

# Peoples under Threat

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It is something of a paradox that, in the period from the aftermath of the Cold War to the early years of the 'war on terror', the world became, by most objective criteria, much safer. Certainly, the number of conflicts fought around the world has steadily fallen and, the great Congolese war apart, the total number of people who have died in them has decreased too. Each research institute compiles its figures somewhat differently, but most conflict experts recorded 20 or fewer major armed conflicts in 2006, compared to a high of over 30 in 1991. Of course, whether a community *feels* safe is as much a judgement about the future as an evaluation of the present. The recent use in Western states of emergency powers and other mechanisms curtailing civil liberties is a response to armed attacks in the USA, Spain and the UK which are in many respects unprecedented, although very rare. But the great toll of death from political violence continues in the countries of the South, in Africa, Asia and the Middle East, and today's wars have this in common with the ethno-nationalist conflicts that succeeded the fall of the Soviet Union: the violence is overwhelmingly targeted by ethnicity or religion. Wars as a whole may be less common, but in three-quarters of the major armed conflicts around the world in 2006, particular ethnic or religious groups were the principal target. In 2007, minorities have more cause than most to feel unsafe.

### New threats in 2007

Minority Rights Group International (MRG) has used recent advances in political science to identify which of the world's peoples are currently under most threat. As explained in the last edition of *State of the World's Minorities*, academic researchers have identified the main antecedents to episodes of genocide or mass political killing over the last half century (see *State of the World's Minorities 2006*). Approximating those main antecedents by using current data from authoritative sources, including the World Bank, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and leading conflict prevention institutes, enables the construction of the Peoples Under Threat 2007 table (see p.11 for short version and Table 1, pp.118–22 in the Reference section for the full version). The indicators used comprise measures of prevailing armed conflict; a country's prior experience of genocide or mass killing; indicators of

group division; democracy and good governance indicators; and a measure of country credit risk as a proxy for openness to international trade.

The position of Somalia at the top of the table for 2006 attests to a highly dangerous combination of factors. In June 2006 the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC), an Islamic coalition seeking to restore law and order to Somalia, took over Mogadishu and subsequently much of the country, curbing the power of Somalia's warlords. However, in December, Ethiopian armed forces acting in support of the Transitional Federal Government (TFG), and supported by the USA, overthrew the UIC, which had received support from Eritrea and a number of Middle Eastern states. The TFG is unlikely to be able to retain control of the country without outside support. While one side has portrayed itself as fighting terrorists linked to al-Qaeda, and the other claims it is fighting Christian invaders, the most immediate fear is now a renewal of atrocities against civilians in the context of Darood–Hawiye inter-clan rivalry and a threat to minorities both in Somalia and in neighbouring Ethiopia. Although the UIC emphasized the importance of moving away from clan politics and had achieved some success in overcoming 'clanism', it was nonetheless particularly associated with the Hawiye clan. It also provided overt support for Oromo and Ogaden self-determination movements in Ethiopia. There is now a grave threat of violent repression against these populations, as well as other groups in Somalia in the context of a power vacuum and/or continued intervention by neighbouring states.

The situation in Iraq continues to deteriorate. Figures released by the United Nations (UN) based on body counts in Iraq's hospitals and morgues showed over 3,000 violent civilian deaths a month for most of the latter half of 2006. These were mainly comprised of killings by death squads, often linked to the Iraqi government itself; attacks by Sunni insurgent groups; and deaths in the context of military operations conducted by the Multinational Force in Iraq. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees estimates that between 40,000 and 50,000 Iraqis flee their homes every month. What is less well publicized is the particular plight of Iraq's smaller communities, the 10 per cent of the population who are not Shia Arab, Sunni Arab or Sunni Kurd. These minorities, which include Turkomans, Chaldo-Assyrians, Armenians,

Rank	Country	Group	Total
1	Somalia	Darood, Hawiye, Issaq and other clans; Bantu and other groups	21.95
2	Iraq	Shia, Sunnis, Kurds, Turkomans, Christians; smaller minorities	21.61
2	Sudan	Fur, Zaghawa, Massalit and others in Darfur; Dinka, Nuer and others in the South; Nuba, Beja	21.50
4	Afghanistan	Hazara, Pashtun, Tajiks, Uzbeks	21.03
5	Burma/ Myanmar	Kachin, Karenni, Karen, Mons, Rohingyas, Shan, Chin (Zomis), Wa	20.40
6	Dem. Rep. of the Congo	Hema and Lendu, Hunde, Hutu, Luba, Lunda, Tutsi/Banyamulenge, Twa/Mbuti	19.88
7	Nigeria	Ibo, Ijaw, Ogoni, Yoruba, Hausa (Muslims) and Christians in the North	19.22
8	Pakistan	Ahmadiyya, Baluchis, Hindus, Mohhajirs, Pashtun, Sindhis	18.97
9	Angola	Bakongo, Cabindans, Ovimbundu	16.68
10	Russian Federation	Chechens, Ingush, Lezgins, indigenous northern peoples, Roma	16.29
11	Burundi	Hutu, Tutsi, Twa	16.20
12	Uganda	Acholi, Karamojong	16.18
13	Ethiopia	Anuak, Afars, Oromo, Somalis	16.11
14	Sri Lanka	Tamils, Muslims	16.00
15	Haiti	Political/social targets	15.72
16	Côte d'Ivoire	Northern Mande (Dioula), Senoufo, Bete, newly settled groups	15.62
17	Rwanda	Hutu, Tutsi, Twa	15.31
18	Nepal	Political/social targets, Dalits	15.07
19	Philippines	Indigenous peoples, Moros (Muslims)	15.06
20	Iran	Arabs, Azeris, Baha'is, Baluchis, Kurds, Turkomans	15.02

Mandean-Sabeans, Faily Kurds, Shabaks, Yazidis and Baha'is, as well as a significant community of Palestinians, made up a large proportion of the refugees fleeing to neighbouring Jordan and Syria in 2006. In addition to the generalized insecurity they face, common to all people in Iraq, minorities suffer from specific attacks and threats due to their ethnic or religious status, and cannot benefit from the community-based protection often available to the larger groups.

With Somalia, Iraq and Afghanistan taking three out of the top four places in the table, and Pakistan rising eight places to be ranked eighth, the correlation between peoples under threat and the front lines in the US-led 'war on terror' is even starker than it was in 2005–6. The debate about whether US foreign policy on terrorism is making Americans safer or not continues to rage in the US, but it is now surely beyond doubt that it has made life a lot less safe for peoples in the countries where the 'war on terror' is principally being fought.

The most significant risers in the table in addition to Pakistan are listed below. Perhaps the most startling case is that of Sri Lanka, where peace talks failed and the conflict between the government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam re-erupted, causing over a thousand civilian deaths and the displacement of hundreds of thousands in 2006 (see the report by Farah Mihar). Civilians in Tamil areas are at particular risk, as is the country's Muslim population, which is caught between the two sides but was excluded from the peace negotiations.

Another long-running self-determination conflict that experienced a resurgence in 2006 was in Turkey, where a Kurdish splinter group carried out bomb attacks in major cities. It remains to be seen whether the ongoing negotiations over Turkey's accession to the European Union will temper the ambitions of some parts of the Turkish government and military to increase repression of the Kurds. In fact, Kurds throughout the region face heightened threats in 2007, with both Turkey and Iran massing troops on their respective borders with Iraq, claiming that Iraqi Kurdistan is being used as a base by armed Kurdish groups from which to launch attacks on their territory.

Iran's position in the top 20 does not relate solely to the threat against Iranian Kurds but also to the country's other minorities (including Ahwazi Arabs, Baluchis and Azeris), who in total constitute nearly

40 per cent of the population. Successive Iranian governments have been hostile to demands for greater cultural freedom for ethnic minority communities, and the US-led intervention in Iraq and the international stand-off over Iran's nuclear programme have left the government deeply wary of any perceived foreign involvement with minority groups. President Ahmadinejad has blamed British forces for being involved in 'terrorist' activities in Khuzistan, a mainly Arab province bordering southern Iraq.

The military coup in Thailand in September 2006 was effected without significant bloodshed, although Thailand's status as a popular Western tourist destination ensured it received widespread media coverage. Less well known is the fact that the coup followed an escalation in the conflict in the south of the country between the government and separatist groups, placing the mainly Muslim population in the southern border provinces at increased risk.

That both Lebanon and Israel and the Occupied Territories/Palestinian Authority have risen in this year's table comes as no surprise following the war between Israel and Hezbollah in 2006 and an escalation of Israeli military operations in the Occupied Territories. (Israel did not appear in last year's table due to the absence of data on some of the indicators.) Israel's bombardment of Lebanon fell particularly heavily on the Shi'a population, but the war has destabilized the country as a whole, placing all communities at the greatest risk since the early 1990s of a return to civil war. In Gaza, an Israeli offensive followed the kidnapping of an Israeli soldier in June, with a total of over 600 Palestinians killed in 2006 as a whole. Throughout the Occupied Territories/Palestinian Authority, the population faces an increased threat, not just from Israeli military operations but also from civil conflict between rival Palestinian factions.

Three states have fallen out of the top 20 in 2006: Indonesia, where a peace agreement signed in 2005 in Aceh has so far held, and Liberia and Algeria, both of which continue to recover following the civil wars that tore those countries apart in the 1990s.

Finally, it should be noted that although the number of African states in the top 20 has fallen slightly since 2005–6, Africa continues to account for half of the countries at the top of the table, making it still the world's most dangerous region for minorities.

## Major risers since 2006

Rank	Rise in rank since 2006	Country	Group	Total
8	8	Pakistan	Ahmadiyya, Baluchis, Hindus, Mohhajirs, Pashtun, Sindhis	18.97
14	47	Sri Lanka	Tamils, Muslims	16.00
15	13	Haiti	Political/social targets	15.72
20	5	Iran	Arabs, Azeris, Baha'is, Baluchis, Kurds, Turkomans	15.02
33	12	Yemen	Political/social targets	12.63
35	7	Lebanon	Druze, Maronite Christians, Palestinians, Shia, Sunnis	12.25
39	15	Turkey	Kurds, Roma	12.02
40	7	Guinea	Fulani, Malinke	11.83
53	New entry	Thailand	Chinese, Malay-Muslims, Northern Hill Tribes	10.96
54	New entry	Israel/OT/PA	Palestinians in Gaza/West Bank, Israeli Palestinians	10.83

## Participation as prevention

The identification of communities at grave risk around the world prompts the immediate question: what can be done to improve their situation? International action is considered later in this chapter; here, we concentrate on one factor at the national level which, perhaps more than any other, has the potential to address minority grievances and to prevent the development of violent conflict. The public participation of minorities, their active engagement in the political and social life of a state, underpins all other efforts to protect the rights of minorities and acts as a safety valve when major sites of disagreement between communities threaten to turn violent.

Within the state, public participation can take many forms, including, most importantly, representation in parliament (this is considered in more detail in Andrew Reynolds' chapter below) and in the executive branch of government, and participation in the judiciary, civil service, armed forces and police. More generally, it extends to taking part in the economic and social life of a state,

such that minorities feel they have a real stake in the society in which they live, that it is *their* society as much as that of anyone else. In areas where minority communities are geographically concentrated, it may also include a measure of autonomy or self-government.

In an important speech he made on a visit to Indonesia, the former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan also made this point when he was commenting on the extreme case of separatism.

*'Minorities have to be convinced that the state really belongs to them, as well as to the majority, and that both will be the losers if it breaks up. Conflict is almost certain to result if the state's response to separatism causes widespread suffering in the region or among the ethnic group concerned. The effect then is to make more people feel that the state is not their state, and so provide separatism with new recruits.'*

Even within one state, very different responses to claims for regional autonomy can develop. In India, for example, the positive approach shown to

**Below:** Internally displaced man in Bartallah, Mosul, Iraq. Three of his family were assassinated. Mark Lattimer/MRG

managing decentralized governance in Tamil Nadu can be contrasted with the state's hostility towards autonomy claims in Punjab, Kashmir and Nagaland. In the Russian Federation, the accommodation of autonomy in a region such as Tatarstan can similarly be contrasted with the gross human rights violations that continue to be committed in Chechnya in the name of combating separatism. Each situation is of course different, but it is notable that, in the case of Indonesia itself, perhaps the most significant faller in this year's Peoples under Threat table, the national parliament in July 2006 adopted a framework for

autonomy that will enable the first direct local elections to be held in the region of Aceh, the scene of nearly three decades of separatist conflict. Since a pact was signed in August 2005, the Free Aceh Movement has reportedly dissolved its armed wing and the Indonesian government has withdrawn troops from Aceh.

But, in many states, it is public participation at the national level that constitutes the key issue for minority protection and conflict prevention. Here it is worth making a distinction between the formal mechanisms of participation, such as elections, and having a genuine say in how a country is run (the former being a necessary but not sufficient condition for the latter). That Iraq has been pushed from the top of the list in this year's table is due to a



slightly less negative showing under the cited World Bank governance indicators, particularly for 'Voice and Accountability', a measure of the extent to which citizens of a country are able to participate in the selection of governments, including an assessment of the political process and human rights (note that the indicators were published in September with a nine-month lag). Yet the fact that Iraqi citizens were able to participate in elections and that the main communities are all represented in government has not prevented the polity from being fatally fractured. The same could be said of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which remains stubbornly alongside Serbia in the upper part of the table, despite over a decade having passed since the power-sharing deal established under the Dayton Peace Agreement. It is clear that the international community still has a lot to learn about the application of public participation in practice.

For public participation to help reduce the threat of violent conflict it needs to be more than simply an entry ticket to a shouting match. It needs to constitute participation *in governance*, and that in turn depends on a basic level of governmental effectiveness and rule of law. However, in both Iraq and Bosnia the mechanisms for community representation introduced under international control have themselves exacerbated or entrenched the division of the state on ethnic or sectarian lines, and induced a level of state failure. Following the occupation of Iraq in 2003, the coalition authorities established an Iraqi Governing Council in which membership was strictly apportioned along ethnic and sectarian lines. Political patronage ensured that whole ministries became dominated by officials from the minister's own sect or group, and sectarian politics quickly became the defining feature of the new Iraqi state. This mistake was compounded at the first Iraqi elections in January 2005, when the electoral system based on a national list combined with a boycott in Sunni Arab governorates effectively ensured that Sunni Arabs were largely excluded from political representation during a key year in the country's attempted transition to democracy. In other states with a long history of ethnic conflict, such as South Africa or Nigeria, constitutional and electoral mechanisms have been established which aim to promote inclusive political systems, with representation across ethnic or religious communities.

The subject of political participation and community representation in very divided societies merits further study, given its fundamental importance to peace-building and stability, and the focus on participation in this edition of the *State of the World's Minorities* is intended as a contribution. But just a brief review of country situations illustrates the obvious danger of constitutional or electoral systems which make ethnicity or religion a principal mobilizing factor in politics, leading to the creation of a majority or dominant group which is defined by ethnicity or sect.

This should be contrasted with the growing range of examples, some quoted above, of where effective participation of minorities has helped to resolve or prevent conflict, through the promotion of more inclusive political systems, whether at national or regional level. In addition to power-sharing agreements, a wide range of mechanisms are available to promote such participation appropriate to the given situation, including rules or incentives for political parties to appeal across communities, the adoption of electoral systems that favour rather than marginalize minorities, systems of reserved seats, special representation, formal consultative bodies, formal or informal quotas in public administration, and positive action programmes, as well as arrangements for greater self-government in regions where minorities are geographically concentrated.

Given the very high correlation around the world between minority status and poverty, it should also become a priority for international development agencies to promote the participation of minorities in their programmes, particularly at national and local level. It is now widely accepted that anti-poverty initiatives are unlikely to achieve long-term success unless the poor are closely consulted and involved in their formulation and delivery, yet minorities are typically excluded from the planning of development programmes, often through the same societal discrimination that is the root cause of their impoverishment in the first place. This is one reason why development programmes, while often bringing important benefits to a society, rarely succeed in targeting effectively the poorest communities.

### **The international response**

After the hopes raised by the UN World Summit in September 2005, the international response in 2006

to the situation of peoples under threat can only be described as disappointing.

The headline case during 2006 continued to be the mass, ongoing crimes under international law committed against the population of the Darfur region of Sudan, which the Sudanese government is manifestly failing to protect. The World Summit resolved that, in such cases, the UN Security Council should be 'prepared to take collective action' in a manner that is 'timely and decisive'. In the event, the reaction of the Security Council was seen to be belated and divided. The strategy of the Sudanese government has been to emphasize its cooperation with the existing African Union (AU) mission in Darfur – while on the ground effectively controlling the AU forces' access to much of the region – and to oppose the deployment of any stronger UN force, relying on divisions in the Security Council and in particular the support of China, a major trading partner and heavy investor in the Sudanese oil industry. In August 2006, the Security Council did finally approve a 20,000-strong UN force, but Sudan continues to withhold consent for its deployment. Meanwhile, the situation in Darfur has deteriorated and continuing attacks by Sudanese armed forces and Janjaweed militia on civilian targets threaten to push the death toll far beyond the 200,000 that have already perished.

A measure of what international peacekeeping forces can achieve was demonstrated during 2006 in neighbouring Democratic Republic of Congo, where the UN's largest peacekeeping force oversaw the successful conclusion of the country's first free elections for 45 years, a major milestone on the road to peace. However, despite a new readiness on the part of the UN peacekeepers to react robustly to threats from militia groups, armed conflict continued in the east in both Ituri and Kivu (leaving the position of the Congo unchanged, near the top of the Peoples under Threat table).

In the programme of UN reform initiated at the World Summit in 2005, the most important development for human rights was the replacement of the discredited Commission on Human Rights with a new Human Rights Council. The vision was for a smaller body that would meet more often, combining improved expertise and objectivity with greater clout within the UN system. By the end of 2006, however, uncertainty still prevailed over the *modus operandi* of the Council's two main tools: the

new system of Universal Periodic Review, by which states' human rights records would be assessed by their peers, and the Council's special rapporteurs and working groups, with the future of the country rapporteurs called into question. More worryingly still, the Council quickly attracted accusations of political bias, and even criticism from the UN Secretary-General, after it held two special sessions devoted to the situation in Gaza and one to the Israel–Hezbollah conflict, but failed to look critically at other major cases of human rights violations around the world. It finally held a special session on Darfur in December, but passed a weak resolution, authorizing a high-level mission to assess the human rights situation but failing to recognize the culpability of the Sudanese government for the abuses committed in Darfur. This was despite the fact that indisputable links between the government and the militias responsible for much of the killing had been reported almost two years earlier by the International Commission of Inquiry on Darfur established by the UN Security Council.

Two recently established UN mechanisms have, however, played an important role in protecting minorities. The Independent Expert on Minority Issues has consistently highlighted minority protection issues worldwide, including issuing communications on the situation of Haitians in the Dominican Republic and on minority women in Burma (Myanmar). The Special Adviser to the UN Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide has undertaken two missions to Darfur, one to Côte d'Ivoire and one to the Thai–Burmese border to investigate events in Burma's Karen state following an intensification of Burmese military operations from November 2005 onwards. The Special Adviser makes recommendations concerning civilian protection, establishing accountability for violations, the provision of humanitarian relief and steps to settle the underlying causes of conflict.

The outgoing Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, established in May an Advisory Committee on the Prevention of Genocide to provide guidance to the Special Adviser and to contribute to the UN's broader efforts to prevent genocide. The committee's report, which has not been published, is believed to recommend strengthening the role of the Special Adviser by ensuring he report directly to the Secretary-General, improve his access to the Security Council and increase resources to the office, as well

as calling for improved cooperation within and outside the UN system to obtain information specifically focused on early warning of genocide and other crimes against humanity. The recommendations have been sent to the incoming Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, and his response will be an early test of the new Secretary-General's commitment to improving civilian protection from mass atrocities.

The principal normative development during 2006 was the finalization of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which had occupied the UN Commission on Human Rights for over a decade. At its first meeting in June, the Human Rights Council approved a text of the Declaration that recognized indigenous peoples' rights to live in freedom, peace and security; not to be subjected to forced assimilation, destruction of their culture or forced population transfer; and recognized their rights to self-determination and self-government in matters relating to their internal and local affairs, and to practise their languages and cultural traditions.

However, in November the third committee of the UN General Assembly passed a procedural motion blocking approval of the Declaration, at least until later in 2007. The motion was put forward by Namibia on behalf of the African group on the committee and promoted by states including Canada, the USA, Australia and New Zealand, which had claimed during the debate that the Declaration may negatively affect the interests of other sectors of society. Although the Declaration's force would essentially have been hortatory and not legally binding, the motion was interpreted as an attempt to weaken the document or to ditch it altogether.

The failure to approve the Declaration is illustrative of a widespread refusal by states to recognize the special, and often very dangerous, position in which indigenous peoples and minorities more generally find themselves, and their urgent need for better international protection. Even affluent states that are free of internal armed conflict and whose territorial integrity remains unchallenged – whatever other security threats they face – frequently ignore the extent of discrimination faced by minorities and often indulge in a tendency to blame any community dispute or integration problem on the minority community itself. As the UN Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide

wrote in the *State of the World's Minorities 2006*, 'Governments in both the South and the North persist in labelling some people a threat simply because they are members of a minority.' Yet any assessment of prevailing conflicts and human rights violations around the world indicates that it is minorities themselves who are at greatest risk, usually at the hands of their own governments. Without the political courage to admit that reality, and to respond appropriately, the world is unlikely to become a safer place for minorities any time soon. ■