

Asia and Oceania

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Central Asia

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The year 2014 in Central Asia was overshadowed by the conflict in Ukraine, as well as the economic downturn caused to the regional economy by international sanctions on Russia and the sharp falls in the price of oil. Besides contributing to a slowdown in the region's economies, the conflict also had a significant geopolitical impact across the region as the implications of the Russian Federation's support for ethnic Russians and Russian speakers were absorbed. An April 2014 offer by President Vladimir Putin for any fluent Russian speaker in the former Soviet Union to become a Russian citizen if they renounced their current citizenship reportedly led to a surge in interest among minority ethnic groups.

The effect of urbanization on minorities in

Central Asia has been mixed. In the main, rural-urban migration has occurred in recent decades among majority ethnic populations. This was partly a result of previous Soviet policies that had made it difficult for rural residents to move to cities, while encouraging or in some cases forcing migration of specialists to Central Asia from more industrialized parts of the Soviet Union. This ensured that in many cities residents who were ethnic Russians, Ukrainians, Germans and Jews – locally known as 'European ethnicities' – were the majority, working as administrators, technical specialists and factory workers, while rural areas were predominantly inhabited by the titular ethnicity.

Many of these 'Europeans' emigrated from Central Asia in the last years of the Soviet Union and in the decades since independence. Urbanization has subsequently been shaped by incomers replacing those who had left the urban workforce, driven also by the chronic

Below: A group of Uyghur youth pick mulberries near the Baraholka bazaar in Kazakhstan. *Panos/Carolyn Drake*



and endemic poverty that affected many rural areas, particularly in the 1990s. However, some cities had large ethnic minority populations who were historical residents of the area and did not emigrate at the end of Soviet rule. These included Osh, Jalalabad and Uzgen in Kyrgyzstan (with large ethnic Uzbek populations), as well as Samarkand and Bukhara in Uzbekistan (with large numbers of ethnic Tajiks).

Resentment against minorities is sometimes fuelled by registration requirements that are often still in place in urban areas. These can exclude many city residents from essential public services and social security, creating a new group of socially marginalized people who face discrimination and are vulnerable to harassment by the authorities. In some cases, internal migrants from majority groups may resent the fact that minorities in urban areas, particularly those well established in larger towns and cities, have better access to resources such as land or housing – a major source of ethnic tension in certain countries, such as Kyrgyzstan.

Kazakhstan

Kazakhstan has a variety of ethnic minorities, including Uzbeks (2.9 per cent), Ukrainians (2.1 per cent), Uyghurs (1.4 per cent) and Tatars (1.3 per cent). The largest of these is the ethnic Russian minority, who make up almost a quarter (23.7 per cent) of the population. Under Kazakhstan's Constitution, while Kazakh is the state language, Russian has equal official status for all levels of administrative and institutional purposes. However, nationalist groups are now pushing for a more aggressive promotion of the Kazakh language. Several municipalities have even taken down Russian-language public signs or refused to provide Russian translations for official communications, such as court proceedings. This concern was raised with the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe's High Commissioner for National Minorities in June 2014. However, in August 2014 President Nursultan Nazarbaev told state broadcaster Khabar Television that he wanted to ensure that any policies promoting the Kazakh language remained moderate to avoid encouraging the divisions evident in Ukraine.

There have been reports of Russians feeling

sidelined from political decision making. Their representation at a senior level in politics reportedly remains limited, though Vladimir Shkolnik, an ethnic Russian, was reappointed as energy minister in August 2014 and their share of seats in Kazakhstan's lower legislative chamber, the Mazhilis, is roughly proportional to their demographic. This is not necessarily the case for many of Kazakhstan's non-Russian minorities, who together make up more than 13 per cent of the population. The UN Committee for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) had expressed concern earlier in the year about the under-representation of non-Kazakh ethnic groups in general in political life and the civil service. One notable exception is Karim Massimov, an ethnic Uyghur, who was reappointed as prime minister in April 2014. However, some analysts have suggested that his appointment is due in part due to the fact that, as a member of an ethnic minority, he is not seen as a potential successor to the president and therefore does not threaten the balance of power among Kazakhstan's elite.

Kazakhstan has not suffered the large-scale ethnic violence that affected its neighbour Kyrgyzstan, most notably in 2010. Nevertheless, two people were hospitalized and four detained by police after clashes on 27 August in Qaramurat, a southern village where the majority of residents are ethnic Uzbeks. A group of ethnic Kazakhs from a nearby village reportedly stormed the community, attacking residents and breaking into shops. The interior minister stated that the incident was not ethnicity-related, but a news blackout in the area, including the blocking of mobile phone connections, indicated that the authorities feared a possible escalation. A second incident occurred in another village in southern Kazakhstan on 5 February 2015, between Kazakh and Tajik communities, after the alleged murder of a Kazakh man by a Tajik man in a dispute over a greenhouse. Severe security and internet restrictions were also imposed following this incident.

Kazakhstan is continuing its attempts to bring all publicly accessible mosques under the control of the state-backed Muslim Board, thereby limiting worshippers' right to exist as a religious community and exercise their freedom of religion

or belief. All other Muslim communities and organizations – including Ahmadi Muslim congregations as well as mosques catering to specific ethnic communities such as Azerbaijanis, Chechens or Uyghurs – are banned. Permission to exist is gained via state registration. However, reportedly even religious communities who try to register or have registered are in some cases prevented by officials from exercising their freedom of religion or belief. According to the NGO Forum 18, by July 12 people had been jailed and 45 fined in relation to state restrictions on freedom of worship. These have been used repeatedly against individuals who have refused to fall in line with the government's policies. In January 2015, Forum 18 reported the case of one Baptist man in his thirties who, having already received three fines and a five-day sentence over the previous two years, now faced the prospect of his garage being seized.

Kazakhstan is an increasingly urbanized society, with more than half (55 per cent) of residents now based in urban areas. It has large minority urban populations, particularly ethnic Russians, and Russian is still commonly used as a lingua franca in most cities outside the south and west, including among many ethnic Kazakhs. All road infrastructure, public transport facilities, streets, avenues and other facilities in urban areas are legally required to be marked in both Russian and Kazakh.

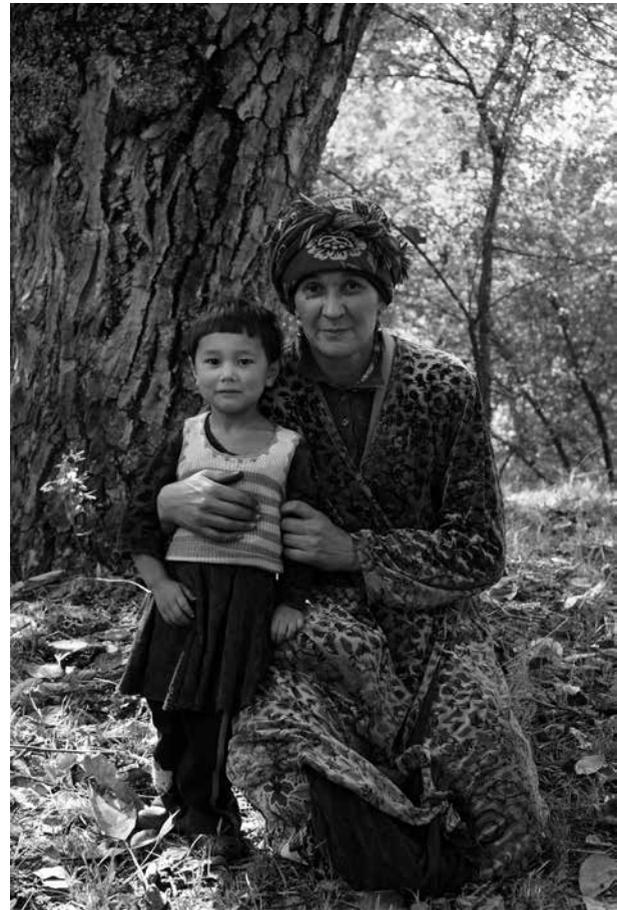
Kazakhstan's policy of attracting Oralman, or ethnic Kazakhs, to immigrate from outside the country has in part been intended to replace the outflow of non-Kazakhs from the country's cities since independence. By 2012, 860,000 Oralman were registered in Kazakhstan, making up more than 5 per cent of the population. Many, having initially settled in remote rural areas with poorly paid jobs, have since migrated again to urban centres such as Almaty or Astana in search of better opportunities. Oralman from countries such as China and Mongolia, who previously had no need to speak Russian, can find it difficult to integrate in the country's Russian-speaking cities. Reportedly some Kazakh-speaking immigrants consider that Russified urban Kazakhs are not genuine Kazakhs, while some of the urban population resent the privileges enjoyed by Oralman that they do not enjoy themselves.

Below: Uzbek woman and child in a village in Kyrgyzstan, 2014. *Jonny Duncan*

However, there has been limited political opposition to the Oralman project as it has been seen as a part of the nation-building process for independent Kazakhstan.

Kyrgyzstan

About a quarter of Kyrgyzstan's 5.6 million inhabitants are members of minority ethnic groups. Ethnic Uzbeks make up the most sizeable minority, at roughly 14 per cent of the population, and primarily live in the southern regions of Osh and Jalalabad. The second largest ethnic minority is Russians at 8 per cent of the population, primarily in the capital Bishkek, and the surrounding area in the north. Dungans (Han Muslims known as Hui in China), Meskhetian Turks, Tajiks and Uyghurs each make up around



1 per cent, with dozens of other ethnic groups also making up smaller proportions. All the groups remain politically marginalized, though the country has an ethnic German vice-prime minister and an ethnic Russian minister of finance.

There is acknowledgement at the national level of the need to invest in building inter-ethnic harmony, particularly in light of the violence that occurred between ethnic Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in June 2010 in southern Kyrgyzstan that left several hundred people dead, primarily ethnic Uzbeks. The *Concept of Development of National Unity and Inter-Ethnic Relations*, published by the government in 2013, has the stated aim of promoting a common civic identity, developing multilingual education to increase knowledge of the official Kyrgyz language among all citizens while at the same time fostering language diversity by ensuring that citizens can preserve and study their native languages without facing language-based discrimination. The *Concept* has been characterized as a rare achievement by the ‘moderates’ allied to the president against nationalist politicians, who since 2010 have used ethnic politics as a convenient and effective tool to gain support among ethnic Kyrgyz. Meanwhile, the Department of Ethnic, Religious Policies and Interaction with Civil Society in the President’s Office and the Agency for Inter-ethnic Relations are attempting to establish an early warning and conflict-prevention system at a local level.

However, progress at a policy level is not matched on the ground. Minorities are still excluded from policy discussions relating to inter-ethnic relations, and are inadequately represented in state structures and law-enforcement bodies. This is particularly true of ethnic minorities living in the south, such as Uzbeks and Tajiks. In the face of the ethnic discrimination that was aggravated by the violence in 2010, many members of the ethnic Uzbek community are reportedly adopting documents stating they are ethnically Kyrgyz in an attempt to keep career and social opportunities open. In addition, Uzbek-owned small businesses in southern Kyrgyzstan continue to face disproportionate checks by the authorities, sometimes leading to business closure or disruption. This reportedly

intensified in the summer of 2014, and was seen by some Osh residents to be in retaliation for the shutting off of gas supplies to southern Kyrgyzstan by Uzbekistan – an example of how international tensions can have a negative effect on minority communities.

The judicial response to the 2010 violence has largely targeted members of the ethnic Uzbek community, even though they comprised the majority of victims. Courts continue to sentence ethnic Uzbek community leaders *in absentia* for inciting inter-ethnic hatred and organizing clashes between ethnic Uzbeks and Kyrgyz in 2010. In November 2014, Kadyrjan Batyrov and Inom Abdurasulov, two of these leaders, were given life sentences, while a third, Karamat Abdullaeva, received a 16-year jail term. This followed the Kyrgyzstan’s Supreme Court rejection in September of an appeal by Azimjan Askarov against his conviction for creating mass disturbances, inciting ethnic hatred and complicity in murder. The detention of the ethnic Uzbek political activist, who prior to his arrest had worked for years documenting police abuses, has been condemned by Human Rights Watch (HRW), Amnesty International and other rights organizations.

The government also continued to crack down on minority activists and human rights organizations during the year. In September, a criminal case was opened against an NGO researching minority rights in southern Kyrgyzstan. The complaint, from the Kyrgyz National Security Service, alleged that the research ‘could again ignite inter-ethnic conflict’ and that it was acting in its capacity ‘to prevent intelligence and subversive activities by foreign special services and organizations’. Though charges were rejected by the prosecutor in early December, the case highlighted the dangers faced by human rights activists working on minority issues. Mahamatjan Abdujaparov, another activist working on police torture and extortion of ethnic Uzbeks, was attacked in his office in Jalalabad on 4 September.

Under Article 10 of the Constitution, Kyrgyz is the state language and Russian is an official language. Russian-language education continues to be relatively popular among all ethnic groups, including many Kyrgyz. There is a common

perception that Russian-medium schools are stronger, and that the language will be useful to users at home and potentially as labour migrants. However, in much of the country the number of Russian-speaking teachers is declining. This has particular implications in ethnically mixed areas such as the border province of Batken, where tensions over disputed territory between the Kyrgyz government and neighbouring Tajikistan are ongoing. While residents in this area have in the past been able to communicate by using Russian as a lingua franca, many ethnic Kyrgyz and Tajik children now only speak mutually unintelligible languages in adjacent villages, increasing the potential for future disagreements between the two communities.

The challenges faced by the country's Uzbek speakers are particularly acute, however. While Uzbek had been used relatively widely in education and local government in areas with high proportions of ethnic Uzbeks, since 2010 the space for Uzbek language in official life has been shrinking. From 2014–15, university entrance examinations will only be available in Kyrgyz or Russian. This is part of a broader context in which the educational aspirations of ethnic Uzbeks appear to be reducing. A January 2014 report highlighted sharp declines in the number of Uzbek students moving on to high school and completing school in Osh city.

The reasons for dropping out include financial pressures on families, the need for extra income and favouritism in the allocation of the limited state funds available. Another factor may be the increasing prevalence of child marriage among girls from families affected by the 2010 violence. Local experts interviewed by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) suggested that the increase was linked to rapes committed during the violence. Meanwhile, the total number of Uzbek-medium schools has halved in recent years, from 133 in 2009/10 to 65 in 2013/14. The reduction has been particularly prominent among urban Uzbeks in the city of Osh, which lost two-thirds of its Uzbek-language schools between 2010 and 2013. Most have been converted into mixed-medium, Kyrgyz or Russian-language schools.

There has also been a rise in prominence of Kyrgyz nationalist youth groups. In January

2015 one of these groups, Kyrk Choro, issued a manifesto calling for foreigners to be allowed to stay only in hotels, and for ethnic Uyghur traders to be barred from the Madina, Bishkek's largest clothing market. They also conducted a high-profile vigilante raid in which they filmed local women who had allegedly been engaged by Chinese migrant workers in commercial sex work. Kyrk Choro appears to have at least tacit support for its actions from government bodies, including security forces. It is unclear where these groups draw most of their supporters from, but most of their activities have taken place in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan's capital and major urban centre.

A Uyghur community organization held a congress in October 2014, after several meetings had reportedly been prohibited in recent years. HRW has expressed concern that Kyrgyz authorities too often target Uyghurs with trumped-up terrorism charges, allegedly as a result of pressure from China as bilateral ties have strengthened between the countries. Uyghur community leaders in Kyrgyzstan do not express support for Uyghur separatism, but some have reportedly raised concerns that the lack of a Uyghur-language school in the country violates their language rights.

The government took a number of steps during the year to increase its control over religious expression, particularly in the case of Ahmadi Muslims, Bahá'í, Hare Krishna, Jehovah's Witnesses, Protestants and other 'non-traditional' groups. In January, the government also announced that it would be revising its Religion Law. Though details of the changes were not confirmed, remarks by the head of the State Commission for Religious Affairs (SCRA) have suggested that part of the focus would be on state registration of religious organizations. Yet registration for many religious organizations has been met with official obstruction or denial. For example, the arrest of two Jehovah's Witnesses in 2013 in Osh (the accused were finally acquitted in October 2014, though they remained under house arrest for a number of months afterwards while the prosecutor appealed the verdict) was seen by members as a reprisal for the group having recently renewed its application for official registration. The Ahmadi community, who, since being stripped of their registration in 2011 have

been unable to meet for worship, launched an appeal at the Supreme Court to appeal against two previous court refusals of registration. In July, however, the Supreme Court upheld the previous rulings against them.

Another recurring issue of religious discrimination is the difficulty experienced by some non-Muslims in the burial of their dead, particularly in rural areas. A number of incidents were reported during the year of discrimination in funeral and burial arrangements for Protestants, with local imams obstructing burial of the deceased in village cemeteries. Burial denial has reportedly been supported or overlooked by police on many occasions and has also been enabled by Article 16 of the Religion Law, which contains a provision stipulating that certain aspects of cemetery use shall be 'governed by regulations of local municipalities'. An April 2014 draft of the government's *Concept on State Policy in the Religious Sphere 2014–20* acknowledged the problem, but failed to highlight the complicity of authorities in failing to protect the victims. Though manifesting as local prejudice, these incidents reflect the broader context of state discrimination and have not been confined to rural areas, but have also occurred close to the capital, Bishkek. Authorities have themselves continued to target religious minorities in Bishkek. During 2014, for example, repeated inspections were conducted on various places of worship in the city, including the Hope Baptist Church, which was reportedly visited by state agencies several times and threatened with eviction. The State Property Fund also attempted to confiscate the property of the Protestant Church of Jesus Christ by seeking to annul the 1999 contract it had previously signed with the Church. Some community members have speculated that the authorities may be motivated by the high value of the site, situated in a prime area of Bishkek, and that the land may be earmarked for a private developer. Though the Economic Court approved the annulment in January 2014, an appeal by the Church was granted by Bishkek City Court in April. However, the State Property Fund subsequently launched a further action to claim the property in the Supreme Court. The case was still unconcluded at the end of the year.

Urbanization in general, particularly in the country's southern cities, has been one of the primary causes of ethnic tension in Kyrgyzstan. In Soviet times, the vast majority of ethnic Kyrgyz lived in rural areas, with a wide range of minority ethnic groups predominant in the cities: Bishkek (then Frunze) was primarily Russian-speaking, after several waves of settlement mainly from European parts of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union over a 150-year period, while Osh, Jalalabad and Uzgen cities in the south also had long-standing Uzbek-speaking populations. As the Soviet system began to break down in the 1980s, living conditions became increasingly untenable in rural areas, and many ethnic Kyrgyz moved to the cities. Pressure on land in the cities led to a number of violent outbreaks in the south in 1990, resulting in several hundred deaths in Osh and Uzgen. Many ethnic Kyrgyz formerly engaged as farmers or nomads in the countryside were forced by lack of livelihood or poverty to move to the cities, where they often struggled to establish viable livelihoods for themselves in the urban economies, where the largely Uzbek mercantile class were dominant. This rapid and troubled process of urbanization has been identified as one of the factors behind the outbreak of the June 2010 violence.

As many ethnic Kyrgyz rural–urban migrants face overcrowding and sub-standard living conditions, the state's failure to provide land or adequate housing has generated acute resentment. At key flashpoints in recent years this anger has also been directed towards urban minority communities, particularly those such as Osh's Uzbek business owners with property in the city. Similarly, during previous moments of political instability in the country, minorities have been targeted for their assets. For example, after President Kurmanbek Bakiyev was removed from power in April 2010, Meskhetian Turks in the village of Maevka, just outside Bishkek, were targeted and their homes burned to the ground: the clashes resulted in at least five deaths and 28 injured.

Land and housing shortages remain unresolved and continue to affect inter-ethnic relations in many urban areas. In Osh, for instance, a number of incidents have flared between ethnic Kyrgyz and Uzbek residents due to the continued

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Case study by *Alisher Khamidov*
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Life as a migrant in Bishkek – a Tatar women tells her story

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On a cold morning in late February, Alya wakes up early as usual to prepare a simple breakfast of porridge for her and her two-year-old boy, Shurik. Then she takes Shurik to her friend for baby-sitting before heading to work. Originally from Osh, a large city in south Kyrgyzstan, she is now a street vendor selling cheap Chinese shoes in Bishkek, the capital, which has a reputation as a more liberal and ethnically diverse place. An ethnic Tatar by origin, 30-year-old Alya has a full day ahead: she must visit several state-run hospitals where some of the doctors and patients are her customers. She will then have to spend the rest of the afternoon selling shoes at her stand, located in a small bazaar in one of Bishkek's suburbs.

'I really love my job, but it does not provide a steady source of income,' she says. 'I wish I had obtained a good quality education that would allow me to have a steady job to support my family.' Alya has finished secondary school, but her family could not afford to put her through college after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Unfortunately, her business has not been doing well. 'When the business is very slow, I go around neighbourhoods and try to sell shoes on the street to passers-by. This strategy works sometimes, but at times it leads to problems with police.'

Many Tatar, Russian and Uyghur women work as street vendors because they lack connections to the formal business or the public sector, which are mostly dominated by ethnic Kyrgyz men. Like the majority of Bishkek's street vendors, Alya operates her business without the formal

licence for street vendors issued by Bishkek's authorities. 'Police officers usually turn a blind eye to me and other street vendors – they know that we are not a threat to society and that we are poor folks who are trying to make ends meet.' She earns about US\$200 a month.

'I meet a lot of different people, and they always complain and ask for help. There are so many unhappy people, especially women, out there,' Alya says of the people she meets on her rounds. 'Someone's in big debt, another's person's husband left her, a third suffers from domestic abuse.'

Alya says she gets tired of listening to such sad stories, because they remind her of her own. At the age of 18 she married Sunil, an Indian medical student at Osh State University, and soon had a daughter who became the centre of their lives. But three years into the marriage, her husband left the country and he stopped communicating with her. In the wake of his departure, on top of her depression, Alya had to endure the cultural pressure that comes along with being a single parent from the Tatar minority deserted by a foreign husband. Kyrgyz and Uzbek society in Osh frown upon divorcees, widows, single mothers and women who marry foreign men: the common assumption is that a single woman, living on her own, would lead an immoral life.

With no steady income, Alya was forced to move in with her mother in a small conservative town near Osh populated mainly by ethnic Uzbeks. 'It was one of the toughest periods of my life,' Alya says. 'My family members were often treated like outcasts.' Ethnic prejudice was a major hurdle as ethnic Tatars, who make up a small minority in the town, have long suffered discrimination by local government and residents. So when an opportunity arose to move to Bishkek and work for a company that operated a casino, Alya gladly accepted the offer. However, her life only got harder in Bishkek. She had to work long hours at

Right: Inside a busy market bazaar in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. Neil James Spicer

the casino while regularly fending off foreign customers who wanted sexual services from her. When a customer attempted to rape her in a drunken stupor, 'I knew that I had enough. I quit that job.'

But Alya refused to return to her mother's town. 'I didn't want to be treated like an outcast any more,' she says. Instead, she began to work as a street vendor selling shoes. Alya now has two dreams: to give her children a good education, and to move to Russia to escape the stigma that she previously experienced in her mother's town. But she acknowledges the chances of realizing these goals are slim. 'I struggle to make ends meet. The only solution for me is to leave for Russia and work there because the pay is better there.'

But though this is not an unusual route in Kyrgyzstan – as many as 500,000 Kyrgyz citizens are already working in Russia as labour migrants – Alya recognizes that it is not the ultimate solution to her troubles. Some of her Russian-speaking friends who have moved there in recent years had to struggle for years until they managed to find stable jobs and housing. Besides, they also confronted deep racial prejudice and increasing hostility among Russian citizens towards Central Asians, reflected in a rise in the levels of hate crime. Like many other minority members in the region, Alya is caught in a limbo between a home country that discriminates against her and a new life in a country where her welcome is uncertain at best. ■



failure of authorities to provide sufficient housing to accommodate the growing population of rural migrants, many of whom live in the city as squatters. In turn, many ethnic Uzbek businessmen have been forced to emigrate from the country due to financial difficulties in the wake of the 2010 conflict.

Turkmenistan

Turkmenistan's minority groups include the Kazakh, Russian and Uzbek minorities, as well as the ethnic Baluch community, which CERD has drawn particular attention to as being at risk of forced assimilation. Human rights organizations have also reported children from ethnic minorities being denied the opportunity to study in their own languages due to the steady closure of schools and reduced resources. Some minorities also struggle to secure formal legal recognition despite being based long-term in the country, creating further difficulties for them when accessing public services and other rights.

In September 2014, a local human rights organization reported on the plight of several thousand ethnic Uzbeks, mainly in the eastern provinces, who for over 20 years had failed to obtain passports and become full citizens of their own country. Almost 10,000 people from Dashoguz and Lebap provinces have reportedly requested citizenship without success. Many had studied in Uzbekistan and graduated there after the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, during the period when national passports were being issued in Turkmenistan. When they returned, their Soviet passports were no longer considered valid. The organization reported that their children and grandchildren had also not been able to obtain Turkmen passports. Meanwhile, several women from Uzbekistan who had married men from Turkmenistan and moved to the country had reportedly been deported, thus breaking up families. Those without internal passports have reportedly been deprived of opportunities to find official employment, leave the country or move to the capital to earn money.

Human rights activists have estimated that about 100,000 Turkmenistan nationals of both Russian and Turkmen ethnicity also hold Russian passports, under a 1993 bilateral Agreement on Dual Citizenship. However, in autumn 2013 the

State Migration Service of Turkmenistan stopped issuing new passports to dual nationals. As a result it has become impossible for them to leave the country. In May 2014, Turkmenistan officially informed the Russian Foreign Ministry that it would terminate the Agreement on 18 May 2015.

In June 2014, Amnesty International published an appeal urging the Turkmen authorities to grant a retrial to Mansur Mingelov, a Baluchi human rights activist who began a hunger strike on 19 May to protest a sentence widely condemned as unfair. Mingelov had been arrested in 2012 and convicted to 22 years in prison for alleged drug and child pornography offences after documenting evidence of police torture against ethnic Baluch. Being in a critical condition, he reportedly ended his hunger strike on 8 June after a number of Turkmen officials visited him in the Seidi labour camp, and his treatment improved. The day the appeal was published, the president issued a statement highlighting the importance of upholding the rule of law and subjecting each criminal accusation to a thorough review.

Turkmenistan, a largely Sunni Muslim country, has long been intolerant towards its religious minorities, including Protestants and Jehovah's Witnesses as well as Shi'a Muslims. In 2014, the US State Department added Turkmenistan to its list of 'worst religious freedom violators'. Ethnic Turkmen converts to Protestantism and other Christian denominations are reportedly even more likely to be exposed to harassment from the state than those from minority ethnic groups. Some have been arrested for their beliefs, though in October eight prisoners of conscience jailed for exercising freedom of religion or belief were released from their incarceration in a labour camp under presidential amnesty. Six were conscientious objectors to military service, while the other two had been falsely convicted as punishment for their beliefs.

While access to information is in many ways strictly controlled in Turkmenistan, Russian-speaking urban residents are able to watch news channels broadcast from Russia via satellite television. The government has reportedly appeared uncomfortable about coverage of the 2014 events in Ukraine, and in April it was reported that access to the broadcasts was affected by more interference, poor signals and

Below: A woman from a small Roma community living in a poor district on the outskirts of Bukhara, Uzbekistan. *Panos/Tim Dirven*

in some cases blackouts. Like other Central Asian countries, Turkmenistan had a large influx of Russians and other European ethnicities to its urban areas during the Russian Empire and Soviet Union. Most remaining Russians and Ukrainians live in or near the capital, Ashgabat, and other urban centres. While Russians and Ukrainians constituted the largest minority group at the time of independence, their numbers decreased dramatically in the wake of independence and more recently in 2003, when Russians lost their dual citizenship rights.

Uzbekistan

With just under 30 million inhabitants, Uzbekistan is Central Asia's most populous country. According to official figures, ethnic Uzbeks make up approximately 80 per cent of the country's population. Russians, Tajiks and Kazakhs each make up a significant proportion of the population, and other minority groups include Karakalpaks, Kyrgyz and Tatars. However, some claim that the

proportion of ethnic Tajiks, as well as native Tajik speakers who may classify themselves as ethnic Uzbeks, is much larger than the official figures suggest, particularly in and around the cities of Samarkand and Bukhara. Though the law provides for non-discrimination on the basis of ethnicity and national origin, in practice key government and business positions are typically occupied by ethnic Uzbeks. Members of ethnic minority groups, including larger groups such as Karakalpaks, Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, Tajiks, Tatars and Russians, appear under-represented in the judiciary and the public administration.

As in other countries in the region, opportunities for ethnic minorities to study in their native languages have diminished since the fall of the Soviet Union. In February 2014, CERD expressed concern that insufficient support was given to the promotion of minority languages, including the Tajik language, and at a decrease in the number of schools providing education in minority languages. It also expressed concern that the authorities do not adequately support education in minority languages at all levels, including preschool education. At the same time, limited remedial Uzbek-language instruction has meant that many non-native



speakers of Uzbek now face greater academic barriers due to their lower levels of proficiency.

Uzbekistan, officially designated a Country of Particular Concern by the US State Department, continued to persecute and obstruct religious minorities during the year. Besides restrictive registration requirements, prosecution and other forms of harassment, Uzbekistan's state-sponsored print, online and broadcast media regularly attacks named individuals belonging to certain minority faiths, including Protestant Christians and Jehovah's Witnesses. The victims are not given a right of reply and media staff avoid answering questions about the attacks. Allegations made in 2014 include 'making zombies out of children', improperly associating with young girls and drug dealing. Faith communities believe the purpose of these media attacks was to publicly discredit and intimidate them.

Like most of the other Central Asian countries, Uzbekistan's cities have a markedly different ethnic composition than rural areas. Tashkent, the capital, has a large Russian and Ukrainian population, though this has shrunk rapidly since the end of the Soviet Union. There has been large-scale migration from primarily Uzbek-speaking rural areas to the country's cities, particularly Tashkent, since independence in 1991. However, rural to urban migration remains problematic. The government has used a carrot and stick approach to encourage the rural population to remain in the countryside and discourage migration to cities, with some experts suggesting this is because of a fear of urban unemployment, and the need for a rural workforce. Although authorities in Tashkent do not officially restrict the number of temporary residents, administrative problems and prohibitive costs discourage most migrants from registering. Consequently, many migrants face poor working conditions and low pay, with little bargaining power to improve their situation. Meanwhile, the cities of Samarkand and Bukhara are largely Tajik-speaking, though as most of the population of the cities is bilingual and no census has been conducted since 1989, the exact proportions are not possible to judge. The status of Tajiks is considered precarious, in part due to tensions between the leaderships of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan.

Southeast Asia

Nicole Girard and Hanna Hindstrom

The majority of the population in Southeast Asia still resides in rural areas, and this is largely true for its minority and indigenous peoples as well. While underdevelopment, closed economies and war have slowed Southeast Asia's urban growth until recently, it is now one of the fastest urbanizing regions in the world. The economic surge as countries have opened up for investment and trade has driven significant migration among minorities and indigenous communities to urban areas, particularly as many are forced to leave rural areas due to declining agricultural employment or are displaced from their land by armed conflict or development projects such as mining. Prospects of better livelihood options and access to services also lure indigenous and minority communities to cities throughout Southeast Asia, but in many cases the benefits of urban areas have not been equally shared. Many face systemic discrimination, inadequate housing in informal settlements and limited employment opportunities, often in informal industries where their rights are largely unprotected.

Minorities have been the targets of evictions to make way for infrastructure and high-income housing developments, such as in Cambodia and Thailand. Other urban minority populations have been openly discriminated against, such as religious minorities in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, or violently targeted like the Rohingya in Sittwe, Burma. None of the states in Southeast Asia have policies or programmes to specifically assist minorities and indigenous peoples in urban areas, but given the increasing trend towards urbanization, their potential contribution to diverse, flourishing cities must not be underestimated.

Burma

Burma's democratic transition appeared to stall in 2014, with deadly consequences for its ethnic

and religious minorities. The Burmese army escalated its offensive in northern Kachin state, rupturing trust in the ongoing peace negotiations and culminating in the deadliest single attack against ethnic minority rebels since the start of the conflict. Meanwhile, a tide of intolerance towards the country's Muslim minority surged as the government pushed for greater legal restrictions on religious freedom.

The Burmese government has struggled to secure a nationwide ceasefire with a myriad of armed ethnic groups fighting for greater autonomy. Unfortunately, 2014 witnessed a return to hostilities in several parts of the country, including eastern and northern Burma. More than 2,000 civilians were forced from their homes in October following clashes near the Salween River between the army, known locally as the Tatmadaw, and the Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA) – ending a two-year period of relative calm in Karen state. A report by Karen Rivers Watch accused the army of conducting a coordinated campaign to gain control of territory near the Salween River, where a controversial hydropower dam is being developed. The following month, the military shelled a rebel cadet training school near the Kachin independence movement headquarters, killing 23 ethnic fighters and casting a heavy shadow over peace talks. The army later claimed it was intended as a 'warning'. In February 2015, fresh conflict flared in northern Shan state between the army and ethnic Chinese rebels known as the Kokang.

Multiple human rights violations were reported in ethnic minority areas, where the Tatmadaw enjoys broad impunity for its crimes. In November, the Women's League of Burma (WLB) reported that it had documented 118 cases of sexual violence and rape carried out by Burmese soldiers since the former military government ostensibly ceded power in the 2010 election. In January 2015, two Kachin teachers were found brutally raped and murdered in northern Burma – shining a fresh spotlight on wartime sexual violence in the country. The army has reportedly since offered money to the families of the victims. WLB has called for more women to be included in the peace process to boost dialogue on sexual violence and other gendered

impacts of conflict.

There is growing concern that Burma's reform process is backsliding as the country prepares for its first general election in over half a century in 2015. A crucial sticking point is the undemocratic 2008 Constitution, which guarantees 25 per cent of parliamentary seats to the military and deprives ethnic nationalities of their right to self-determination. The president may also hand over executive and judicial powers to the military in the event of a national 'emergency' – potentially legitimizing a coup. The government has also been reluctant to discuss political grievances with armed ethnic groups, fuelling scepticism about the future of the peace process.

For decades the Burmese military regime imposed a policy of 'Burmanization' on ethnic minorities, an estimated 40 per cent of the population, which continues to be felt today. For example Muslims and ethnic Chinese and Indian citizens struggle to obtain or renew their national identity cards, which are needed to travel freely, attend government schools and obtain jobs. Some report being overlooked for scholarships or professional opportunities in urban centres such as Yangon, because they are not Buddhist. Ethnic minorities are still prevented from studying in their own languages, although extracurricular classes have been made available in some areas. In general, the lack of instruction in their native language has meant that a disproportionate number of minority children drop out of school due to language barriers. However, the government appeared to have relaxed these restrictions during the year with the announcement that instruction of minority languages would be reintroduced to the classroom. In April, the Mon state parliament authorized the teaching of Mon language among primary school students – the first time a minority language has been taught in government schools for decades.

Since the end of formal military rule, Burma has witnessed the rise of a Buddhist nationalist movement, resulting in intermittent bouts of communal violence since 2012 – mostly targeting the beleaguered Rohingya Muslim minority in Arakan state. This violence has spread to a number of Burma's cities, resulting in religious

Below: Women at Thin Taw Li refugee camp, where more than 3,000 Rohingya refugees live in a Muslim enclave. *Panos/Nic Dunlop*

segregation and increased marginalization of non-Buddhists around the country. Over 140,000 Muslims have been expelled from cities in Arakan state, while thousands more are in isolated ghetto-like camps outside Sittwe, Rakhine's capital. A fraction of Sittwe's Muslims – who until the violence comprised almost half of its population – remain in Aung Mingalar, now the city's only Muslim neighbourhood, which they are not allowed to leave. Many shops and businesses belonging to Rohingya Muslims in Sittwe have reportedly been destroyed or taken over by Buddhists.

Burma's Muslim population has also been targeted in Mandalay, Burma's second largest city, where an estimated 200,000 Muslims reside. In July, violence erupted following allegations that a Buddhist woman had been raped by two Muslim teashop owners, leading to the deaths of two men and many more injured in apparent riots by Buddhist gangs. However, unlike previous riots that have escalated into

large-scale communal violence, most Mandalay residents refused to participate and locals tried to defuse the situation. Nonetheless, the riots had a crippling impact on the economic lives of the city's Muslims, many of whom run family shops and businesses.

Mandalay is home to the most prominent leader of Burma's anti-Muslim movement, a monk named Wirathu, who continues to call on Buddhists to boycott Muslim businesses. Unfortunately the government has lent political support to his activities by tabling a set of divisive 'race protection' laws to parliament, which seek to restrict inter-faith marriages and conversions to minority faiths. In January 2015, 180 women's and minority rights organizations signed a statement urging the government to withdraw the legislation. However, by March 2015 the bills on religious conversions and population control were pushed through both houses of parliament.

Other government policies have also been a cause for concern. In April, the government reneged on a promise to allow minorities the right to self-identify in the country's first census in over 30 years. Instead, some 1 million Rohingya were told to register as 'Bengalis',



indicating that they are illegal immigrants from Bangladesh, or be excluded. A government scheme to grant citizenship to Rohingya Muslims has similarly demanded that they accept the government's designated ethnic term. In early 2015, some half a million Rohingya Muslims were stripped of their temporary identification cards and remaining voting rights, spelling disaster for the largely stateless community.

Many analysts suspect the government wants to capitalize on religious tensions ahead of the 2015 poll – a tactic commonly used by the former military regime. This view gained support in November when the US government slapped fresh sanctions on former regime hardliner and ruling party MP Aung Thaung for undermining recent economic and political reforms in the country. He is widely suspected of supporting Burma's anti-Muslim movement. Wirathu has publicly backed the military-aligned Union Solidarity and Development Party in the upcoming elections and cautioned against amending the Constitution to allow opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi to run. Indeed, Buddhist nationalists appear to have growing influence over public policy. In December, opposition member Htin Lin Oo was charged with 'insulting' religion for delivering a speech condemning the misuse of Buddhism. Even his party, the National League for Democracy, subsequently removed him from his position as information officer for the party. In another worrying case, New Zealander Philip Blackwood was sentenced to two and half years in prison for defamation of religion after using an image of the Buddha in headphones to promote an event at his bar in Rangoon.

Burma is one of the least urbanized countries in Southeast Asia, with just over a third of the population based in cities. This is largely due to the fact that Burma's economy was crippled by decades of military misrule and international sanctions. However, the rate of urbanization is expected to increase substantially over the next few years, spurred on by the country's reform process and an influx of foreign investment. In particular, Rangoon's population of over 7 million is expected to double by 2040, with many migrants from Burma's rural and ethnic minority populations likely to relocate.

In this context of rapid growth, the city's property development is being driven by wealthy land-owners who have links to the former Burman-dominated military regime and is likely to involve unsustainable development plans. Urban slums are already sprouting at a disturbing pace as Rangoon's impoverished workers are squeezed further from the city centre. The Rangoon authorities have come under fire for pushing through a large-scale development plan that will consume thousands of acres of farmlands west of the city. At least 40 per cent of Rangoon's residents are either 'poor or very poor', according to the UN, while a revised analysis by the World Bank suggests that urban poverty is much higher than previously thought – only four percentage points lower than in rural areas. If left unchecked, Burma's current urbanization trends could exacerbate existing inequalities, including between majority Burmans and ethnic minorities, unless broader issues of discrimination are addressed.

Cambodia

The year 2014 saw the continuation of long drawn-out trials against top Khmer Rouge leaders at the UN-backed Extraordinary Chamber in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC). Marred by reports of corruption and politicized proceedings, the rulings have come slowly. On 31 July, the second trial that is part of Case 002 began against Nuon Chea, known as 'Brother Number Two', and former head of state Khieu Samphan, charged with genocide and crimes against humanity for the mass execution of 20,000 ethnic Vietnamese and between 100,000 and 500,000 Cham Muslims, who were systematically targeted for murder, forced marriages and rape during the Khmer Rouge regime (1975–9). As the trial proceeded, defence lawyers boycotted it and demanded that the judges be disqualified, a motion that was overruled: Nuon Chea's defence team returned to court, but Khieu Samphan instructed his lawyers to continue their boycott. By the end of the year the judges claimed they had no choice but to adjourn the case until 2015. In regard to the first case that formed part of this second trial, a ruling was handed down in August sentencing both men to life in prison for their role in the forced evacuation of Phnom Penh and

other urban areas.

Deeply entrenched discrimination against Vietnamese in Cambodia, both Vietnamese nationals and ethnic Vietnamese long resident in the country, continued in 2014. In Phnom Penh, opposition party and garment factory protests early in the year helped ignite anti-Vietnamese sentiment, a traditional tactic of opposition groups and political parties in Cambodia. One Vietnamese-owned coffee shop was destroyed in the protests. In February, a Vietnamese man was beaten to death in February by a mob in Phnom Penh after he crashed his motorcycle into the back of a car. Racist slurs were reportedly shouted at the victim before he was killed. Anti-Vietnamese protests continued, reignited in June and July when a spokesperson from the Vietnamese embassy refuted that parts of southern Vietnam, also known as Kampuchea Krom, was under Cambodian control until it was acceded to Vietnam by the French in 1949. The spokesperson was replaced in September, but in October monks led protests and threatened to burn the Vietnamese embassy.

Amid this atmosphere, the Interior Ministry announced that it will conduct a census of foreigners living in the country. Since then, reports of arrests and raids on businesses with suspected Vietnamese workers have increased, and by the end of October 399 Vietnamese nationals had been arrested and over 160 deported. The census was distressing for ethnic Vietnamese, as many lack identification papers, rendering them stateless and vulnerable to a host of human rights abuses.

Indigenous people continued their struggle for ancestral land rights, as large swathes of their territory continue to be seized and exploited for commercial agriculture and energy projects. The UN Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights Flavia Pansieri, who arrived in Cambodia on an official visit at the end of April, noted that more effort must be made to issue communal land titles to protect these communities from eviction. For example, a group of around 5,000 mostly indigenous people face resettlement to accommodate the development of the north-eastern Lower Sesan dam project. Construction on the Chinese and Vietnamese-backed dam was set to begin in January 2015. In October, 18 civil

society organizations released a statement noting that the current impact assessment underestimates the 'extensive and severe' potential damage, including to fish stocks and livelihoods, with no consultation or offer of compensation yet made to affected communities.

An indigenous Chong community of about 600 families continued to resist the efforts of Chinese Sino-hydro to build a dam on their ancestral territory in Aveng Valley, one of the last remaining tracts of primeval forest in Southeast Asia, situated in the Cardamoms Protected Forest. While the project has been passed between financial backers, with reports that the proposed dam is not even feasible, the community claims it has not been consulted throughout the process. Villagers worry about the real intentions for the land as in February the Cambodian minister for mines approved a six-month exploration licence in the area. The following month, over 150 villagers blocked company staff from attempting to conduct assessments of the area.

In July, local human rights organization Adhoc reported that over 100 'ethnic minority activists' protecting community forests had been detained, jailed, intimidated and attacked in the first half of the year. In January, protests by Kuoy indigenous villagers in Preah Vihear province against Chinese plantation firms resulted in several arrests, including staff from the NGO Community Legal Education Centre, and forced others into hiding. On 9 August, a march for the International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples by 700 Bunong was blocked by police.

In May the Cambodian government issued a new directive on economic land concessions (ELCs), calling for improved protections of community forests and burial sites. While the directive was met with scepticism by indigenous rights activists, measures such as these led the World Bank to reinstate loans to the country later in the year, which it had officially frozen in 2011 due to the Boeung Kak Lake evictions. In November, the *Phnom Penh Post* reported that two preliminary proposals had been approved by the World Bank in Kampong Thom, despite the potential threat of indigenous communities being evicted. Complaints against projects funded by the World Bank had continued throughout 2014: in February, the World Bank

had agreed to investigate a complaint filed by 17 indigenous groups regarding its being implicated in deforestation and land grabs. By May, the Vietnamese rubber company Hoang Anh Gia Lai (HAGL), implicated in the case, had suspended parts of its operations amid investigations by the Bank.

While many evictions in Cambodia relate to areas with large amounts of natural resources, often in isolated rural locations, land rights violations are also commonplace in Cambodia's urban areas. Though only a fifth of the population currently reside in towns and cities, urban growth is rapid and continues to be shaped by the legacy of the Khmer Rouge era. Though major centres such as Phnom Penh were largely emptied under communist rule, they were gradually repopulated in the chaotic years following the fall of the regime. Lost land records and vacant makeshift housing shaped Phnom Penh's expansion, allowing residents to set up where they chose but also laying the foundation, in recent years, for land grabbing and displacement. In this context, minorities, indigenous peoples and other vulnerable groups have been especially vulnerable to displacement due to existing patterns of discrimination against them.

While most of Cambodia's Cham Muslims and indigenous peoples still reside in rural areas, they also comprise significant urban communities and face a regular threat of eviction. For instance, Phnom Penh's most publicized case of land grabbing involved eviction of residents around Boeung Kak Lake, following the government's reclassification and leasing of the area on a 99-year commercial contract to private developers. Among the thousands of people evicted were entire Muslim Cham neighbourhoods, with families either offered minimal cash compensation or given homes in a relocation zone far outside the city, with little access to services or ability to make a living. As they were relocated away from Al-Serkal mosque, which had served as the community's anchor for gatherings and religious services, their collective sense of community was also undermined. Following its demolition, the mosque was replaced with the help of a large donation from the United Arab Emirates, yet the community itself no longer resides in the area.

The ethnic Vietnamese population, whose

ancestors have lived in the country for generations, are largely urban and occupy low-income settlements in the capital. Their lives are insecure as a result of being barred from formal citizenship, leaving them with limited access to education, health care and other benefits normally associated with cities. Their lack of identity papers also prevents them from purchasing land or housing, and as a result many live in waterways and other marginal areas where they face fewer restrictions on residency, including Svay Pak district on the outskirts of Phnom Penh. Without viable alternatives, the sex industry helps support these families, as ethnic Vietnamese women are over-represented in it. In one study of urban slums in Phnom Penh from 2006, nearly half of Vietnamese families surveyed reportedly sold a girl child for sex, often a one-time sale of an underaged girl's virginity. The study also noted that being a minority Vietnamese in Cambodia is itself a contributing factor to entry into the sex trade, given the structural discrimination that shapes their lives.

Indonesia

The year 2014 was punctuated by the election of President Joko Widodo, a youthful reformist popularly known as Jokowi, after a tense and divisive poll in July. Jokowi's win has been celebrated as a victory for democratic reform and religious pluralism in Indonesia after years of rising intolerance, raising hopes among the country's diverse indigenous populations and other minority groups. Jokowi campaigned under the national slogan 'Unity in Diversity', promising to curb escalating religious and ethnic tensions in the Muslim-majority country.

Indonesia has experienced a surge in religious intolerance under the 10-year rule of former President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, resulting in frequent violence against its Ahmadi, Christian and Shi'a minorities. According to the Setara Institute, attacks on religious minorities have skyrocketed since the government authorized two decrees restricting the right to worship freely in 2006 and 2008. This trend continued in 2014, with hardliners congregating in April in Bandung, West Java, to form the first ever 'Anti-Shi'a Alliance' calling for jihad against the minority, viewed as 'heretical' by

Below: Indonesian Christians hold candles during a Christmas mass prayer session at Gelora Bung Karno stadium in Jakarta, December 2014
REUTERS/Beawiharta.

extremists. A Shi'a journalist covering the event was reportedly detained, interrogated and assaulted by participants. Youdhoyono has been blamed for forging a political alliance with the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI), which has relentlessly promoted a narrow and xenophobic interpretation of Islam. In January, the MUI urged police in Yogyakarta, Java, to monitor, freeze and disband organizations run by Shi'a Muslims. Ahmadis, who were branded 'deviant' by Indonesia's top clerical body in 2008, also face persistent social ostracism, harassment and arbitrary closures of their places of worship.

Activists have called on President Jokowi, who was sworn into office in October, to take a tough stance against extremist groups and their political allies. To his credit, Jokowi has already defended a number of minority politicians, including Christian Susan Jasmine Zulkifli and Shi'a Jalaluddin Rakhmat, against public outrage over their religious affiliations. The government has announced that it

is drafting a new law to protect religious freedom, which will allow all religions to publicly practise their faiths and construct houses of worship. The new law is expected to replace previous discriminatory legislation, including Indonesia's controversial blasphemy law. Over 100 individuals have been jailed over the past decade for perceived religious offences under this draconian legislation.

Another crucial test for the new president is the bitter conflict in resource-rich West Papua province, where ethnic Papuan rebels have fought for independence from Indonesia for decades. Unfortunately, there has been little apparent progress in achieving a sustainable peace in the region since Jokowi took power, and security forces continue to perpetrate abuses against the indigenous population. In August, a prominent separatist activist went missing a day before a scheduled visit by then President Yudhoyono. His dismembered, bullet-ridden body was discovered floating in a sack off the Papuan coast six days later. Foreign media remain largely shut out from West Papua, which requires a special permit to enter. In August, two French journalists were arrested for reporting on the Papuan separatist movement on tourist visas.



They were sentenced to two months in prison and later deported.

Dozens of peaceful activists were arrested in West Papua in 2014 amid regular reports of arbitrary killings, rapes and violence perpetrated by the Indonesian army. West Papua's independence movement is increasingly urban and educated, applying non-violent means to further their cause, with a growing number of youths using social media to campaign against the Indonesian occupation. In December, four high school students were killed when the military and police opened fire on a crowd of protesters in the eastern province. Jokowi was roundly criticized for his inefficient response to the incident. This follows anger over his decision to appoint former military strongman Ryamizard Ryacudu – notorious for his derisive attitude towards human rights defenders in West Papua and Aceh provinces – as the new Minister of Defence.

Indonesia's controversial transmigration programme – an initiative moving people from densely populated to less populated parts of the archipelago to counter rapid urbanization in Java – has fuelled anger and ethnic friction in West Papua. Six decades after this programme was first introduced by the Dutch colonial administration, ethnic Papuans now number less than 50 per cent of the population. The programme has led to increased marginalization of the indigenous population. According to the Institute for Policy Studies, indigenous urban youth in West Papua are twice as likely as migrants to have little or no formal schooling. Disparities in human development between the migrant-dominated urban areas and indigenous-majority interior are even more pronounced.

In May 2014, Indonesia's Human Rights Commission (Komnas HAM) launched its first national inquiry into land rights abuses committed against Indonesia's indigenous population. Over 2,000 communities have asked for investigations, according to the Indigenous Peoples' Alliance of the Archipelago (AMAN). Activists have called on Jokowi to publicly apologize to the country's indigenous peoples. This comes one year after a Constitutional Court ruling that invalidated the state's claim to millions of hectares of customary indigenous

lands. Jokowi has pledged to improve conditions for Indonesia's 70 million indigenous people, although his government has yet to implement the Court's recommendations. A draft law on the rights of indigenous peoples has stalled in parliament, facing obstruction from Indonesia's controversial Forestry Ministry, which is currently being investigated by the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK). Jokowi has since merged the Environment and Forestry ministries in an effort to improve sustainable practices, although environmental campaigners worry that this will dilute conservation policies.

Indonesia has one of the highest deforestation rates in the entire world, with a new study suggesting that 840,000 hectares of primary forest were felled in 2012 – twice as much as the historic global leader Brazil. This process has been accelerated by endemic corruption at the Forestry Ministry. In March, the former governor of Indonesia's Riau province was sentenced to 14 years in prison for issuing illegal logging permits in central Sumatra, which has already been devastated by the spread of palm oil and paper plantations. The former minister of forestry was questioned in a separate investigation.

Rapid deforestation and land confiscations have hastened the speed of urbanization among indigenous communities in Indonesia. For example, Dayaks – a constellation of non-Muslim peoples in Borneo – are increasingly migrating to bigger cities in search of better employment opportunities. Though the Indonesian government signed an agreement with UN-Habitat during the year committing to the promotion of sustainable urbanization, the government has not made specific plans on how Indonesia's myriad minorities and indigenous peoples will be incorporated into this process.

In Jakarta, Indonesia's capital, rapid urban growth has disproportionately affected certain ethnic groups. In particular, indigenous Betawi have been historically marginalized by the government's urban development projects. As Jakarta rapidly expanded into a sprawling megacity, it engulfed Betawi farming villages on its periphery, turning them into isolated urban settlements. Thousands of Betawis have since been dislocated from their homes to make way for large-scale private or commercial enterprises,

often forced into slum dwellings as land prices soar. Their culture and identity has come further under threat because of an influx of economic migrants to the booming capital. Many Betawis have had to abandon their traditional livelihoods, such as dairy cows, agriculture or batik production, and minority youths have struggled to find work, giving rise to ethnic-based urban gangs and criminal networks. In recent years the government has employed various strategies to promote Betawi culture in Jakarta. For example, when Jokowi was governor of Jakarta, he toyed with the idea of using Betawi architecture to boost tourism to the city. Another marginalized minority in Jakarta is Indonesia's ethnic Chinese, who faced acute persecution under military rule and continue to be segregated from other ethnic groups by the legacy of racism and violence since an outburst of anti-Chinese riots in 1998. However, this year saw the election of an ethnic Chinese Christian to the role of governor of Jakarta.

The Acehese ethnic minority are known for their devout adherence to Islam and their long resistance to external rule. However, the strict interpretation of Sunni Islam in Aceh province has led to at least 20 churches having been closed in the province and 14 minority Islamic sects having been formally banned, fuelling insecurity among religious minorities. Women in particular have become increasingly marginalized in Aceh, since it was devastated by the Indian Ocean tsunami in 2004. Men have largely determined the recovery efforts, as well as the terms of the peace deal that ended Aceh's long-running struggle for self-determination and was reached as a direct consequence of the tsunami. The peace deal included the application of Sharia law, which has led to an erosion of women's rights and freedoms in urban spaces. Research suggests that these religious gender constraints are more harshly felt in urban areas than rural areas, with women's dress and behaviour more closely monitored – strictures that are felt especially by non-Muslim women.

Aceh's cities also received a disproportionate amount of humanitarian aid in the aftermath of the 2004 tsunami, aggravating an urban–rural divide in socio-economic development. This policy had a significant impact on thousands of

survivors who had fled from coastal regions and urban centres to Aceh's conflict-torn interior and missed out on disaster relief. Banda Aceh had already been shielded from the worst of the fighting, even briefly emerging as a democratic space for the educated urban elite to resist the Indonesian occupation after the fall of Suharto. Five years after the tsunami, all traces of the disaster had been removed from Banda Aceh, while many rural areas lay neglected and abandoned.

Malaysia

Malaysia continued to restrict religious freedoms in 2014, further marginalizing and alienating its non-Sunni Muslim population. Prime Minister Najib Razak has been accused of exploiting religious tensions and pandering to Islamist hardliners after suffering major electoral losses in the 2013 election. In November, he formally abandoned a pledge to revoke a draconian colonial-era Sedition Law that has frequently been used to silence his political opponents, instead vowing to strengthen its provisions.

The Muslim-majority country has witnessed a surge in blasphemy allegations targeting the country's sizeable Christian minority. Malaysian law imposes a maximum three-year jail sentence for individuals found to have 'insulted' religion or published text or imagery deemed offensive to public 'morality'. This legislation is disproportionately used to clamp down on religious minorities. In January, religious authorities seized hundreds of bibles from a Christian group because they used the Arabic word '*Allab*' to refer to God – a practice that was formally banned in 2013. In May, the country was placed on the US government's Tier-2 'watch list' of countries where religious freedoms are under threat.

Malaysia's restrictive laws have entrenched discrimination against certain Muslim sects, such as Shi'a, Ahmadis and Al-Arqam, who are banned from spreading their faiths. The Department of Islamic Development (JAKIM), under the Prime Minister's Office, has broad authority to determine what constitutes 'un-Islamic' or 'immoral' behaviour and to penalize individuals deemed to be in breach. The body regularly monitors, harasses and prosecutes members of

minority Muslim sects for alleged crimes against Islam. In March, over a hundred Shi'a, including a four-month-old child, were detained by authorities for attending a religious ceremony.

At the start of the year, the government unveiled plans to establish a Sharia police unit within JAKIM to help enforce Islamic law. It comes amid growing concern that Sharia courts in Malaysia are seen to favour the Sunni population, especially men. In one notable case, a Hindu woman whose Muslim husband abducted their daughter is facing an uphill battle to regain custody of her child because a Sharia court ruled against her on the basis of her faith. Followers of the outlawed Ahmadi faith are fighting back against a crackdown on their activities, arguing that they should not be subjected to interference by religious authorities since they have been classified as 'non-Muslims' by the government. In August, a group of 39 Ahmadis were granted leave by the High Court to pursue a judicial review application of their arrests. According to the human rights monitoring group SUARAM, dozens of indigenous Christians were also tricked into converting to Islam in January, after being promised money in exchange for signing cards and reading 'foreign words'. According to SUARAM, responsibility for the case was handed by the police to the Sabah State Islamic Affairs Department, which reportedly had presided over the ceremony.

In this context, Malaysia's burgeoning intolerance has fuelled the proliferation of hate speech and religious extremism across the country, where radical clerics are permitted to preach freely in mosques and through social media. Indeed the government has a track record of tolerating religious extremism among its political support base, while cracking down on dissidents using the controversial Sedition Law. In response to this increasingly oppressive environment, in December a group of civil servants wrote an open letter urging the government to take swift steps to promote religious harmony and understanding in Malaysia.

Issues affecting indigenous communities continue to be sidelined by the Malaysian government. Prime Minister Najib Razak has yet to implement the recommendations made

by the National Human Rights Commission following a historic inquiry into land rights abuses against indigenous peoples in 2013. Instead, he established a separate task force to consider steps moving forward, which has been criticized as an effort to dilute the inquiry's provisions. In March, Malaysia rejected a suggestion made by Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, the UN Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples, to evaluate its treatment of Orang Ulu, comprising 27 indigenous groups on the island of Sarawak. Orang Ulu, also known as Dayaks, face growing threats to their traditional lands from the rapid spread of logging, palm oil companies and large-scale hydropower dams. Many thousands of Orang Ulu have been forcibly displaced over the past few years to make way for a series of controversial mega-dams in Borneo, forming the Sarawak Corridor for Renewable Energy (SCORE).

Controversy has centred on Sarawak's former Chief Minister, Taib Mahmud, who is the subject of an ongoing investigation by Malaysia's Anti-Corruption Commission. Taib stepped down in February after 33 years in office, although indigenous activists fear he is still involved behind the scenes. His replacement, Adenan Satem – Taib's former brother-in-law and close political ally – has pledged to push ahead with the SCORE project, despite local opposition. In August, a new report by SAVE Rivers accused the government of threatening and coercing the indigenous populations in Baram, Sarawak, where resistance has flared against the next proposed dam site. The report raises fresh concerns about the role of money politics in Sarawak.

Malaysia has one of the highest levels of urbanization in Southeast Asia, with around three-quarters of its population now residing in cities. In Sarawak, a growing number of indigenous youths are migrating to urban centres in search of work and educational opportunities. This process has largely been driven by Malaysia's rapid rate of deforestation, which has eroded the traditional livelihoods and lands of indigenous forest dwellers. Nearly 70 per cent of the highland Kelabit tribe in Sarawak has migrated to urban areas and, according to a 2013 survey, the population of Baram dropped from 80,000

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Case study by Hanna Hindstrom
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Supporting indigenous livelihoods in Baguio city

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Four years ago, a typhoon struck the northern Filipino city of Baguio. The storm ruptured the walls of the city's mounting garbage dump, sending hundreds of tonnes of urban waste cascading into the streets. The landslide flattened several houses and killed two young children. The tragedy was a wake-up call for Geraldine Cacho, an Igorot woman and rural farmer who first migrated to Baguio to pursue university studies. 'Why would garbage become a killer? Why would it become an issue?' she asked herself at the time.

Many Igorot migrants are accustomed to the practice of *ayyew* – known as *sayang* in Filipino – an indigenous concept of recycling and reusing all forms of waste. For example, biodegradable waste would be transformed into fertilizers using vermiculture, while plastic bottles and old clothes may be recycled into household containers or rugs.

As residents dump some 300 tonnes of garbage every day, recycling not only offers a source of livelihood to Baguio's indigenous population but also provides the city with an effective form of waste management. 'Using *ayyew* as a culture of managing waste would lessen garbage and help solve the city's huge garbage problem,' she says. 'As an activist organizer, I knew there has to be a way. A mass movement is needed to help solve the problem, if not eliminate it.'

After attending a training programme organized by the NGO Tebtebba, Cacho set up a vermibed in her kitchen. At first she faced resistance from her landlady, who described the compost worms as 'unsanitary'. She confiscated Cacho's worms and discarded them in a smelly

open-pit garbage dump in her backyard. 'It was however a blessing because after some weeks, we noticed that the open pit was not smelly anymore, and the neighbours stopped complaining of its stench,' she says. She then explained to the landlady how vermiculture works and helped her plant onions, eggplants and cabbage in her back garden using compost.

Cacho is now working with the Cordillera Women's Education and Research Centre (CWEARC) to promote vermiculture practices in Baguio. CWEARC is supporting over 100 indigenous women to establish urban vegetable gardens with the help of recycled waste. The idea is to simultaneously boost the socio-economic status of indigenous women while combatting Baguio's burgeoning waste problem. The women are all migrants from rural areas who often struggle to earn their living as street vendors or backyard hog raisers. By working as a collective, the women harness another indigenous concept, known as *ubbo* or mutually beneficial labour.

According to the UN, indigenous migrants make up 60 per cent of the city's population and more than half of them live in poverty. Indigenous women are particularly marginalized and are usually excluded from discussions about urban planning in Baguio. But now they have a stronger voice in the community. 'The project increased the capacity of indigenous women on project management, leadership, economic empowerment, and strengthened their organization,' says Lucille Lumas-i from CWEARC.

Even the government has responded positively to the project. 'In communities where practitioners were located, there is a decrease in the volume of waste being hauled by the city government,' added Lumas-i. 'At the community level, Barangay [ward] officials are very supportive of the project and some have adopted the concept in their community waste management programme.' Cacho now has a blooming urban garden, studded with ginger, corn, squash and sweet potatoes. It reminds her of her family's farm in the countryside. 'The growth was very visible,' she says, 'like magic.' ■

to 20,000 in a decade. Activists have warned that the proliferation of new dams will exacerbate this trend. Hunter-gatherer tribes such as the Penan are particularly vulnerable during resettlement as they often lack the occupational skills suited to life outside the forest. This has contributed to the urbanization of poverty among Sarawak's indigenous population, who already form a significant percentage of squatters in cities such as Miri. However, the Sarawak government maintains that new hydropower dams will boost rural development and discourage Orang Ulu from migrating to cities.

A large proportion of indigenous peoples from Peninsular Malaysia, known collectively as the Orang Asli, live below the poverty line. Despite being protected by Malaysia's controversial Bumiputera laws – which favour the ethnic Malay and indigenous populations for government jobs and university opportunities, while entrenching discrimination against Malaysia's Chinese and Indian minorities – Orang Asli still face discrimination in most aspects of their lives and consistently rank lowest on health and education indicators. According to a recent study, demographic changes and urbanization has worsened the risk of diabetes, hypertension and obesity among the Orang Asli. This may be caused by the rising cost of food in urban areas. Indigenous activists blamed the government for failing to help indigenous communities adapt to city life. Some Orang Asli report feeling out of place in urban areas due to educational and socio-economic disparities and language barriers.

Philippines

During 2014 the Philippines made significant progress towards concluding a 45-year Muslim minority struggle for self-determination that has claimed over 120,000 lives. In March, the Philippine government finalized a historic peace deal with the largest Muslim armed group, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), paving the way for the creation of an autonomous Mindanao region – also known as Bangsamoro – by 2016. Notably, it was the first time anywhere that such a document was signed by a woman as chief negotiator. The Muslim minority, making up roughly 5 per cent of the population, is one of the poorest and most marginalized groups in the

overwhelmingly Catholic country. The resource-rich Mindanao province has been engulfed by conflict since the 1970s, amid religious tensions and grievances over perceived exploitation by the central government.

The Philippine Congress is currently considering a new law, known as the Bangsamoro Basic Law, which would formalize the terms of the peace agreement, including mechanisms for natural resource revenue-sharing and political devolution. However, indigenous peoples in Mindanao, known collectively as Lumads, have expressed concerns about the future of their ancestral domains. Some fear the new legislation could aggravate land conflicts and erode the rights of indigenous peoples in the southern Philippines. There are some 100,000 Lumads in the proposed Bangsamoro region, and they consider almost 300,000 hectares of land to be their ancestral domains. Although two Lumads are included in the commission drafting the Basic Law, it is unclear how these concerns will be addressed. Other non-Muslim communities have resisted inclusion in the new Bangsamoro region, including the Christian-majority city of Zamboanga, which came under siege by armed groups in 2013.

A patchwork of other separatist groups, such as the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters, opposed the peace deal and continued to launch deadly attacks on the civilian population throughout the year, targeting the region's Christian minority in a number of towns and cities. The peace talks have similarly excluded the MNLF's founder, Nur Misuari, an influential figure who led the siege on Zamboanga in 2013. Mindanao is also haunted by a continuing communist insurgency against the government, and Lumads often get caught in the middle.

The Philippines also remains one of the world's deadliest places for human rights activists and indigenous community leaders. Many killings have been linked to the military or pro-government militias operating near resource development projects. In March alone, nine people were murdered, including William Bugatti, a prominent Tawali activist who was gunned down by unknown assailants on his way home from work. The Philippine

Below: A child mesmerized by people dancing and playing the Igorot ‘ganza’ (music and dance with gongs) at the Igorot Park in Baguio City, Philippines during the protest against violence against women headed by the One Billion Rising women’s group.

Richard Balonglong

army had reportedly identified him as a ‘target person’ and communist sympathizer in a leaked military document from 2012. In August, three indigenous rights activists were murdered within one week, two of whom were involved in disputes with a local palm oil and mining company. The Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact described the ongoing violence against indigenous communities as a ‘systematic attack’ intended to ‘stifle their opposition and struggle to defend their ancestral lands’.

Militarization and clan-based violence are key factors driving rural–urban migration in the southern Philippines, where the influx of displaced households has placed a heavy burden on the host communities. According to UN-Habitat, it has led to increased competition for jobs as well as shortages in housing, health and sanitation in urban areas. Young Muslim women, who tend to have lower

levels of education than the men, are especially vulnerable to trafficking or exploitative domestic labour schemes.

Natural disasters are another major source of displacement in the typhoon-prone Philippines. Indigenous communities were left isolated after Typhoon Haiyan hit the southern Philippines in November 2013. According to the NGO Tebtebba, some 1,600 indigenous families are struggling to survive after losing their homes, infrastructure and boats used to gather vital supplies for the community. Indigenous groups have been made more vulnerable due to their geographical isolation, far away from major urban centres where support services are typically located. Research suggests that the rapid rate of urbanization in the Philippines has also made poor and marginalized groups, such as minority and indigenous communities, more susceptible to natural disasters and flooding as they cannot afford to buy or rent housing in safer places.

However, indigenous customs and knowledge have also been recognized as a tool to tackle the effects of climate change in the Philippines. For example, a regional UNESCO-led project has studied indigenous cultural practices to help policy makers devise better disaster preparedness strategies in coastal areas. The study identified a



number of traditions that were used to accurately predict disasters, such as typhoons or tsunamis, and later integrated with scientific approaches. The study found that indigenous communities have developed various ways to strengthen their houses and store food ahead of disasters, offering useful lessons in strengthening local resilience.

Around 35,000 people, mostly from the country's Muslim minority, remain uprooted following the siege of Zamboanga in 2013. Thousands have since been subjected to arbitrary relocation, with others reportedly receiving inadequate aid and food supplies. According to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), most of the people who remain displaced are urban poor who lack formal land-ownership or tenancy rights in their area of origin. The repatriation process has been further hindered by concerns about certain areas deemed unsuitable for returns due to risks of flooding or renewed violence. The IDMC has called on the government to prioritize housing rights for displaced communities as part of the resettlement process. Congress is currently reviewing new legislation on the rights of IDPs, seen as a crucial step towards protecting vulnerable minorities and indigenous people in the Philippines. The law is a revised version of a historic 2013 bill that was controversially vetoed by the president.

The Philippines is a rapidly urbanizing country, with around half of the population now living in cities. Although most indigenous communities, which make up roughly 15 per cent of the population, live in isolated rural areas, a growing number are migrating to cities in search of better livelihoods and social services. Many are driven from their traditional lands by the expansion of large-scale development projects, militarization and tribal conflicts. They often face poverty and exclusion as a result of their limited formal education and the fact that their skills may not be suited to an urban context. In the northern city of Baguio – where indigenous people make up over 60 per cent of the population – it is estimated that some 65 per cent of indigenous migrants suffer from extreme poverty. Many of them are migrant women working as vendors in the city streets, where they are regularly pestered by police as part of the government's anti-peddling drive.

Thailand

Thailand's fragile democracy suffered a serious blow during 2014 when its military seized power from the democratically elected Pheu Thai government on 22 May. The military swiftly established its ruling National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO), led by coup leader General Prayuth Chan-ocha, stifling all dissent by imposing martial law, taking control of the media and repealing the 2007 Constitution. By late July, the NCPO had pushed its own interim Constitution into force. As the year drew to a close, Prayuth's regime had overseen the widespread suppression of dissent and a crackdown on journalists, political opponents and activists – with a number of policies directly affecting Thailand's minorities and indigenous peoples.

Shortly after seizing power the NCPO set about instituting a series of reforms, including a 'Return Forest Policy' in June and a reforestation 'Master Plan' two months later, with the goal of increasing forest cover throughout the country. Since many of Thailand's indigenous territories are in protected forests, these policies carried the threat of judicial action for the communities living there. In July, three indigenous Pakayaw Karen families had their lands reclaimed by the Royal Forest Department in Thung Pa Ka village, northern Mae Hong Song province. The move followed the arrest of 39 Pakayaw Karen in May for cutting down trees in the surrounding forest as timber to build their homes: they now face imprisonment or fines after they were sentenced for encroachment and illegal logging in October. More land confiscation and evictions continued, many in Isan, the north-eastern Lao-speaking region that has faced discrimination from the Thai administration in Bangkok since its incorporation into the modern state of Thailand. Indeed, by December *Prachatai* news had reported that nearly 1,800 families had been affected by the order, mostly in the north and north-east, home to large minority and indigenous populations. A newly proposed Mining Bill – shot down during the previous government – was also revived and will soon be up for approval by the National Legislative Assembly, causing concern for minority communities in mineral-rich areas as the new bill has weakened impact assessments.

Conflict between officials and local communities over land and natural resources has led to the death or disappearance of numerous activists in recent years. One of the most high-profile cases occurred during 2014 when a leading Karen land rights activist, Porlajee Rakchongcharoen, also known as Billy, was reportedly last seen with the chief of Kaengkrachan National Park and three park officials when he was detained for carrying ‘illegal honey’ on 17 April. Kaengkrachan Park is the largest of Thailand’s national parks and home to Billy’s indigenous S’gaw Karen community. Billy was one of the key witnesses in a lawsuit against park officials for burning and looting the homes of more than 20 families. The park chief, Chaiwat Limlikhitakorn, had already been under investigation for the killing of another Karen activist in 2011. He claimed to have released Billy after his arrest. In July, the provincial court cleared Chaiwat of involvement in Billy’s disappearance, but by December a representative from the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) publicly stated that their investigation into the case has found that Billy was never released by the officers.

A community of indigenous Moken ‘sea gypsies’ have also been struggling to resist eviction from their ancestral territory, occupying highly prized lands in Phuket whose title deeds are owned by several businessmen. A lower court ordered the eviction of over 100 people, but the Department of Special Investigations has found that these lands have been occupied by the community for at least 100 years through DNA analysis of burial grounds, though they lacked any formal title deeds. In November it was reported that the Justice Ministry had asked the Department of Lands to revoke the title deeds.

The year 2014 marked the ten-year anniversary of both the Tak Bai massacre, where at least 78 Muslim protesters were killed after being pushed into overcrowded police trucks, and the disappearance of Muslim human rights lawyer Somchai Neelapaijit. Both were key events in the timeline of the Thai state’s conflict with the separatist movement in the ethnic Malay dominated provinces in the south of the country: in neither case has justice been served. Nevertheless, in December, Prayuth travelled to

Malaysia to restart peace talks with the Barisan Revolusi Nasional Melayu Patani (BRN) after negotiations stalled in 2013, amid promises that the south would be free of violence by the end of 2015. Nevertheless, conflict continued in the region throughout the year, bringing the death toll to more than 6,000 people since 2004, with regular killings and bombings, including increasing attacks against ‘soft’ targets like hospitals. Both the Thai military and separatists have been responsible for serious human rights violations; no members of the security forces have been successfully prosecuted, which has led to a climate of impunity. The separatists have particularly targeted teachers and schools; after the killing of three teachers since the beginning of 2014, HRW noted in March that at least 171 teachers had been killed and 300 schools had been attacked. In response to ongoing violence, in November the military bolstered its programme of arming civilian ‘volunteers’ with military weapons, despite reports emerging two months earlier of one such volunteer killing an unarmed 14-year-old Muslim boy in August, then planting a gun in his hand to frame him as an insurgent. Security forces in general have been responsible for numerous human rights abuses in the region: three-quarters of the 134 torture allegations reported to the NHRC between 2007 and 2013 occurred in the south.

The NCPO announced that it had made a deal with neighbouring Burma to repatriate over 130,000 refugees who have settled along the border over decades of fighting. Most are minority communities who have reason to doubt guarantees of their safe return. The same applies to the 1,300 Rohingya asylum seekers – an ethno-religious community that is among the most persecuted on earth – deported back to Burma in February, having fled the country due to targeted violence and mass displacement. This followed shortly after a raid by Thai security forces on illegal ‘human smuggling camps’ located over 500 Rohingya who had reportedly been held hostage en route to other countries. Other migrant groups are also vulnerable to deportation, with rumours of a planned crackdown by the military government on Cambodian migrants triggering an exodus of more than 120,000 Cambodians in June.

Many migrants and ethnic minorities in search

of employment have relocated to urban areas, particularly Bangkok, where Thailand's economic and political activity is mostly concentrated. This has contributed to enduring underdevelopment and a lack of economic opportunity in cities elsewhere in the country, including the Muslim south and the north-east Isan region, despite periodic attempts to encourage more investment in smaller urban areas, such as the Isan cities of Khon Kaen and Korat. While the capital has been a beacon of opportunity for people all over the country, the largest numbers of incomers are Isan, spurred by poor crop fertility, flooding, drought and population pressures. Thailand's economic boom in the 1970s was largely sustained by the Isan labour force, who still comprise a significant proportion of the urban working poor today, transiting between Bangkok and their homes. Remittances form a significant part of Isan family incomes. It has been suggested that this experience of urban life in Bangkok has not only helped create a sense of distinct Isan ethno-regional identity but also bolstered their political engagement; they form a significant cohort of the modern Red Shirt movement.

Because of evictions, drought and resettlement out of natural parks into villages with little land to farm, many of Thailand's indigenous peoples are driven to migrate to cities such as Mae Sot, Chiang Mai and Bangkok. Many Karen youth engage in daily agricultural labour or factory work in smaller cities like Ratchaburi, with some migrating to Bangkok more permanently. However, for the more than 100,000 indigenous people who lack formal Thai citizenship – the result of complicated and discriminatory registration procedures – movement outside their areas of residency is illegal. Without legal status, they are denied access to education and end up concentrated in informal and low-wage labour in urban or peri-urban areas. A significant proportion of Thailand's northern indigenous women, for example, enter domestic labour or the sex trade, mostly in urban areas. Many migrant workers from surrounding countries, many of whom are minorities in their home countries, similarly lack legal status, despite ongoing government efforts to implement migrant worker registration. This makes migration to and residency in cities extremely precarious, and leaves

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Case study by *Nicole Girard*
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Promoting a more inclusive tourism industry for Chiang Mai's hill tribes

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'I'm studying Chinese so that I can be a guide for Chinese tourists,' explains Nahneuh, a 20-year-old indigenous Karen from Thailand, 'I think it's a good future for me to help support my family.' Nahneuh comes from a small village near Mae Saring and moved to Chiang Mai to study. Like everyone else in the city, she has seen a dramatic rise in the number of Chinese tourists to Chiang Mai, and the potential economic opportunities this has presented for its residents, including the indigenous hill tribes from remote villages.

Chiang Mai is the largest city in northern Thailand, nestled in the mountain ranges of the Thai highlands, a long-time tourist destination for both domestic and international tourism. Since the 1960s, Thais have ventured to the so-called 'Rose of the North' to experience its cooler climate and indigenous cultures. Trekking and visits to hill tribe villages have been cornerstones of Thailand's tourist promotion in the north, displaying posters of colourfully dressed Akha women in the airports of Bangkok and featuring them in its 2015 'Discover Thailand' marketing campaign. Visitors to the north are increasing among both Thais and foreigners, with the number of tourists from China alone exceeding 4 million in 2014. So what does this mean for Thailand's indigenous peoples?

When Chiang Mai's tourism boom first began, the self-sufficiency of Thailand's northern indigenous peoples had already been eroded through a series of government

policies, including the creation of national protected parks, a ban on traditional swidden agriculture and the prohibition of opium production. Supplementary income, through work in the city or village homestays for tourists, was therefore a necessity. Though the government had started to issue some national identity cards to indigenous residents, many communities were and still are essentially stateless, with little access to health and education opportunities. Consequently, the opportunities presented through tourism, including construction work in the city on tourism infrastructure, were one of few viable livelihoods options. Many indigenous men and women also entered the sex trade, a form of exploitation fuelled by tourism.

Trekking and homestay tours began to pick up in the 1980s. At this time, indigenous communities such as Hmong, Lisu, Akha and Lahu began to sell their handicrafts and cultural wares in the Chiang Mai night bazaar or perform traditional dances at the Chiang Mai Old Cultural Centre. A select number of people from these groups were moving to the city for these opportunities due to economic insecurity in their villages, a need that – together with their lack of Thai language skills – left them vulnerable to exploitation by Thai tourist guides. Homestays in villages were initiated by Thai guides, who

would receive the majority of the fees, split with guesthouses and tourist agents in the city that sold the tour packages.

By the early 1990s though, villages were starting to tire of this situation. ‘Fees given for accommodation, food and to guides were much lower than ours’, says Thellie, an eco-tour coordinator from the Mirror Foundation, an NGO based in the neighbouring city of Chiang Rai.

‘There was little interaction with villagers by guests, and little or no explanation of culture and traditions. This manifested in ignorance and insensitive practices by guests, because they were uninformed, and the feeling of a zoo-like experience for both guests and villagers.’

The Mirror Foundation was formed in 1991 and is run by Thais, including indigenous staff, with the aim of running a variety of projects to support indigenous communities across northern Thailand, including anti-trafficking campaigns, citizenship initiatives, scholarship programmes and handicraft livelihoods, among others. Only later did they include ecotourism as one of their projects, however. Thellie explains:

‘Once our other projects were established, there was a realization that the villagers were being exploited



by unscrupulous tour agents, so the [ecotourism] project developed as a response to this, but also to give employment opportunities to villagers, as guides, and homestay families’.

Unlike many outfits, the Mirror Foundation places an emphasis on participation. ‘The project was done in coordination with villagers, and a training programme set up for those interested in becoming tour guides.’ By allowing indigenous peoples to play a major role in staffing and decision making, the organization aims to build their capacity and achieve a broader transformation of the local tourism industry:

‘All our guides are from local indigenous groups and licensed by the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT), and encouraged to work for themselves or other agents, as well as the Mirror Foundation – this helps to spread the ethos of our work out into the tour agency community, which hopefully realizes that it is more beneficial to them long term if the villagers are treated fairly, and not exploited.’

The revenue they receive from their ecotours goes back into the Mirror Foundation projects, with the goal of being self-sustaining.

When asked how tourism has affected the villagers, Thellie replies:

‘I think that it is safe to say that tourism has altered the lives of villagers. Not just for those communities where tourists visit, but for the communities where the youth leave to find work, or spouses, within the wide range of areas in the tourism industry. Tourism, along with exposure to the wider society, has the power to improve lives, motivate individuals, and give opportunities which were not previously available; but each also brings with it the ability to destroy, de-motivate and deny opportunities, if not handled properly.’ ■

Left: A woman from a local hill tribe prepares food for an ecotourist home stay. Mirror Foundation

them vulnerable to traffickers and exploitative working conditions.

However, some minorities have fared well in urban areas and successfully resisted attempts to evict or displace their communities. The settlement of the Cham Muslim community in the canalside area of Ban Krua, for instance, dates back at least 200 years and is an exceptional example of old Bangkok, with wooden stilt houses and fruit trees in the midst of malls and highway overpasses. Its continuing strength is no accident, however. Starting in the 1980s, Bangkok’s transport division was keen to build an expressway through their neighbourhood, with the intention of demolishing houses, evicting residents and destroying their mosque and cemetery. Residents successfully defied the project with a cohesive campaign of resistance and advocacy that has been attributed to the community’s relative autonomy and the strong Islamic identity tied to the land, empowering the community to oppose aggressive city planning. While plans for an expressway on-ramp were abandoned in 2001, successive attempts continued in 2012, with Ban Krua again uniting against the urban administration’s plans.

Vietnam

Vietnam made international news headlines in May 2014 after rare large-scale protests broke out across the country against China, sparked by the movement of an oil rig into disputed territory in the South China Sea. Initially the Communist government did not attempt to quash the protests, but it appealed for calm after mobs began to attack perceived Chinese nationals and Chinese-owned factories. Hundreds of factories were attacked in the central provinces and there were reports that more than 20 people had been killed. Over 600 Chinese nationals reportedly fled the country fearing further violence.

In February, Vietnam underwent its second Universal Periodic Review, accepting 182 out of 227 recommendations, including those concerning freedom of religion or belief as well as non-discrimination for minorities, but rejected key recommendations that would overhaul the state of human rights in the country. In addition, after a delay of 21 years, Vietnam submitted its State Report for the UN Committee on

Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. The exile Vietnam Committee for Human Rights condemned the State Report as 'empty rhetoric' and highlighted the country's continuing human rights violations against much of its population, particularly religious and ethnic minorities. This point was reiterated in July when the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, Heiner Bielefeldt, made an official visit to the country. Concluding his visit, he expressed concern about serious restrictions on religious groups and made note of how the government's process of official registration, ostensibly to enable people to practise their beliefs freely, 'is no guarantee that freedom of religion or belief is fully respected'.

A number of incidents during the year also underlined the ongoing challenges religious minorities face in practising their faith. On 1 January, the head of the Buddhist Youth Movement (BYM), Le Cong Cau, was placed under house arrest in the north central province of Hue as he attempted to visit the leader of the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam (UBCV) in Ho Chi Minh City. The UBCV is a banned religious organization in Vietnam, but authorities tolerate the related BYM organization for their social support activities. However, his arrest triggered a series of raids against BYM members, with 23 people reportedly arrested in Hue in subsequent weeks. A Memorial Day service on 10 January in Hue was stopped by authorities and over 300 UBCV invitees were intercepted or threatened. After being expelled from Hue, a prominent UBCV monk Thich Chon Tam was also assaulted by plainclothes police in Ho Chi Minh on 14 January. The crackdown is thought to have come on the heels of UBCV's announcement of a new executive committee.

In March, three Hmong Christians were sentenced to prison terms in the north-eastern province of Tuyen Quang under Article 258 of Vietnam's penal code, a broad provision used to prosecute those who 'infringe upon the interests of the State'. Hoang Van Sang, Ly Van Dinh and Duang Van Tu are part of a group of Hmong Christians who advocate for reformed burial and wedding practices, said to be less costly and less burdensome on families. The government is reportedly forcing the reformists to return to their

traditional practices. The lawyer of Hoang Van Sang said that he had been charged for building a funeral home to accommodate the new practices, but also mentioned that the community's refusal to accept grain seed and other state development initiatives has angered the government.

Arbitrary sentencing and imprisonment on bogus charges is a common tactic to repress those defending the rights of minorities and indigenous peoples, with imprisoned religious freedom defenders often subjected to serious mistreatment, including beatings and harassment, while in jail. In August, three human rights defenders were sentenced to prison in August for 'causing public disorder' for traffic violations in Dong Thap province. Bui Thi Minh Hang, Nguyen Thi Thuy Quynh and Nguyen Van Minh, an independent Hoa Hao Buddhist, were arrested in February after 21 bloggers and Hoa Hao Buddhist activists rode motorbikes to the home of a former political prisoner, Nguyen Bac Truyen, and his fiancée, Bui Thi Kim Phuong, also an independent Hoa Hao Buddhist practitioner.

A new land law passed in late 2013 came into effect during the year. It will put more conditions and restrictions on how the government reclaims land for development purposes, in contrast to the previous provisions that facilitated indigenous and minority land alienation. The law still allows for land acquisition for development projects that are in the interest of 'the public and the nation', but they must be approved by the prime minister and the National Assembly.

Land rights remained a serious source of insecurity during the year, particularly for minorities. In the village of Con Dau, near Da Nang city in central Vietnam, the government expropriated land from Catholic community members to give to a resort investor. The UN Special Rapporteur on housing Raquel Rolnik called it 'a clear case of land grabbing for the benefit of private entrepreneurs and at the expense of local communities'. In October, the Thai Ha Redemptorist Church in Dong Da district, Hanoi, protested the filling of a lake that the church insists belongs to the parish, citing their increasing membership as the motivation for authorities to confiscate their land.

The majority of Vietnam's indigenous peoples still reside in rural areas, where poverty levels are

higher than for their majority Kinh counterparts. According to 2009 government census data, only 13 per cent of 'ethnic minorities' live in cities, as compared to 32 per cent of ethnic Kinh. One contributing factor to the significant developmental gaps between minority and majority communities in Vietnam is the broader inequality between cities and the countryside, with poverty rates two and a half times higher in rural areas. Ethnic minorities are therefore more likely to be adversely affected by the limited development and lack of opportunities outside urban areas. However, Vietnam's ethnic disparities far exceed these differences. Over extended periods, ethnic minorities have fared much more poorly than their majority counterparts. In fact, urban poverty levels among ethnic minorities remain higher than rural poverty levels among majority Kinh. The only positive trend is that poverty levels among minorities in cities are markedly lower and have continued to fall over time, suggesting that further urbanization could improve outcomes if the process is well managed.

However, migration among ethnic minorities is less common than among majority Kinh and tends to be from rural to rural areas, many as part of government relocation or sedentarization programmes from previous decades. Nevertheless, an increasing number of younger minority community members are now migrating to the city, mostly in search of work as labour scouts have recently advertised heavily in rural areas with large minority populations to engage factory workers, domestic maids and other areas. Lack of opportunity in rural areas is driving urbanization, and minorities are disproportionately vulnerable to food insecurity, price fluctuations, drought and other natural disasters.

South Asia

Shikha Dilawri and Nicole Girard

Minorities and indigenous peoples continued to face persecution across South Asia during 2014.

Armed conflicts in India and Pakistan in regions with large minority and indigenous populations led to mass displacement, while also exacerbating the vulnerability of some communities to targeted attacks. In Sri Lanka, five years after the official end of the conflict, ethnic and religious tensions remain due to the government's continued failure to provide justice to the families of victims killed or disappeared during the decades-long conflict. Similarly, Nepal's post-conflict transition has been slow amid concerns that security forces responsible for the deaths or disappearance of thousands of Dalits and Madhesis during the civil war will escape punishment. Land grabbing by other communities and state-sponsored development programmes in customary territories also continue to affect minority and indigenous populations across the region.

Though largely rural, South Asian countries have been undergoing a profound transformation in recent years due to urbanization, with cities across the region expanding at an extraordinary pace. This has created significant problems as lack of infrastructure and limited land has led to the growth of slums and informal settlements, often on the periphery of cities. In this context, minority and indigenous urban populations are especially vulnerable to communal violence, evictions and exploitative or unsanitary employment, such as manual scavenging. In addition, many communities, such as Pakistan's Shi'a, are increasingly being targeted in urban areas. Ensuring the rights and security of these groups is an essential element for the long-term sustainability and development of the region's urban areas.

Afghanistan

In 2014, Afghanistan's presidential election consumed the country. Marred by allegations of fraud, the months-long electoral process eventually resulted in a power-sharing agreement between the two leading candidates, Abdullah Abdullah and Ashraf Ghani, who became president. Amid this political uncertainty, civilian casualties reached record levels in 2014. Nevertheless, at the end of 2014 NATO formally declared an end to its 13-year combat mission in Afghanistan. This has provoked uncertainty over what the end of this phase of foreign intervention

will mean for Afghans, not least for the country's minority populations such as the Hazara, who – as both a sectarian and visible ethnic minority – have been targeted by the Taliban.

Tensions surrounding issues of 'identity' in Afghanistan came to the fore during the election, which saw the politicization of identity along predominantly ethnic lines. Although Ghani has avoided using his tribal name for official purposes since his election, during the campaign his identity was mobilized in efforts to appeal to Afghanistan's majority Pashtun voters. Meanwhile, Ghani's first vice president, former Uzbek warlord Abdul Rashid Dostum, warned minority Uzbek and Turkmen tribes in Baghlan province they would be considered 'traitors' if they did not vote for Ghani. However, the election also provided an opportunity for minorities to challenge Afghanistan's hierarchical political system, with Hazaras playing a particularly prominent role in the election – a reflection of their improved status over the last decade. Although the Hazara vote was split, the majority of voters lent their support to Abdullah Abdullah – who is of mixed Pashtun and Tajik ethnicity but is identified with the latter – and who represented a vote for change in the eyes of many. Following the parliamentary rejection of a presidential decree proposing a reserved seat for Hindus and Sikhs in December 2013, political representation of these groups remained limited in 2014. However, in a historic appointment, in May 2014 the previous Afghan government selected a representative from the dwindling Hindu community for the diplomatic rank of ambassador for the first time.

Although violence along ethnic lines has greatly reduced since the 2001 toppling of the Taliban government, violent attacks continue to be perpetrated against certain groups, particularly Hazara. In July 2014, for instance, Taliban stopped a bus travelling to Kabul for Eid, separated Hazara passengers and shot them, killing 15, including three women and a child. More recently, in late February 2015, masked gunmen kidnapped 31 Hazara men travelling through Zabul province on a major road from Herat to Kabul. Following this kidnapping, the country has seen a rise in similar attacks on travellers on Afghanistan's main highways,

including the reported abduction of eight Hazara in March 2015 on a road between Jaghori District and Ghazni City. Also in March 2015, a rare attack was perpetrated on a minority Sufi mosque, viewed as heretical by hardline Sunni groups, killing at least six people. Allegations that these recent sectarian attacks may be connected to ISIS have stoked fear among many Afghans, and in particular members of the country's minority groups.

Persistent discrimination against Afghanistan's Hindus and Sikhs also compelled hundreds of members of these dwindling religious groups to leave Afghanistan during the year, including 35 Sikhs who arrived in the UK in a shipping container in August 2014. While no longer forced to wear yellow arm-bands to identify themselves, as was required under Taliban control, members of the Sikh community have reported worsening conditions since 2001. For example, Sikhs continue to suffer verbal and physical abuse during funeral cremations – a practice forbidden in Islam – and, while the Ministry of Education has opened two primary schools exclusively for Hindu and Sikh students in Kabul and Jalalabad, those not separated into designated schools continue to suffer discrimination in the country's public schools.

Local women's rights organizations have aptly pointed out that – to differing extents – all sides of conflict in Afghanistan have had a role in undermining women's rights. Nevertheless, as Oxfam highlighted in a 2014 report, any future peace talks with the Taliban must not undermine those important, if limited, gains that have been made with respect to women's rights in recent years. As reported by Amnesty International in early 2015, women human rights defenders continue to suffer threats, harassment and intimidation on a daily basis. Although Ghani nominated three women to join his cabinet – one more than his predecessor Karzai, but one less than initially promised – high levels of discrimination persist in the country, which itself puts women appointed in such positions at risk. Gender-based discrimination and growing religious intolerance intersected in what was described by the newly elected president as a heinous attack in March 2015, when a mob killed a young woman after she allegedly burned

a copy of the Qur'an.

In light of persistent insecurity, as well as other factors such as environmental disasters and limited economic and social opportunities, many minorities have been determined to leave their homes for more stable environs. Yet, with countries such as Pakistan and Iran taking an increasingly exclusionary stance towards Afghan refugees in 2014, many relocated within the country itself. From January to September the UNHCR documented an increase of more than 38,340 internally displaced (IDPs) in Afghanistan, bringing the total to over 755,011. The majority of these IDPs, as well as Afghan refugees returning from neighbouring countries, have chosen urban areas as their destinations, in turn greatly contributing to Afghanistan's rapid urbanization in recent years. This largely unchecked and unplanned growth has meant that the majority of residents in and around Kabul are based in informal settlements or slums. Kabul is now the fifth fastest growing city in the world.

Minorities have been among the many Afghans contributing to this process of urbanization which has, in certain ways, changed the face of the country. Although, broadly speaking, Afghanistan's ethnic groups continue to occupy geographically distinct regions, with Pashtuns in southern and eastern areas, Tajiks occupying the north-west and north-east, Turkmen and Uzbeks in the north, and Hazara living predominantly in the centre, the movement of diverse populations to urban areas has complicated this picture. In slums in and around Kabul, Pashtuns as well as minorities such as Hazara, Tajiks and Uzbeks from across the country live among one another. Yet while this diversity has encouraged cooperation and coexistence in certain locales, structures of exclusion and discrimination have also been reproduced in urban areas.

For Hazara, the journey to Kabul from Hazarajat in the centre of the country has proven dangerous. The main roadway between the two areas – dubbed 'Death Road' – has been the site of kidnappings and other deadly Taliban attacks on Hazara in recent years. As a result, having successfully arrived in Kabul, Hazara have often been unable or afraid to return to their previous homes. This violence on the main roadway has further isolated and thereby stalled

the development of Hazarajat, which requires labour and materials from Kabul to build facilities such as schools and clinics. Both these factors have contributed to the high numbers of Hazara currently residing in Kabul, with many concentrated in one overcrowded area, Dasht-e-Barchi. Although life in Kabul has relatively improved for Hazara since 2001, they have continued to occupy lower-status jobs and have faced harsh discrimination, including in access to facilities and provision of services.

Meanwhile, for Kabul's tiny Sikh population conditions continue to worsen, their small population dwindling to an estimated 300 families. Socially ostracized, Sikhs living in Kabul reportedly face economic hardship, with many refusing to conduct business with them, but also due to land grabs in areas in which Sikhs have historically resided. In addition to daily economic and social discrimination – sometimes manifesting as physical and verbal abuse – freedom to practise their religion has also been curtailed. Kabul was once home to eight Sikh places of worship or *gurdwaras*, but only one remains today.

Members of Afghanistan's Kuchi minority – a diverse nomadic community representing a variety of tribal and ethno-political affiliations – who have more recently adopted a sedentary lifestyle on the periphery of major cities have similarly faced discrimination. Urban Kuchis have typically lacked access to 'serviced' areas of the city and have instead lived on the outskirts, often occupying infertile land or, as has been the case near Kandahar, permanently residing in refugee camps. These shabby living conditions have not only disadvantaged those living in such settlements, but have also fuelled increasingly widespread negative perceptions of Kuchis, further undermining their social status within Afghanistan.

Bangladesh

The year in Bangladesh began with national elections on 5 January. Tensions in both the build-up to and aftermath of the elections, described by HRW as 'the most violent in the country's history', led to widespread attacks against minorities, particularly Hindus, who have regularly been targeted for their traditional

support of the secular ruling Awami League. These elections were especially tense, as the opposition coalition led by the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) boycotted the vote and attempted to prevent others from voting. Polling stations were attacked and minorities particularly targeted, with hundreds of Hindu homes, shops and temples burned and ransacked, especially in northern and south-western districts. Christians were targeted as well.

Both the Awami League and police blamed the BNP, their coalition partner Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) and their supporters for the violence, though the BNP itself denied any involvement. The Chair of the National Human Rights Commission also accused the government of failing in its responsibility to prevent attacks on Hindus. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina said measures would be taken to see justice in these cases, while the prime minister's law affairs officer said that special tribunals would be set up to prosecute offenders under the Terrorism Prevention Act. An independent judicial commission was formed in 2009 to investigate election violence towards minorities in 2001, but none of its recommendations have since been implemented.

The ruling Awami League came to power in 2009 on a platform that included war crimes tribunals for atrocities committed during the 1971 War of Independence, including those connected with violence, mass killings and conversions of Hindus and other minorities. The trials have been highly politicized, further polarizing a society already divided between support for the BNP and Awami League, with many JI leaders convicted for their alleged involvement in the abuses. The trials have been criticized for falling far short of international fair trial standards. In 2014, JI leaders continued to be tried for genocide and crimes against humanity: in December A.T.M. Azharul Islam, assistant secretary general of JI, was sentenced to death on 30 December for the killing of 1,400 Hindus near Jharuarbeel on 17 April 1971. JI organized nationwide protests in response, though these were on a much smaller scale than the demonstrations organized in 2013 against the court rulings, when numerous Hindu temples and homes were attacked.

This unstable climate has also been exploited

by certain groups to seize land from minorities and indigenous peoples. Indigenous peoples of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), known collectively as Jumma or Pahari peoples, have seen much of their lands settled by majority Muslim Bengalis, causing continued outbreaks of violence between communities, despite a 1997 Peace Accord securing their land rights. In June, over 250 Chakma and Tripuri people reportedly abandoned their homes and fled to the Indian border at Tripura after clashes with Bengali settlers. In December, around 50 indigenous people in Rangamati district had their homes razed by Bengali settlers in apparent retribution for the destruction of the latter's pineapple and teak saplings. While the Peace Accord called for the demilitarization of the CHT, the area remains highly militarized. State security forces have been accused of conducting attacks against Jumma communities, not intervening in incidents of communal violence and facilitating the influx of Muslim settlers.

Despite implementing legislation such as the Land Commission Act of 2001, no cases of land disputes have yet been solved by the commission and land encroachment continues. Follow-up legislation has been drafted under the CHT Land Disputes Resolution Commission Act (Amendment) but, though approved by the cabinet in June 2013, it had yet to be implemented at the end of 2014. The Peace Accord was further eroded during the year when bills passed on 23 November changed the composition of district councils in three indigenous areas – Rangamati, Khagrachari and Bandarban – from five to eleven members, with three non-indigenous unelected members. The Accord stipulates that the council members must be elected, but the government has instead hand-picked the council members. Indigenous civil society groups demonstrated in Dhaka against the bills, calling for their immediate withdrawal.

Sexual violence against indigenous women in the CHT has been endemic in recent years, perpetrated by state security forces and, increasingly, by Bengali settlers. Rapes and murders of indigenous women and girls have been used to terrorize the whole community, helping to clear the land for more settlers. This trend continued during the year, with 15 cases

of violence against indigenous women in CHT reported between January and April 2014 alone, including eight incidents of rape and two murders after rape. The perpetrators of these abuses are seldom, if ever, prosecuted.

Bangladesh continued its attempts to squeeze out its Rohingya refugees and asylum seekers. Between 200,000 and 500,000 Rohingyas, a persecuted Burmese ethno-religious minority who are considered to be Bangladeshi by Burmese authorities, are currently living in Bangladesh in squalid conditions in camps or informal settlements in urban areas. In February, the Bangladeshi government announced a 'new strategy' to address the situation of Rohingyas, but neglected to make any details public. In March, plans were released to document, temporarily house and then repatriate all Rohingyas. In September, after discussions with Burma over the formation of a joint committee for repatriation, it was announced that over 2,000 Rohingyas would be repatriated. In November, the government revealed plans to move 30,000 officially documented refugees to an undisclosed location, causing further concern among Rohingyas in the country.

Bangladesh's Bihari minority – Urdu-speaking Muslims who migrated from Bihar and West Bengal during India's partition – have long been discriminated against for their perceived alliance with Pakistan during the independence war. Many lack formal citizenship and are therefore stateless. Today, about 300,000 Biharis live in 70 shanty towns that were initially temporary relief camps. The largest settlement, 'Geneva Camp', has 25,000 residents: it is estimated that only 5 per cent have formal education. As ownership of the settlements is uncertain and land prices have risen sharply, these areas have become increasingly attractive for investors. Many apparent incidents of communal violence against Biharis are intended to displace them from their land. On 14 June, for instance, a Bengali mob attacked a Bihari settlement on the outskirts of Dhaka after an altercation broke out between communities, resulting in 10 deaths and widespread damage from arson. A local leader alleged that the attack was motivated by the desire of local politicians to evict the community.

Dalits, too, comprise many of Bangladesh's

urban slum dwellers. Many live in what are called 'sweeper colonies' as most Dalits here are traditionally employed as manual scavengers or waste collectors. Discriminated against throughout society, it is difficult to find more skilled employment for the educated few, as their housing address on their CVs quickly reveals who they are. Whole colonies have faced multiple evictions over the course of decades, moving between abandoned hospitals and factories after being displaced by 'rehabilitation' or urban beautification. An anti-discrimination law has long been advocated for in Bangladesh, but stalled again in parliament this year. Though there is a paucity of data available on their situation, in May 2014 a seminar organized by Dalit activists highlighted the water and sanitation crisis facing their communities – a huge health risk given the city's vulnerability to flooding, exacerbated by climate change. Dhaka's poorest communities are typically located in the most flood-prone areas of the capital, including Dalit settlements such as the Agargaon Sweeper Colony, where residents live in a series of cramped shelters built on stilts to protect them from the floodwater.

India

National parliamentary elections in 2014 saw the victory of Narendra Modi and the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in May. Modi has been criticized for his role in the 2002 Gujarat anti-Muslim riots, when he was chief minister of the state, and is accused of complicity in failing to halt the killings. Although an investigation backed by the Supreme Court found no prosecutable evidence against him, his close associates faced charges. His candidacy was supported by Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), a right-wing Hindu organization that has continued to support a campaign of forced conversion against the Muslim population. Though Modi has generally avoided discriminatory language himself since taking office, he has been criticized by activists for failing to condemn the group's activities. The election was widely interpreted as a blow for minorities, particularly Muslims, who received the lowest number of seats in India's parliament, the Lok Sabha, in 50 years.

Even before the election, however, the Anti-Communal Violence bill passed by the cabinet in late 2013 – a groundbreaking piece of legislation that would have detailed reparations for victims of communal attacks and held politicians accountable for violent outbreaks – was dropped in parliament following strong opposition from a number of parties, including the BJP, which accused Congress of pandering to Muslim voters ahead of the election. As 2014 marked the thirty-year anniversary of the Golden Temple massacre and the subsequent anti-Sikh riots that killed thousands, with no high-ranking officials prosecuted for their role in the violence, the bill would have been an important step for the families of victims in their search for justice.

Isolated pre-election violence occurred in the north-west state of Jammu and Kashmir, where an armed separatist struggle has been waged for decades by Muslim Kashmiris. In Kashmir, three people, including two village council chiefs, were killed in Pulwana District in mid-April, with separatists warning against voting in the elections and calling for their boycott. State assembly elections for Jammu and Kashmir were also held in November and December, again marking a spike in violence as shoot-outs in border camps killed both soldiers and gunmen. Despite more threats of violence and calls to boycott, the process was relatively peaceful and voter turnout was around 70 per cent.

The Assam state of north-eastern India was also affected by pre-election violence as a result of ongoing tensions between Muslims and indigenous communities – caused by land disputes and Muslim in-migration into indigenous territories. In early May, over 30 Muslims were killed in multiple attacks on villages ahead of the national elections. The government blamed the Songbijit faction of the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB-S) for the attacks, an armed separatist organization of the Bodo indigenous people, though the NDFB-S denied responsibility and accused the government of attempting to stoke communal tensions.

Muslims in the area are assumed by many, including Modi, to be illegal migrants from Bangladesh, despite many being descendants of Muslims who moved to the area before partition. The elections resulted in the first ever non-Bodo

parliamentarian winning the seat for Kokrajhar, headquarters of the Bodoland Territorial Council, an indigenous self-government body.

Similarly, Adivasi villages in Assam were also attacked later in the year, reportedly by Bodo separatists. Adivasis is the term used by the government to denote indigenous groups from central India, in this case largely tea-plantation workers, many of whom are descendants of migrants brought to Assam in the 1850s. In December at least 80 Adivasis were killed and another 250 reported missing in a series of



attacks, again attributed to the NDFB-S faction, resulting in the displacement of tens of thousands of Adivasis escaping the violence. Several Bodos were reportedly killed in retaliatory killings. Within a few days, the government announced 'Operation All-out', with as many as 9,000 troops deployed in the province in an effort to eradicate NDFB-S fighters.

In Manipur, in north-east India, minority and indigenous groups including Kuki, Meitei and Naga face human rights abuses by both government forces and armed groups. The region

Below: Dalit girls in Kadi Town in the Mehsana district of Gujarat. *Navsarjan Trust*

is locked in a decades-long conflict rooted in land rights and political self-determination. Violence in Manipur continued in 2014 with the murder of indigenous district councillor Ngalangzar Malue by unidentified assailants on 12 July in Ukhrlul. Following his death, hundreds of military personnel were deployed and limits on freedom of assembly imposed. On 16 July, the new BJP government restarted peace talks with the



Isak-Muivah faction of the Nationalist Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN-IM), even though the Manipur government blamed NSCN-IM for the assassination of Malue. Public rallies held in August in Ukhrul district, calling for a resolution of negotiations, ended in the deaths of two protesters when police fired on the crowd.

The discrimination experienced by north-easterners in their home regions is also replicated when they move to large Indian cities such as Delhi, Mumbai and Bangalore for education or employment. Due to their distinct features and cultural practices, minority and indigenous migrants from the north-east often face verbal abuse and even violence. This was highlighted in January when Nido Tania, an indigenous university student from Arunachal Pradesh, died shortly after being beaten by a group of shopkeepers in Delhi who had reportedly shouted racist slurs and insulted Tania's hairstyle. Four adults were charged with his death, while minors were also detained. The police investigation recommended that charges be filed under the Scheduled Castes and Tribes Prevention of Atrocities Act, 1989 (SC/ST Act), a key piece of legislation intended to prevent violence against Dalits and indigenous peoples. In September this recommendation was declined by the trial court after it concluded that the racist element was not proven, though Nido's father, a member of the legislative assembly, is seeking to overturn this ruling. In the wake of this killing, the Bezbaruah Committee was formed to investigate remedial measures, and made a series of recommendations including criminalizing discrimination targeting north-easterners. By the start of 2015, the government had decided to add to its hate speech provision in Section 153 of the penal code to address their concerns.

Violence against Dalits is also widespread and continued throughout 2014, driven by the persistent effects of India's caste system and the lack of justice for victims. One of the most shocking incidents occurred in October in Bihar, when a Dalit boy was beaten and burned to death for letting his goat graze on the grass of an upper-caste landholder. The landholder was subsequently taken into police custody. Though attacks on Dalits are common throughout the country, the situation is particularly difficult in

Bihar, often cited as India's most lawless province, where the population is overwhelmingly rural and often located in remote areas. Some activists believe that the appointment of Jitan Ram Manjhi, a Dalit, as Bihar's chief minister in May sharpened tensions as Manjhi's calls for greater rights for the Dalit community were resented by upper-caste members. Manjhi resigned from his post in February 2015 just before he was to face a vote of confidence in the state assembly, claiming his decision was intended to avert violence after he and his supporters allegedly received death threats.

Though the majority of Dalits still reside in rural areas, with just over 20 per cent based in urban areas, cities are often seen as a positive force in reducing caste divisions. While Dalits still face violence and discrimination in cities, strict social hierarchies are harder to enforce and violence generally is not as pervasive and brutal. Severe inequalities persist, however, with Dalits making up a large proportion of those engaged in the urban informal labour sector as domestic workers, rickshaw-pullers, street vendors and other poorly paid sectors. While many choose to migrate voluntarily for employment, many also end up in urban areas as a result of forcible displacement or evictions – issues which affect marginalized minorities disproportionately and continue to drive migration to urban areas. Of the 60 million or more people displaced by development projects since independence in 1947, 40 per cent are Adivasis and another 40 per cent are Dalits or other rural poor.

The challenges are especially acute for Dalit women, who are further exploited due to caste-gender prescriptions. Manual scavenging, for instance – the practice of removing human waste – is often 'reserved' for Dalit women, particularly in rural areas but frequently in urban centres as well, including by local government and municipal corporations who pay menial wages for this degrading and unsanitary task. This is despite the Supreme Court reaffirming in March 2014 that the practice was prohibited. In some cases, certain Dalit castes are expected to do the job and may be pressured or intimidated if they attempt to access alternative livelihoods. Nevertheless, urban areas can also offer women from excluded castes the opportunity to improve their lives.

The garment manufacturing industry in Tamil Nadu, for example, has attracted Dalit women into cities like Tirupur and Coimbatore through the Sumangali Scheme. Set up in the early 2000s, the scheme targets young women and girls, 60 per cent of whom are Dalits. Girls migrate on the promise of decent wages and a bonus after their contracts are finished, hopeful to escape poverty and discrimination in the villages – though many unfortunately end up in situations of exploitation and bonded labour.

While India is visibly struggling with general urban poverty and the growth of informal settlements, minorities experience these challenges more acutely. One in every five urban slum dwellers is Dalit, compared to only one in ten for urban India generally, and urban Dalits continue to report discrimination in access to housing and employment. Rapid urban expansion and urban beautification programmes for international events or upmarket housing have led to the destruction of many urban slums, including marginalized minority settlements. Expanding urban areas can even swallow former rural settlements, with little regard for their existing residents. In Maharashtra in 2012, for instance, the Malegaon municipality attempted to requisition outlying Dalit and Adivasi villages for a slum relocation project, claiming that their existing land certificates were no longer valid under the city's jurisdiction. 25 houses were demolished without warning, though a sustained campaign managed to save 75 Dalit and Adivasi homes in the adjacent village.

Though lower-caste groups are especially vulnerable to land grabbing, many communities have also successfully resisted attempts by local authorities and companies to forcibly displace them. During 2014 the Dalit Ekta Camp in New Delhi, a slum community of 4,000 Dalits and Muslims, faced the threat of demolition due to claims of encroachment on protected green space, despite residents having lived there for decades. Critics argued that the real motivation was local politics rather than environmental protection, as in May the local member of the legislative assembly had written to local authorities to request demolition of the slum: he stood to profit from evicting 900 voters who supported the opposition Aam Aadmi Party candidate in

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Case study by Rajiv Shah
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Discrimination against Dalit women in Ahmedabad

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In Ahmedabad, located in the heart of Gujarat state, Dalits have been an important but often invisible presence for generations, working as scavengers and waste-clearers within the strict confines of India's caste system. Concentrated on the periphery of the city, frequently segregated from other communities, many had also migrated to the city in search of work in emerging industries such as Ahmedabad's textile mills. Nevertheless, though strong caste and communal barriers remained in place, Dalit settlements existed alongside upper-caste and Muslim neighbourhoods in the city centre and the nearby industrial townships. However, over the last few decades a number of violent incidents, including anti-Dalit riots in 1981 and communal violence in 2002, have reinforced divisions. This case study, drawing on interviews conducted in December 2014 with a number of activists and community members based in the city, highlights some of the key challenges facing Dalit women today.

According to Madhuben Koradiya, a Dalit women's rights activist with the Ahmedabad-based NGO Navsarjan Trust who was interviewed for this case study, the closure of many of the city's mills in the 1980s and early 1990s also precipitated a crisis for Dalit women. In previous years Dalit women had been making some small gains, with some even managing to secure low-level government employment, but this tentative progress halted with the collapse of the textile industry:

'[It] led to large-scale joblessness among men, following which Dalit women were forced to do any job they could lay their hands on, even as construction workers, in order to help the family. A huge oversupply of labour in the job market meant less wages.... Women have nowhere to go, except to work as daily wagers or home-based workers.'

As a result, their livelihood options deteriorated:

'Things have further worsened over the last 10 to 15 years. Dalit women are doing such jobs which I could not even imagine when I was young. They are ready to work as guinea pigs for pharmaceutical companies, which use them to experiment with the reaction to medicines of the human body. They are ready to become surrogate mothers for money.'

Following the outbreak of communal violence across Gujarat in 2002, the situation for Dalit women worsened. Though Muslims were exposed to the worst of the violence, the 'next biggest casualty' were Dalits:

'Out of more than 1,000 killed, more than 100 were Dalits. The young Dalits were misguided by the saffron brigade [right-wing Hindu extremists]. Now no one takes care of the families of many of the Dalits who were arrested for the riots or those who died. The condition of women is particularly in bad shape. Many women have been pushed into such illegal activities like brewing country liquor and prostitution, and there is little anyone is doing.'

The challenges Dalit women face, though overlapping with general issues of urban poverty and gender discrimination, are in many ways distinct from the issues that face the female population as a whole. Ahmedabad has a number of active women's organizations, but while these often have a large Dalit constituency among their members, their focus generally is not on specific incidents of discrimination. While a trade union may periodically train its members on issues of sexual violence and harassment, for example, it usually avoids taking up human rights issues related to atrocities against Dalit women.

Solidarity was also undermined following

the 2002 communal violence. Preeti Vaghela, another activist based with the Navsarjan Trust, described how prior to the riots Dalit and Muslim families lived side by side in some parts of the city. However, in the aftermath, the interaction between women from different communities came to an abrupt halt:

'[Until 2002] women interacted with each other. However, following the riots, Dalits have fled many of these areas, and got scattered to different places. The social fabric which women had built around themselves, even among Dalits, has broken apart.'

Ramilaben Babubhai Parmar, a researcher who was involved with Navsarjan Trust in a survey of the city's sanitary workers, reports that among Valmiki – probably the most marginalized of all the Dalit sub-castes – most women work as sanitary workers, whether it is for the municipality or housing societies.

'In housing societies, they are paid to work as sweepers. They sometimes are also allowed to work as sweepers inside individual houses and clean up individual toilets. However, they are generally not employed as housemaids to clean up utensils or cook food. The latter work is mostly done by women from other backward classes, who do not have the stigma of being "impure". There are Valmiki women who work in private offices. But they mostly work as sweepers.'

Their husbands, too, will also typically work in this dangerous occupation and as a result many end up having to head their households alone:

'The situation is such that there is a higher incidence of widows among the gutter workers. Our survey said about 20 to 25 per cent of young Valmiki women were widows, and I don't think that the situation has changed much even now. Malnutrition is widely prevalent. Most girls are married very young, even before attaining adulthood.'

In the segregated areas where Valmiki are located, however, sanitary facilities are almost non-existent:

'A large number of Valmiki localities are devoid

of any toilet facilities. There is a pay-and-use toilet in several localities, like Bootbhavani and Chandranagar areas, where they live, yet it is in poor shape, or often locked, and never cleaned up because of lack of water, and women are forced to go out in the open, often sitting next to the railway station nearby, to defecate.'

One consequence of the systematic humiliation experienced by the community is that Valmiki women also face regular abuse from men of their own caste:

'Within Valmiki families, their condition has worsened. Our impression is that cases of their suicide have gone up drastically, and so have cases of violence by men. I come across such at least three to four cases of this kind every month. Working in insanitary conditions, dejected and depressed following day-long work, men drink a lot of illicit country-made liquor, which wasn't generally the case earlier. This tells heavily on women.'

In one slum area in western Ahmedabad, situated within an affluent locality, around 70 Valmiki families live in huts with no access to water, sanitation, electricity or any form of government support. None yet have the luxury of a concrete house, in part because their homes have been destroyed by local authorities as illegal several times already. All face the constant threat of eviction. The settlement is surrounded by expensive flats, whose owners employ some of the women as sweepers. Research interviews with a number of Valmiki women living in this area highlighted the continued discrimination they faced in their employment. While claiming they were not subjected to 'untouchability', as was the case in the past, all of them admitted that at best they were working as sweepers in individual households, with none employed as regular housemaids to clean up utensils or cook. As one of the women interviewed put it:

'Frankly I don't feel untouchability as our ancestors did, but I do not do any other work inside the houses except sweeping and cleaning the apartments. I am allowed into the kitchen also, but I do not

cook food or clean utensils. In fact, nobody has asked me to do these jobs, which others do.'

Another Valmiki woman, when asked why she did not refuse to work as a manual scavenger as it was prohibited by law, smiled and said, 'Do you want us to lose our job? If we do not do the work, we will be replaced by others.' This seemed to be the case even when they had been lucky enough to access some secondary education. Based on the accounts of the women interviewed, it appeared that even those Valmiki women who had managed some study were still condemned to the same manual labour their ancestors had been forced to perform. Though these issues are not usually as pronounced among non-Valmiki Dalit women, discrimination in Ahmedabad is still widespread even among the less stigmatized Dalit groups, as Koradiya describes:

'It is rarely visible, but one can feel it does prevail in the dominant caste behaviour. In an interaction, Dalit teachers complained to us that while they would sit together to take an afternoon meal, non-Dalit women as a rule would not like to share food with them, nor would the non-Dalit women ever offer them water. The feeling of distance was always visible.'

Sexual harassment, too, remains a serious challenge for women in Indian cities in general, but is especially acute for Dalit women, who are vulnerable due to their secondary status. For example, Leena Patel, a Dalit journalist and social worker interviewed for this research, highlighted the experiences of Dalit women working in the city's diamond polishing industry. The 'hypocrisy', as Patel describes it, is that 'untouchability is their motto, but the dominant caste owner doesn't have any problem touching Dalit women'. She heard similar stories from Dalit women recruited to work as cleaners at wedding parties, who felt helpless in the face of harassment. 'In fact, a few of the women considered sexual overtures as a normal behaviour of the contractors who offered them work. They said, if they protested against men touching them, they would not be given the job the next time.' ■

the upcoming assembly elections. At the end of November, once the upcoming elections were set to be announced, Dalit Ekta Camp was informed that their homes would be destroyed in less than 12 hours. They filed a case before the Delhi High Court and managed to get a stay of the demolition. On 4 December the court issued an order that the Delhi Development Authority must produce evidence that the eviction is in accordance with existing policy.

Pakistan

Violence and political instability persisted in Pakistan throughout 2014. Beginning in August, mass demonstrations led by the opposition leader Imran Khan of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party took place in cities across the country, with participants demanding Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's resignation on account of alleged vote rigging during the 2013 election. The protests were only called off on 16 December, in response to an attack on a military-run school in the northern city of Peshawar that killed 141 people, including 132 children. According to the perpetrators, the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), this attack – the deadliest perpetrated by the group so far – was in response to ongoing military operations in North Waziristan. The offensive, launched by the government in June after peace talks previously collapsed and followed later in the year by a similar push into the Khyber region, resulted in the displacement of more than a million people during the year, including many Pashtuns – an ethnic minority in the country who have historically made their homes in the tribal areas.

In this context of insecurity and division, Pakistan's Muslim and non-Muslim minorities in particular have faced high levels of social marginalization, hate speech and the constant threat of violence. While there was a slight decrease in the number of attacks compared to 2013, when sectarian violence in the country reached unprecedented levels, these groups continue to face disproportionate levels of violence, particularly Shi'a, who account for around 15 per cent of the country's Muslim population. Hazara Shi'a have been particularly vulnerable to attack as a result of the intersectional discrimination they have

encountered as both a sectarian and visible ethnic minority. Indeed, in recent years Sunni militant groups such as Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ), Sipah-i-Sahaba (SSP) and TTP have increasingly targeted Hazara Shi'a, the majority of whom reside in Quetta. A stark indication that 2014 would bring little significant change to their situation came on 1 January, when a car bomb targeted a bus carrying Shi'a pilgrims returning from Iran to Baluchistan's capital city, Quetta, killing at least three and injuring 31 others. Later that month, a similar attack was perpetrated by LeJ on a bus carrying Hazara Shi'a pilgrims in Mastung District, just outside of Quetta. At least 22 of these passengers were killed, with more than 20 others wounded.

Similar targeted attacks against the community continued throughout 2014. In April, for example, two Hazara men were victims of a targeted killing near a bus terminal in Quetta. In October, at least eight Hazara were killed at a market in the outskirts of Quetta when gunmen opened fire on the bus in which they were travelling. Outside Baluchistan, Shi'a in Pakistan also suffered a number of targeted attacks in cities such as Karachi. This violence had been accompanied by widespread intimidation: for example, in April the banned militant outfit, Lashkar-i-Islam, distributed incendiary pamphlets in a Peshawar neighbourhood, threatening residents – mostly Shi'a Muslims – with violence if they did not leave their homes.

Another marginalized religious group is Pakistan's Ahmadi population, who – despite considering themselves to be Muslims – remained subject to severe legal discrimination in the country's criminal code and Constitution, which officially designates them as 'non-Muslims'. Alongside this persistent institutional discrimination, in 2014 Ahmadis faced a number of targeted attacks, resulting in 11 casualties. In May, an Ahmadi man accused of blasphemy was shot dead by a teenager while he was in police custody. Later that same month, a Canadian-American doctor undertaking humanitarian work in Pakistan was killed, apparently on the basis of his Ahmadi faith. International pressure failed to bring an end to such attacks: less than two months after the UN statement, in response to blasphemy allegations, a mob set fire to homes

in a small Ahmadi community in Gujranwala District, Punjab, killing two children and their grandmother.

The situation for non-Muslim minority groups remained similarly tense in 2014. Discrimination against Pakistan's Christian population culminated in a particularly violent attack in November when a Christian couple in Kot Radha Kishan accused of desecrating the Qur'an were beaten and burned to death in the brick kiln where they worked. More recently, in the first large-scale attack suffered by the Christian community since the bombing of All Saints Church in 2013, Jamaat-ur-Ahrar – a TTP splinter group – bombed two churches in Lahore during Sunday processions in March 2015, killing at least 15 and wounding upwards of 70 people.

Meanwhile, for Pakistani Hindus, there was an alarming increase in attacks on places of worship in 2014. While a total of nine Hindu temples were attacked during the previous year, five temples were targeted in March 2014 alone.

Below: Shi'a Muslims protest against the killing of their community members in a suicide bombing on the outskirts of Quetta, Pakistan on 21 January 2014. *EPA/Sohail Shehzad*

According to the NGO Life for All, this signalled the most violent month suffered by Pakistan's Hindus in two decades. Forced conversion and marriages of minority women also continued in 2014, with Dalit Hindu girls especially targeted. These incidents have been perpetuated by the lack of substantial reform to personal laws, which prevent or obstruct certain minorities from registering marriages. Although attempts were made to address such gaps in the province of Punjab with the tabling of the Punjab Hindu Marriage Registration Bill in 2014, substantial reform remains to be seen.

The year 2014 also saw violent attacks against religious minorities who have typically been less affected by such harsh discrimination in Pakistan, such as Zikris and Sikhs. In August, for example, at least six people from the Zikri community



were shot and killed near a shrine in Awaran District, Baluchistan. The attack was preceded by graffiti in the town a week before, calling on Zikris and Hindus to convert to Islam or face death. For Pakistan's small Sikh community, growing religious intolerance manifested in an attack on three shops run by Sikhs in Hashtnagri, Peshawar. In response members of the Sikh community took to the streets to demand greater security.

Muslim and non-Muslim minorities continued to be disproportionately affected by the country's notorious blasphemy laws during the year. In March, Sawan Masih – a Christian man convicted of uttering blasphemous remarks the year before – was sentenced to death. Meanwhile, international efforts to appeal the death sentence of a Christian woman, Asia Bibi, who was convicted of blasphemy in 2010, were undercut when the Lahore High Court upheld the ruling in October; she has now appealed to the Supreme Court. Amid growing religious intolerance, attempts to challenge blasphemy laws or defend those accused of violating them also became increasingly difficult: in May, human rights lawyer and activist, Rashid Rehman, was the victim of a targeted killing due to his defence of a professor accused of blasphemy.

Although political and social obstacles have stood in the way of improving conditions for minorities in Pakistan, in June 2014 the Supreme Court delivered a groundbreaking judgment in response to the bombing of All Saints Church in Peshawar in 2013. This ruling not only called on the government to ensure that victims of the attack were compensated, but also directed federal and provincial governments to develop institutions to monitor implementation of minority protection laws and to create a National Council for Minorities. Meanwhile, also in June, the Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Pervez Khattak directed that increased security should be provided to protect places of worship for minorities. In response to rising violence against Hindus in Sindh, the provincial government similarly took initiatives to promote the security of minority places of worship, and officially celebrated the Hindu festival Diwali in October. While all these are welcome initiatives, progress has been slow and an effective response

at federal, provincial or local levels is still lacking.

Religious minorities are not the only groups that suffered discrimination in Pakistan in 2014. Pakistan has become an increasingly hostile environment for the country's mostly Pashtun refugees from Afghanistan, the majority of whom have lived in Pakistan for decades. In March, shortly after the government declared its intention to restrict the number of Afghan refugees in Pakistan, bulldozers were sent to demolish a settlement outside Islamabad where over 100 Afghan families resided, some for almost 30 years. Meanwhile, in the context of the persistent nationalist struggle in the province of Baluchistan, enforced disappearances, torture and extra-judicial killings of members of the Baluch minority by security forces reportedly continued with impunity.

Extreme levels of violence and instability in Pakistan have encouraged many to flee their homes for safer environs, either within or outside the country. In October, the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCPC) reported that at least 300,000 people – including over 200,000 Hazara, 10,000 Hindus and hundreds of Zikris and Parsis – had left Baluchistan over the last ten years, with many migrating to large urban areas in other provinces. Yet those arriving in Pakistan's cities, many of whom are minorities, typically do so for a variety of reasons: not only to escape insecurity and natural disasters, but also to seek out better public services and opportunities. However, rapid and unplanned growth has perpetuated infrastructural and social problems in Pakistan's cities, with many migrants and other marginalized groups concentrating in informal settlements. For example, a large number of Hazaras who have left Baluchistan to escape insecurity are now living in difficult conditions in cities such as Islamabad and Rawalpindi, where they lack access to adequate housing, jobs and other services.

Although ethnic, linguistic and religious groups in Pakistan have tended to live in particular geographic areas – with the majority of Hindus living in Sindh, for example, and the majority of Punjabi speakers in Punjab – cities such as Karachi are much more densely mixed. Though it is important not to oversimplify ethnic and other divisions, poorly planned urban

development and rapid demographic growth have the potential to escalate levels of violence along sectarian lines, with serious implications for Pakistan's minorities. This is particularly the case in Karachi, where ethnicity is highly politicized. Violent disputes between different parties over control of local settlements are therefore defined increasingly in ethnic terms, placing minorities at even greater risk of attack. With Pashtuns now constituting the largest segment of new arrivals in Karachi, there is concern this could exacerbate tensions between the locally ruling Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM), which largely represents the *muhajir* population – mostly Urdu-speaking Muslims who migrated from northern and western India following partition – and the Pashtun-dominated Awami National Party.

Indeed, relocating to cities has also not always ensured greater security for Pakistan's minorities. Hindus who have migrated to Karachi, for example, have continued to fall victim to incidents of forced conversion and marriage. Militants have also increasingly focused their attacks against minorities in urban areas. In Karachi, growing numbers of TTP fighters and high levels of violence led to 750 sectarian targeted killings reported between September 2013 and September 2014. However, government anti-terrorism measures have often only served to increase the vulnerability of minorities and other marginalized groups in urban areas. In response to a double suicide bomb attack in Islamabad in March 2014, for example, the government swiftly blamed and conducted raids on the city's slums, or *katchi abadis*, where many minorities make their homes. Subsequent efforts to demolish slums have been met with protests from those living in these areas, including many of Islamabad's Christians who migrated from other parts of the country in search of better opportunities. These actions reflected increasing hostility from the recently elected government towards these settlements, which it has regarded as a security threat, though some inhabitants have argued that the attempted clearances are also driven by commercial interests.

Patronage networks and discriminatory attitudes in areas such as employment are often reproduced in Pakistan's cities, with

minorities often confined to underpaid and low-status livelihoods. In Lahore, the Christian population accounts for the bulk of the city's sanitation workers and street-sweepers – a fact that reinforces their stigmatization – while most of their supervisors are Muslim. Nevertheless, urbanization has presented opportunities for minorities and other disadvantaged groups to transcend prescribed roles and access services such as education that might otherwise have been unavailable to them. Urban centres have also been a site of resistance where – despite the severe repercussions they can and often do confront – members of minorities and other groups have protested against the persistent targeting they face. One such instance took place in November 2014 when, following the murder of a Christian couple in Kasur, various Christian, Hindu and other groups took to the streets in Peshawar, calling on the government to end impunity for the perpetrators and promote religious harmony.

Sri Lanka

Throughout 2014 the Sri Lankan government, headed by Mahinda Rajapaksa, continued to obstruct calls by NGOs and the international community for a full investigation into war crimes conducted during the country's long civil war between the government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), an armed group seeking to establish a separate Tamil state in the north. However, popular resentment against increasing authoritarianism and corruption contributed to the shock defeat of Rajapaksa's Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) in the January 2015 national elections and his replacement by Maithripala Sirisena, a former ally and SLFP member until his surprise defection to the opposition in November 2014. Though Sirisena's election on a ticket of 'compassionate governance' has been welcomed by activists, he has remained quiet on substantive issues of Tamil autonomy. Furthermore, while he has announced plans to conduct an inquiry into alleged war crimes – an apparent step forward after years of prevarication by the Rajapaksa government – the UN and other international investigators will not be involved in the process.

The divisive issue of justice for the families of victims of the decades-long conflict, many of

Below: Tamil activist Balendran Jeyakumari was arrested in March 2014 and released on bail one year later. *Vikalpa/Groundviews/ Maatram/CPA*

whom belong to the Tamil or Muslim minorities, remains unresolved. In 2012, after much international and domestic pressure, the cabinet approved a presidential task force to monitor the implementation of recommendations made under the government's Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission (LLRC), focused mostly on reconciliation after the war rather than accountability for human rights violations. In January 2014, the government released an update on the LLRC implementation and reported on some positive developments such as a national trilingual policy. But, as noted in the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights' (OHCHR) report to the Human Rights Council in February 2014, the government had pledged to implement only 145 of the LLRC's 285 recommendations. The High Commissioner condemned its investigation as 'limited and piecemeal' and called for an independent

international investigation into allegations of serious human rights abuses – a recommendation accepted by the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) through a 27 March vote. In response, government officials refused to cooperate with the investigation and on 7 April the minister of mass media publicly threatened legal action against anyone testifying to the OHCHR. On 18 June, parliament passed a resolution opposing such an international investigation with Rajapaksa subsequently announcing on 19 August that OHCHR investigators would not be allowed into the country. Those thought to be cooperating with the UN have been threatened or faced reprisals. One example was Ananthi Sasitharan, a Tamil Northern Provincial Councillor and human rights advocate, who was attacked in the media for planning to attend the HRC session in Geneva.

Despite the civil conflict formally ending five years ago, Sri Lanka's minorities continue to be harassed and intimidated by state security forces for activism or suspected separatism. In February and March, in what the OHCHR called the biggest search operation since 2009,



the government arbitrarily detained over 65 people in the north of the country, claiming that the LTTE was trying to re-establish itself. Human rights defenders were caught up in the sweeps on suspicions of engagement with former LTTE fighters. On 13 March, Balendran Jeyakumari, a Tamil activist known for her work on the disappeared, was arrested by the Terrorist Investigation Division along with her 13-year-old daughter in Kilinochchi district. Shortly afterwards, human rights defenders Ruki Fernando and Father Praveen Mahesan, both from the minority Christian community, were arrested on 16 March after attempting to investigate Jeyakumari's whereabouts. A huge international outcry resulted in the release of Fernando and Mahesan, but at the end of the year Jeyakumari still remained in detention without charge. In March 2015 Jeyakumari was released on bail, although with strict conditions imposed.

Despite these and other cases of minority civil society crackdowns, the government submitted the Assistance to and Protection of Victims of Crime and Witnesses Bill for consideration by parliament. Long awaited, the bill has been in preparation since 2006, and is set to give reparations to victims, as well as protection to witnesses from harassment, intimidation or coercion. The Centre for Policy Alternatives (CPA), a public policy research organization based in Colombo, said that while the draft was an improvement on previous versions, there are still some shortcomings that may jeopardize witness safety. The first hearings for the government's Commission on Missing Persons, to investigate disappearances in the Tamil-dominated north and east of the country, were also held early in the year, registering 19,471 such complaints by September. However, some observers questioned how effective it would be.

Since the end of the conflict with the LTTE, Sri Lanka's Muslim population has also experienced increasing hostility from Buddhist nationalists. Anti-Muslim violence and hate speech continued in 2014, including a riot in June when four Muslims were killed and over 80 injured in Aluthgama and surrounding areas in the south-west of Sri Lanka, led by the extremist group Bodu Bala Sena (BBS). Protesting the alleged assault of a monk by a Muslim man,

the BBS coordinated rallies through Muslim neighbourhoods, burning shops, homes and mosques. Though extreme, the violence was not an isolated incident. Between January and August, the OHCHR received reports of at least 88 cases of attacks, destruction of property or hate speech towards Muslims, while Christian groups reported 55 such cases. Rajapaksa announced the creation of a high-level panel to investigate the attacks, although the OHCHR reported in September that no prosecutions had yet taken place.

One of the drivers of continued human rights abuses in Sri Lanka is the fact that, five years after the conflict, the country remains highly militarized. Many aspects of civilian life are still controlled by the army, who are now guiding post-conflict reconstruction in the north. One of the most significant steps in this regard was Rajapaksa's decision to bring the Urban Development Authority (UDA) under the purview of the military in 2010. This has had serious implications for urban populations across the country, particularly minorities in the north and east, who resent the army's involvement in infrastructure development, land deals and a range of economic sectors, including hotels, coffee shops and Jaffna's burgeoning tourism industry. Urban areas in the north and east have faced acute stresses as migration from rural areas, the return of displaced communities and the recent settlement of majority Sinhalese from the south has resulted in rapid population growth.

These difficulties have been exacerbated by reported incidents of intimidation and exclusion by authorities in towns with large Muslim populations, such as Pottuvil, where in 2013 the military allegedly supported local Buddhist extremists in erecting Buddhist statues and broadcasting Buddhist prayers in public areas as a provocation. While well-managed urbanization in the region could produce significant social and economic benefits, current policies are likely to deepen religious and ethnic tensions.

Similarly, in the capital of Colombo, where more than half of the population lives in slums, the government has committed to eradicating the city's informal settlements by 2020. However, authorities have been criticized for pursuing an aggressive policy of settlement clearance that, rather than addressing the root causes of

poverty and marginalization, has frequently targeted minorities and other vulnerable groups. In 2010, shortly after control of the UDA was passed to the Ministry of Defence, dozens of houses were bulldozed in Mews Street, Slave Island – reportedly all belonging to Muslim families, except for one Tamil-owned home – to accommodate the expansion of a school for the children of army officers. They were given only five days’ notice of the evictions, despite having title deeds and residing in the houses for decades; other settlements with predominantly minority populations were also identified for redevelopment. As Colombo’s urban beautification has continued with the construction of swathes of luxury apartments and other ‘world-class’ developments, slums have been demolished all over the city without consistent or adequate compensation to affected families. According to a comprehensive 2014 report by CPA, throughout Colombo – one of the most ethnically diverse areas in Sri Lanka – ‘a significantly large section of the population being affected are Tamil and Muslim’.

East Asia

Michael Caster

Violations of minority rights persisted across East Asia during 2014. In China, the troubled western province of Xinjiang witnessed an upsurge in violence during the year, with heavy-handed security crackdowns and official discrimination feeding into increasing dissent, sometimes violent, among the Uyghur population. Restrictive policies on culture, religion and land rights have also served to further alienate the Tibetan population. Meanwhile in Japan, ongoing tensions with neighbours in the region have contributed to the rise of right-wing nationalist groups who protested regularly throughout the year against Koreans, Chinese and other minorities in the country. In Mongolia, too, resentment linked to the exploitation of the country’s natural resources has fuelled vocal anti-Chinese rhetoric and even attacks against Chinese nationals.

Urbanization across the region has taken many forms. Rapid urban growth, frequently sponsored and directed by the state, is transforming China and in the process leading to forcible resettlement, destruction of heritage and other impacts that have been felt especially acutely by minorities in cities such as Kashgar or Lhasa. While urbanization has contributed to rising incomes and development across the country, there is a danger that inequalities will only widen if measures are not taken to ensure that minorities are fully included in this process. Japan, in contrast, has already developed into a largely urban society. Among the most pressing issues there are the resolution of historic discrimination and underdevelopment in certain neighbourhoods, such as Buraku *dowa*, and the conflicts that arise in Tokyo and elsewhere from racist groups who resent the increased diversity of urban Japan. In Mongolia, where the majority of the population is still rural, urbanization is nevertheless transforming the lives of many herders and pastoralists who, in a context of crop failure and limited access to land, are now migrating in large numbers to the capital, Ulaanbaatar.

China

The year 2014 in China was characterized by continued censorship, the detention of political opponents, forcible resettlement and other abuses. Minority populations, particularly Tibetans and Uyghurs, were especially affected by security crackdowns, restrictions on religious freedom and the detention of rights activists. This included the conviction of Uyghur academic Ilham Tohti in September on separatism charges in a closed-door trial condemned by the European Union and others. He lost his subsequent appeal in November and was sentenced to life in prison. He had been detained in January, along with seven of his Uyghur students, who were also sentenced to between three and eight years in prison.

Tibetan human rights activists, including the Tibetan writer Woesser and singer Gebey, were also harassed during the year. In December, prominent monk Karma Tsewang, an outspoken language and culture activist, was also detained on ‘state security’ charges along with 16 of his



supporters. Soon over 4,000 people signed a petition for his release but he was later sentenced to two years in prison, while another monk was sentenced to 10 years on unspecified charges. The same month, well-known Mongolian rights activist Hada was released from four years of extra-judicial house arrest, following a 15-year prison sentence on 'separatism' charges, but remained in police custody under residential surveillance.

As in previous years, Tibetan activists were assaulted or denied medical care while in

Above: A modern Uyghur residential area can be spotted through a partially demolished wall.

Teo Choong Ching

detention before being released from custody shortly before their deaths. In March, Goshul Lobsang died soon after being released on medical parole after reportedly suffering torture and a savage beating in jail that left him unable to swallow food. In December, just days after being released from prison, political prisoner Tenzin Choedak also died after prolonged abuse

and ill-treatment in prison. He was less than six years into his 15-year sentence.

The National Security Commission, formed by President Xi Jinping in 2013, had its first meeting in April with a mandate to address issues such as separatism, religious extremism and terrorism. In Xinjiang, China's most westerly region, this has translated into increasingly restrictive policing of the large Uyghur population in response to political dissent and unrest. While some of these incidents have been serious, including attacks on civilians, national policies and local security forces often fail to distinguish between violent crimes and legitimate activities such as peaceful protests or activism. Human rights groups have argued that the government's repressive and indiscriminate treatment of the region's Uyghur population has exacerbated the situation and contributed to further violence.

The year 2014 saw a number of tragic attacks related to ongoing tensions within Xinjiang. This included the massacre of more than 30 people in March outside a train station in Kunming, Yunnan province by a group subsequently reported to be Xinjiang separatists. In May, two cars loaded with explosives also ploughed through a busy shopping street in Urumqi, the capital of Xinjiang province, killing around 30 people. Both incidents were condemned by the President of the World Uyghur Congress (WUC), Rebiya Kadeer, though she called on China to refrain from collectively punishing the whole population and drew attention to the role that state policies played in encouraging the violence. However, following the Urumqi bombing, China announced a year-long anti-terrorism crackdown, with Xinjiang Party Secretary Zhang Chunxian asserting the necessity for 'unconventional measures' in the 'people's war' against terrorism. These included numerous raids on mosques, house-to-house searches, harassment and other abuses by police, with several rights groups reporting increased arbitrary arrests and disappearances. Executions were also carried out throughout the year.

Violence in the region peaked over the summer following a riot in Yarkand that resulted in 96 deaths, according to official sources, including 37 civilians and 59 persons identified by the

government as religious extremists. However, the WUC alleged that the actual death toll was much higher, with hundreds of Uyghur civilians killed in the ensuing crackdown by security forces. The details surrounding these events are also contested, with state outlets claiming that the violence began with a premeditated attack on a police station by jihadist militants, while the WUC and other Uyghur sources have suggested that a recent security crackdown on religious practices and reports of police abuses had triggered the protests.

One of the chief sources of resentment among many Uyghurs is the state's repression of various religious and cultural forms of expression, often on the grounds of security. In August, for example, authorities in the city of Karamay banned men with long beards and people with headscarves, veils or clothing with the crescent moon and star from boarding public buses. The local Urumqi parliament also announced a move at the end of the year to ban Islamic face veils in public, while authorities forced Muslim students to eat during Ramadan, threatening students who refused with expulsion. In the wake of new regulations in Xinjiang that went into effect in January 2015, prohibiting the spread of religious propaganda online or clothing with religious messages that could promote extremism, a Uyghur man was reportedly sentenced in March 2015 to six years' imprisonment for growing a beard and 'inciting' his wife, who also received a two-year sentence, to wear a *burqa*. These restrictions have played a major role in triggering opposition, including deadly attacks, across the region.

Ongoing labour migration of ethnic Han into Xinjiang, particularly to urban areas in the north of the region such as Urumqi, has been another source of conflict. This has often occurred through the state-sponsored creation of new towns and cities populated predominantly by Han, often near areas seen as separatist hotspots. Tensions were therefore inflamed by comments in May by Zhang Chunxian, suggesting that China's 'one child' policy should in future be imposed on all ethnic groups in the region: at present, in line with its national policy towards ethnic minorities, the government permits Uyghur families to have two to three

children each. Another policy, reportedly developed during the year by local authorities in Cherchen County in southern Xinjiang, introduced a reward system to incentivize Uyghur and Han inter-marriage with RMB 10,000 (US\$1,600) annual payments for up to five years and other benefits.

Further urban development policies in Xinjiang will lead to the creation of dozens of new cities and towns. One is planned for construction near Hotan, a city with considerable symbolic importance for Uyghur culture. Local residents have reported that Uyghur farm owners in the area have been forced to sell their land for below market rates, which would otherwise be taken without remuneration by the government as part of a 'development policy'. Those who have resisted forced evictions or land grabs have been detained or arrested. The new cities project will be completed by the majority Han Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps, or Bingtuan, a semi-military organization that is largely staffed by majority Han and is widely resented by the local Uyghur population.

Poverty and unemployment among Uyghurs is worst in the south of Xinjiang, despite government attempts to boost urban development through special economic zones, such as in Kashgar, established in 2011 and scheduled for completion in 2020. Kashgar has partnered with eastern provinces such as Shenzhen and investment companies to secure investment. Zhongkun, for example, has been active in developing tourism in the city but has been accused of exploitative practices that do not benefit Uyghur residents. Their livelihoods and identity have been further threatened by the ongoing demolition of Kashgar's old city, an area of particular cultural significance to the Uyghur community. The urban redesign project aims to demolish some 65,000 homes and resettle over 200,000 Uyghur residents, 85 per cent of Kashgar's old city. Though some Uyghurs have welcomed the opportunity to live in modern housing with amenities unavailable in their former mud-brick homes, many feel the forced relocation from the ancient centre to high-rise apartments on the outskirts is more of an assault on culture than a sign of modernity.

The Chinese government also continued

to pursue a range of repressive policies in Tibet during 2014, characterized by forced resettlement, restrictions on freedom of belief and other discriminatory policies. In recent years, Tibetans have protested against their treatment through a series of high-profile self-immolations in Tibet and elsewhere in China. In 2014, according to the International Campaign for Tibet, the number of self-immolations since 2011 reached 135, of which 22 involved women and 24 involved those 18 years old or younger. Authorities in Tibet have responded to these incidents by detaining and arresting family members and friends of the deceased. Since 2013 the police have warned Tibetans that anyone accused of abetting self-immolators would be charged with homicide. In 2012 police were offering around RMB 50,000 for tips related to planned self-immolations or protests, and by February 2015 the Tibetan provincial government had raised the reward to RMB 300,000 for information on terrorist activities – a broad term that reportedly includes 'thought, speech or behaviour' undermining the state.

Throughout 2014 police stations were set up in Buddhist monasteries across Tibet, accompanied by 'patriotic education' campaigns targeting the spread of certain Buddhist teachings. Appeals to the Qinghai People's Congress in January 2014 to limit religious restrictions and end police presence in monasteries were disregarded. In July, officials in Tibet issued regulations on temporary prohibition of freedom of movement and religion, prohibiting Tibetans from participating in the Great Prayer Festival in Ladakh, India, one of the most important Tibetan Buddhist festivals that includes special teachings by the Dalai Lama. Later in the year, at least 26 nuns were expelled from the prestigious Jhada Nunnery after it refused to denounce the Dalai Lama in September.

In 2014, the State Council also announced the completion of a massive relocation project of Tibetan nomads from multiple grassland provinces around the Tibetan Autonomous Region, a year ahead of schedule. Those who resisted relocation from traditional herding lands to overcrowded resettlements have had their personal documents and belongings seized or

been detained by the police. Mass resettlement in recent years has already resulted in the forcible relocation of more than 2 million Tibetans, including hundreds of thousands of nomadic herders rehoused in ‘New Socialist Villages’, in some cases impoverishing them or making them dependent on state subsidies.

While only around a quarter of the population in the Tibetan Autonomous Region are currently urban, this proportion is rising rapidly, driven in part by Han labour migration. Urbanization has been closely tied to the state’s large-scale development programme in the region and the significant economic growth that has resulted, with government figures reporting a doubling in average per capita incomes among nomads between 2005 and 2010. This has been sustained by recent investments in infrastructure such as the Beijing–Lhasa railway, completed in 2006 and responsible for a substantial increase in business and tourism within Tibet. However, rapid in-migration of Han Chinese, coupled with the forced relocation of Tibetans to Lhasa, has had significant impacts on Tibetan traditional culture that some argue far outweigh the economic benefits, including the destruction of historically significant areas of Lhasa as the city’s booming tourism industry has driven rapid redevelopment of the old centre.

Nevertheless, urban areas can offer the possibility of better life outcomes for Tibetans, including women, who are sometimes able to enjoy a measure of freedom from oppressive gender norms. While in rural areas Tibetan girls are routinely denied access to education, relocation to cities is slowly creating more opportunities for them to attend school. Tibetan women who work in urban settings also earn their own salaries and therefore do not need to rely on family land or livestock, enabling them to be more independent. However, Tibetan women who travel outside Tibet to eastern cities such as Beijing or Shanghai often experience discrimination in areas such as employment, housing and education for their children. Similar barriers remain for Tibetans in general and other minorities such as Uyghurs, excluding them from the promised social or economic benefits of urbanization.

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Case study by Ross Perlin
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Urbanizing the Trung – one of China’s smallest officially recognized minorities

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This research is a result of several years of field work in the north-west corner of Yunnan province, one of the most multicultural and multilingual areas in China. The most recent observations and interviews are from November 2014. Dulong is the widely used Chinese name – the people call themselves Trung.

November 2014 marked the official completion of a paved 76 km road, including a 6 km tunnel, connecting Yunnan province’s Trung River valley to the rest of the world. ‘The opening of the highway will lead the Trung people to prosperity and happiness,’ announced Yunnan Party Secretary Li Jiheng. At a reported cost of US\$127 million, one of the country’s most isolated places – the mountainous homeland of the Trung people, hard by the border of Burma and the Tibetan Autonomous Region – is now fully open for business.

With a total population of 6,930 according to the 2010 census, the Trung are one of the smallest of China’s 56 officially recognized ethnic groups, and the majority live in the Trung River valley. Until 1999, the valley had remained almost completely inaccessible to outsiders, except on foot or by horse caravan from the neighbouring Nu River valley. Trung people still derived their livelihood from shifting swidden agriculture with a wide variety of crops, as well as subsistence hunting and gathering. For the last 15 years, a treacherous, unpaved road has allowed uncertain access to shared jeeps, but remained closed half the year due to

winter snows. ‘The new all-weather road will cut travel times in half, bring a regular bus service, and allow more frequent visits to the county seat’, said one young Trung man. ‘Everything will be opened up.’

Transformative demographic changes are already under way. On the one hand, the road enables people to leave, prompting classic urbanization patterns in a country where the official urban population has for the first time outstripped the rural – though many in practice move between the two. Until recently, sheer distance and expense had prevented most Trung

Below: Traditional Trung dance, 2014.

Claire Lij

from joining China’s ‘floating population’, but more are now ascending the rungs from the village to the township to the county seat, and sometimes beyond to the prefectural capital, the provincial capital of Kunming, and (in a handful of cases) even Beijing, over 2,000 miles away. The local government has even encouraged this with a formal labour export programme, attempted in 2008, in which 19 Trung farmers were sent to work in the eastern industrial city of Dongguan.



More typically, education is the way out. Secondary school is only available outside the valley, and the most successful Trung students go on to university, even further afield. They only return to work for the county or prefectural governments, which are major employers, especially of minorities.

The focal quasi-urban environment for most Trung is Cikai, the seat of Gongshan county, where the road into the valley originates. China's county seats are porous membranes where the rural and the urban coexist. About one-third of the county's 35,000 people live in Cikai, where government, trade and education are concentrated for a substantial rural hinterland, not to mention taxis, karaoke clubs, churches and public amenities. 'I came here to make more money and because life in the valley is backward', said a young Trung man who had recently moved to Gongshan to work in construction. 'I first came here for high school so I have a lot of friends here. I have Lisu friends, Tibetan friends, Han friends.'

Though most Trung remain in the valley, they are effectively urbanizing at an even more local level, *in situ* and largely by fiat, as scattered houses turn into denser settlements and hamlets mushroom into villages. Others are being drawn into fast-growing Kongdang, the main town in the valley. Besides being the local government seat and the centre of education and trade, Kongdang is where the road into the valley terminates. Though most cycle through, some non-Trung small business owners and traders have settled there semi-permanently. Although currently less than 10 per cent of the valley's population, such outsiders are over-represented and highly visible in Kongdang, with a palpable effect on the Trung language and culture.

In situ urbanization is the direct outcome of deliberate high-profile national policies which have converged on the Trung River valley as a particular test case, in order to combat what is officially viewed as an embarrassing example of 'backwardness' (*luobou*). The early 2000s brought hydroelectric power stations, satellite antennas and mobile phone reception. Village schools were closed in favour of

centralized locations in towns like Kongdang and Gongshan, with boarding for students. Instead of 'barefoot doctors' moving between villages, the emphasis was now on hospitals and clinics in the towns. The government cited service delivery and poverty alleviation as reasons to further concentrate and urbanize the population, which had already been resettled from isolated mountain hamlets, down to the riverside, back in the 1950s and 1960s.

In 2003, the Sloping Land Conversion Programme (*tuigeng huanlin*) abruptly ended traditional subsistence practices in the name of environmental protection and reforestation, promising cash and rice instead and simultaneously 'freeing' Trung people from the land and enabling wage labour. At the same time, the central government's Western Development Programme (launched in 2000) and poverty-alleviation initiative – focused on 592 'key counties', mostly in areas of western China populated by ethnic minorities – provided further impetus and funding. Starting in 2010, a dedicated 'Help the whole Trung nationality' programme has led to the construction of 1,068 new houses with windows and balconies in 26 'settlement areas', near the previously existing villages but denser. Within a few years, almost the entire Trung population has effectively been resettled and rehoused – but at the same time, many have left.

Many inhabitants, particularly younger Trung, emphasize the positive benefits that this urban development has brought to the area. 'It's completely different now, not backward like before,' according to one resident. 'You wouldn't recognize it: new houses, tall buildings, internet, even a museum in Kongdang.' Yet poverty remains endemic, with welfare dependence deepening. Estimates vary, but agree that income in the valley remains under the threshold of US\$1 per day. An eco-tourism boom has yet to materialize, but direct food subsidies and surreptitious subsistence activities help fill the gap. Other problems, such as alcoholism and rising suicide rates, also remain. ■

Japan

In August 2014 the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) reviewed Japan. The committee noted concern that Japan has still not adopted a comprehensive definition for racial discrimination in its domestic legislation, nor legislation enabling victims to seek legal redress. One of the most troubling and urgent issues, however, was the continuing problem of hate speech. This included, in April, the use of Nazi imagery by right-wing nationalists during anti-Chinese and anti-Korean demonstrations in Tokyo, as well as various racist slurs. Persistent anti-foreigner sentiment is reflected in 'Japanese only' signs still posted by some hotels and restaurants. In March, a giant 'Japanese Only' banner was even hung from the Saitama Stadium in Tokyo by supporters of the Urawa Red Diamonds during a football game, prompting an order from the national J-League for the club to play a match in an empty stadium – an edict that cost the club in excess of US\$1 million.

There were some positive developments to address the issue. In July the Osaka High Court, followed by the Supreme Court in December, upheld a groundbreaking October 2013 ruling by Kyoto High Court that had found Zaitokukai, an organization opposed to the granting of certain rights to foreign residents in Japan, guilty of racial discrimination for shouting abuse and slogans in front of a Korean school. At the beginning of 2014, an Osaka municipal human rights committee also drafted recommendations for curbing hate speech, including the creation of a municipal fund to offset court costs for victims. Multiple municipalities have followed suit with similar proposals, though there are concerns that hate speech legislation will be difficult to pass due to free speech concerns.

Legal and institutional discrimination against foreigners and minorities continues to affect many residents, some of whom have spent their entire lives in Japan. In July, for instance, the Supreme Court overturned a Fukuoka High Court decision, ruling instead that permanent residents do not have a guaranteed right to receive welfare benefits. The case involved an 82-year-old Chinese woman who had been born and grew up in Japan, but was denied welfare because she was not a Japanese national.

Japan's indigenous Ainu also continue to face discrimination, limited access to basic services and low levels of political participation. Even in Hokkaido, where the majority are based, most Ainu have lower economic status than non-Ainu Hokkaido residents. When Japan ratified the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 2007 it denied it had any indigenous peoples, but the next year it passed a non-binding resolution recognizing the Ainu as indigenous to Japan. The decision was a major victory in recognizing the distinctiveness of Ainu language and culture. However, in November 2014 Masaru Onodera, a member of the Hokkaido prefectural parliament, created controversy when he publicly stated Ainu indigenesness was 'highly questionable'.

The struggle for recognition is even more acute for indigenous Okinawans (or Ryūkyūans) who, unlike Ainu, have yet to receive official indigenous status, despite previous UN recommendations. Their culture and traditional lands are threatened by the denial of their right to free and informed participation in policy-making, especially concerning the expansion of US military bases in Okinawa – an issue that continues to be perceived as a form of discrimination against the indigenous population. Ongoing construction of a new US base in Henoko, situated in a bay rich in biodiversity including the critically endangered Okinawan dugong, was a particularly contentious issue in Okinawan politics in 2014. Local protests swelled to several thousands demonstrating in September and October, ahead of elections in November, with authorities responding harshly by detaining and arresting anyone who approached the construction site. The subsequent election of Takeshi Onaga in the November Okinawan gubernatorial elections was in large part due to his strict opposition to military base construction. In January 2015, Tokyo announced that, despite considerable local opposition, the plan to relocate a US military base from Futenma to Henoko would still continue. However, as of April 2015 Onaga was still actively opposing plans to relocate the base.

Japan has yet to implement CERD's 2010 recommendation to create a specific government agency to deal with Burakumin

issues. Burakumin are not a distinct ethnic group in Japan, but the descendants of outcast communities from the feudal era who continue to face discrimination in mainstream Japanese society. Although they are not subject to official discrimination, Burakumin still face deep-seated prejudice, especially in marriage and employment, with some companies referring to lists of family names and neighbourhoods to discriminate against Burakumin. Historically, Burakumin neighbourhoods, also known as *dowa*, were isolated and excluded settlements with little in the way of public services or other amenities. Increasing numbers migrated to urban areas in the post-war period, resulting in the expansion of segregated slums.

Following strong advocacy efforts from Buraku organizations, however, the Japanese government committed substantial government funds between 1969 and 1997 to improving Buraku urban neighbourhoods, funding upgraded housing, infrastructure development and other improvements. As a result, in large part because of the active efforts of Buraku residents, living conditions in the areas have generally improved. By 2002, the government had completed urban development projects related to the Dowa Special Measures. Among other positive developments, the physical environment in traditionally Buraku districts has improved and other indicators, such as educational attainment and employment, have also risen. However, some of the community cohesion is being weakened as some more affluent Buraku move out and poorer non-Buraku groups move in from elsewhere, meaning that sub-standard housing and other issues are reappearing.

Mongolia

Though in recent years Mongolia has been one of the fastest growing economies in the world, 2014 saw a dramatic reduction in foreign direct investment and a fall in its GDP growth rate. The slowdown in the Mongolian economy, which remains heavily dependent on the country's natural resources, has been partly attributed to concerns among foreign companies over stalled negotiations between the Mongolian government and Turquoise Hill Resources, a subsidiary of Rio Tinto, over the development

of the controversial Oyu Tolgoi copper and gold mine. The multi-billion-dollar mining project, located in the south of the country, has been opposed by local herders and civil society organizations due to the destructive impact the development will have on the surrounding environment. In February 2015, however, following a national text message referendum, Mongolia agreed to further development of the mine, despite opposition from environmental groups. Pastoralist livelihoods are threatened not only by the mine itself, but also by the infrastructure connecting it to China, which runs through traditional grazing and pasture lands. Herders have consistently complained about inadequate compensation for their land.

Rising nationalism, linked in part to resentment of the role of international companies in mining and natural resource extraction, has intensified anti-foreigner sentiment in Mongolia, particularly towards Chinese nationals. This is reflected in regular incidents of abuse and even violence towards migrants, foreign minorities and visitors. In April 2014, for instance, three foreigners were attacked at a rock concert in Ulaanbaatar, while in early 2015 reports emerged of the ill-treatment of Chinese tourists by Mongolian nationalists. In May the Mongolian parliament announced that it would begin discussing anti-discrimination legislation to supplement the relevant provisions in the Constitution. However, critics have argued that the proposal does not go far enough to include a specific category for hate crimes.

Mongolia's Tuvan minority's language and culture remain under threat, despite government support and a modest subsidy. Already, growing numbers of Tuvan children are travelling to attend schools in the capital where they cannot study in their native language. These challenges are especially acute for the Dukha (also known as Tsaatan) community, a Tuvan sub-group and Mongolia's smallest ethnic minority, with fewer than 50 families remaining in the far west of the country. Nevertheless, there have been efforts to support the preservation of Dukha language and culture. In December 2014, the Mongolian National Museum premiered a documentary about Oyunbadam, a Dukha educator who established a grassroots language and culture

school for Dukha children.

Mongolia's recent transition to a market economy, as well as limited livelihood opportunities in the countryside, has also driven rapid urban growth in the country's capital, Ulaanbaatar – a process that has unfortunately outpaced the development of public services and infrastructure. In certain districts more than half of the population live in *ger*, traditional nomadic yurts of wool and felt, in lots for which they do not hold land titles. Forced evictions continue to occur against a backdrop of rising property prices and increasing competition for space, with families evicted without consultation and communities harassed by real estate companies, which have even cut off water and electricity supplies to pressure them to leave. *Ger* residents also have limited access to essential services such as sanitation, education and health.

Many are families of former herders who have been pushed to the city by desertification and the harsh winters of the steppe. Following a period of extreme cold in 2010 – known as a *dzud*, meaning 'white death' – that resulted in the deaths of millions of livestock, thousands of herders moved into *gers* on the edge of the city. They continue to make up a significant proportion of those migrating to the city each year. The increasing settlement of rural and formerly nomadic Mongolians around Ulaanbaatar has contributed to the erosion of their traditional lifestyles. In addition to migration in order to find work, herders are also moving closer to markets in towns, particularly near Ulaanbaatar, because they are switching from subsistence husbandry to raising animals for sale. Many residents of poorer areas of Ulaanbaatar rely on herders for their food supply, which results in more seasonal migration to the city; a number of such in-migrants return to the countryside for the summer months.

Oceania

Jacqui Zalcborg

The diverse region of Oceania spans approximately 25,000 islands, ranging from the

large land masses of Australia, New Zealand and New Guinea to a variety of smaller states where, in most cases, the numerical majority of the population are indigenous. Their experience of urbanization is similarly varied: while countries such as New Zealand have close to 87 per cent of the population living in towns and cities, the proportion is much lower in Papua New Guinea (13 per cent) or Tonga (23.4 per cent). However, smaller island states are also facing high population growth and rapidly accelerating urbanization. Almost a quarter of Pacific Islanders already live in urban centres, up from only 8.5 per cent in 1950, and half of the region's countries already have majority urban populations. In these countries the challenges of urbanization, particularly for their indigenous communities, are especially acute.

Urban migration among indigenous peoples in the Pacific is driven in part by the potential opportunities cities present in terms of improved employment, health care and other benefits. Furthermore, limited livelihood options and lack of development in rural areas is also a factor, and income generated by urban indigenous people is often used to support families in their communities of origin. Nevertheless, in a context of rapid and largely unmanaged growth, indigenous populations face increasing challenges in urban areas, including lack of housing, limited public services, low economic prospects and other issues. One of the key challenges for almost all Pacific Island countries is that there is insufficient land to keep pace with the growing demands of urbanization. The shortage of land means that many who move to urban centres do not have access to or cannot afford adequate land or housing, contributing to the growth of squatter settlements.

These factors have increased stress on the physical and social environments of urban dwellers, particularly for women and children. Domestic violence, sexual violence and violence against women remain endemic across the region, and these problems are often compounded by the impacts of urbanization, such as fragmented communities and increasing marginalization. In addition, the deterioration of established communal structures in urban areas renders many young people vulnerable to issues such

as gang violence, crime and substance abuse, particularly as traditional governance systems have eroded. In New Zealand, for instance, the rapid urbanization of Māori from the 1960s saw the breakdown of *iwi* (tribe) and *hapū* (clan) systems. Māori leadership, however, worked to address the issues that arose from this breakdown and established multi-tribal urban authorities to help foster the economic, social and commercial development of urban Māori communities. The impacts of urbanization on indigenous communities and minorities across Oceania have therefore been ambiguous, and their future situation will likely depend to a large extent on the region's ability to achieve sustainable and inclusive urban development.

Australia

The year 2014 began promisingly with the announcement by Prime Minister Tony Abbott in January of a planned amendment to the Constitution to recognize Australia's indigenous population as the original inhabitants of Australia. Abbott subsequently pledged in December to hold a constitutional referendum on the issue in 2017. The amendment is seen by rights activists as an important milestone in reversing the historic marginalization suffered by the Aboriginal community. Nevertheless, considerable hurdles remain before the amendment, which was first proposed in 2010, is likely to be passed.

In addition, the positive effects of the amendment may be limited without broader efforts to address the deep-rooted discrimination that Australia's indigenous population continues to face on a daily basis. One issue that sparked national debate during the year was their disproportionate rates of incarceration, described by the Law Council of Australia as a 'national emergency'. Though they make up only around 2.5 per cent of the overall population, indigenous Australians comprise 27 per cent of the country's prison population. This is even higher in some regions, with Aboriginal youth making up 98 per cent of detained juveniles in the Northern Territory. The UN Committee against Torture, in its 2014 review of Australia, noted its concern about the high numbers of indigenous prisoners, as well as cuts in legal assistance and the use of

mandatory sentencing laws in some jurisdictions – issues which particularly affect the indigenous community.

The issue of Aboriginal deaths in custody also received renewed attention in 2014 following the death in August of a 22-year-old Aboriginal woman while incarcerated in a Western Australia jail. The woman was twice taken by police to a local hospital, but on both occasions was declared well enough to be sent back to prison, despite reportedly not being seen by a doctor. The woman had been placed in South Headland police custody due to unpaid parking fines, a controversial approach that has been blamed for perpetuating the high incarceration rates among the indigenous population and other marginalized groups.

Serious inequalities persist in other areas, too, such as education, employment and health: for example, life expectancy for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations is still a decade less than that enjoyed by non-indigenous Australians. Progress to reduce these disparities has been slow, with Abbott admitting in February 2015 that the country's continued failure to meet most targets on improving outcomes for indigenous communities in areas such as education, employment and community safety was 'profoundly disappointing'. Yet the introduction of the government's controversial Indigenous Advancement Strategy (IAS) in July, consolidating 150 different programmes into five broad thematic areas and involving cuts of more than AU\$500 million over the next five years, has generated considerable resentment among indigenous communities. In addition to reduced overall funding, significant portions of the new budget have gone to state departments, sporting clubs and other non-indigenous organizations, while some local indigenous organizations found that their funding had been halted.

One challenge in terms of service access and development is the geographical seclusion of many rural indigenous communities. While the country as a whole is highly urbanized, with almost 90 per cent of Australians now living in urban areas, the proportion is significantly lower among the indigenous population; over 20 per cent are still based in areas classified as remote or very remote, compared to less than 2 per cent



of the non-indigenous population. Many of these isolated communities, particularly in the Northern Territory, struggle with higher levels of child mortality, poor living standards and lack of access to essential services such as health care. These issues are compounded by a lack of culturally appropriate programmes and limited opportunities for bilingual education, with a large proportion of indigenous children in more remote areas of the country barely able to read or write.

Though some remote indigenous communities face significant challenges, the announcement in November 2014 by the Western Australia

Above: In the township of Kennedy Hill, Western Australia, a young Aboriginal girl watches as the town's main offices are demolished. The Western Australian government are in the process of closing approximately 150 remote Aboriginal communities. *Ingetje Tadros/Diimex*

state government that as many as 150 of its 274 Aboriginal communities would be shut down sparked widespread outrage among Aboriginal Australians and rights activists. The announcement was made following the decision of the Australian federal government to stop

funding power, water and other services to these communities beyond the next two years, with Western Australia accepting an AU\$90 million one-off payment from the federal government to take responsibility for the services. The Western Australia State Premier, Colin Barnett, claimed that without federal funding the state government could not afford to continue to service the communities, despite being the richest state in Australia. He also justified the closure of the communities in terms of safety and well-being, citing 'high rates of suicide, poor education, poor health [and] no jobs'.

The decision was strongly condemned by the deputy indigenous adviser to the Abbott government, Dr Ngiare Brown, who argued that 'governments have the responsibility to understand the historical and contemporary contexts of those communities and the failure of systems which placed them at risk, and then negotiate the best possible options' for them. Amnesty International has noted that the plan to evict traditional owners from their homes would cause considerable trauma to the communities and that for them migration to larger urban centres would present an even higher risk of substance abuse, crime and other issues. Nor, when the decision was made, was there a plan in place to support community members in transitioning to their new context elsewhere.

The potential effects of uprooting communities in this way were demonstrated in 2011 when the small indigenous settlement of Oombulgurri was forcibly closed by the state government after evidence emerged of high levels of violence, suicide and sexual assault in the area. Those who refused to leave were evicted from the town and public services closed down. In 2014, despite protests from rights groups, the town was demolished. The transition for residents was reportedly traumatic, with inadequate support services and housing in place for displaced residents who were forced to relocate to a larger urban area nearby. Some community members were reportedly still homeless at the end of 2014, several years later.

Notably, similar agreements to transfer responsibility for remote communities have been reached between the federal government and the States of Queensland, Victoria and Tasmania,

with responsibility for the provision of power, water and other services now falling to the state authorities. The State of South Australia initially rejected a payout, but in April 2015 reached an agreement with the federal government to share the management of the state's indigenous settlements, which otherwise would have faced closure. The implications of these changes for other rural indigenous communities remain to be seen.

Nevertheless, with the exception of certain areas such as the Northern Territory where three-quarters of the population are rural, the majority of Australia's indigenous populations are now urban. The relocation of indigenous communities to urban areas is rooted in part in Australia's troubled colonial history, beginning with their displacement and forcible resettlement in missions and reserves. Limited opportunities and the takeover of much of their former homelands subsequently pushed increasing numbers of indigenous people, particularly in the second half of the twentieth century, to migrate in search of opportunities. Nevertheless, various improvements in rural areas from the 1960s onwards, such as recognition of land rights and more government funding, reduced the pull of migration to urban areas. In the past few decades, demographic increases have resulted primarily from natural growth over multiple generations, as well as higher levels of self-identification among the indigenous urban population in censuses and population surveys.

The effects of urbanization for indigenous Australians has been mixed. Despite the difficulties of adjusting to unfamiliar urban settings, life in Australia's cities has brought many positive developments. In particular, the interaction of many previously separated communities in urban areas led to the emergence of a shared indigenous consciousness and the beginning of indigenous political activism. While aspects of traditional indigenous culture have undoubtedly been eroded – for example, just 1 per cent of indigenous people in urban areas speak an indigenous language, compared to 56 per cent in rural areas – cities have in some ways helped reinforce indigenous identity and enabled the reinvention of indigenous heritage in new and distinctly urban forms of expression. Urban

indicators in a range of sectors, from employment to education, also outperform those in rural areas by a significant margin.

Nevertheless, indigenous residents continue to experience serious inequalities in cities compared to the non-indigenous population, particularly as shifts in urban labour markets have reduced employment opportunities for workers with limited job skills or education. Indicators such as educational attainment, income and health are also poorer among urban indigenous communities than the non-indigenous urban population. In addition, evidence suggests that indigenous residents are disproportionately situated in poorer and marginalized city districts. Discrimination and exclusion have therefore persisted and have even led to new forms of disadvantage. Some studies have suggested, for instance, that well-being and self-reported levels of happiness among indigenous Australians in rural areas is higher, despite lower levels of development. The overall picture of indigenous urbanization in Australia is therefore mixed, with cities bringing considerable benefits while also maintaining many inequalities.

Though Australia has a vibrant and diverse population, especially in urban areas, there have been ongoing reports of ethnic minorities being subjected to increasing racism. A 2014 survey reported that experience of discrimination remains close to the highest level recorded; 18 per cent of those surveyed reported that they had experienced racial, ethnic or religious discrimination compared with 19 per cent in 2013 – the highest level recorded since this particular survey began in 2007. There have also been repeated reports of minorities and foreigners being subjected to hate speech on public transport in major cities, including two widely reported incidents in Sydney and Perth in which Asian women were verbally abused by other passengers. There were also concerns, following a religiously motivated attack on a Sydney coffee shop in December 2014 which led to the deaths of two hostages, that attacks against Australia's Muslim population would escalate in the aftermath. However, Sydney citizens and activists launched a campaign online with the hashtag #IllRideWithYou, with users offering to accompany Muslims in religious attire on public

transport as a gesture of solidarity.

Increasing racism and xenophobia in Australia, particularly towards Muslims, may also contribute to widespread popular support for the country's punitive policies towards asylum seekers. The majority of asylum seekers, originating mostly from Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, are ethnically distinct from the white Australian majority and are often presumed by members of the general public to be Muslim. All asylum seekers entering Australian territory by boat continue to face mandatory, indefinite and non-reviewable detention at centres on Nauru or Manus Island in Papua New Guinea, in conditions described by UNHCR as unsafe and in violation of international standards. Violence and neglect in these centres remain serious issues: an Iranian man was beaten to death in May in a riot at the Manus Island centre, while in September another asylum seeker was left brain dead after an infected cut was not adequately treated, resulting in septicaemia.

The government has nevertheless continued to militarize migration control and forcibly returned boats carrying asylum seekers to their country of origin. In 2014, Australia attempted to return a boat carrying 153 asylum seekers and refugees to Sri Lanka. The Australian High Court blocked the attempt temporarily after it found that another boatload of 41 people had already been returned to Sri Lanka, where they faced persecution. The 153 asylum seekers on the boat were held aboard the Customs vessel as the government sought to arrange their return to India, and were subsequently sent to Nauru. In January 2015 the High Court held that the government had not acted illegally when it detained them at sea for almost a month. These policies were further institutionalized in December 2014 when parliament passed the Migration and Maritime Powers Legislation Amendment, strengthening the power of maritime controls to take asylum seekers found at sea to other destinations and also reducing other safeguards for asylum seekers. The Act has been criticized by a wide coalition of stakeholders for further eroding human rights standards relating to asylum seekers.

Papua New Guinea

The indigenous population of Papua New

Guinea is one of the most diverse in the world, with thousands of separate communities and an estimated 800 languages spoken in the country. Many communities continue to live on subsistence agriculture in the isolated mountainous interior, although the presence of natural resources such as forests and mineral reserves in some indigenous areas has resulted in land grabbing, environmental devastation and other abuses. The country also faces governance challenges that persisted during 2014, with an arrest warrant issued by the national anti-corruption watchdog for Prime Minister Peter O'Neill for alleged fraudulent payments. O'Neill subsequently fired the deputy police commissioner and stopped the watchdog's funding, effectively bringing its activities to a halt.

The year 2014 saw the approval of Papua New Guinea's application for Extractive Industry Transparency Initiative (EITI) candidate status. This was an important move for a country endowed with abundant natural resources, yet in which the UNDP estimates that 40 per cent of the population are living on less than US\$1.25 a day. It is hoped that the initiative will improve relations between communities and development projects, as well as ensure that profits are transparently directed back to the country and its peoples. This is particularly the case for ExxonMobil's US\$19 billion Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) project, which began production in 2014. Nevertheless, rights violations against local communities continue to occur. In early 2015, for instance, 14 people, including 11 indigenous women and girls who were raped or violently molested at the Porgera Mine in the Papua New Guinea highlands, reached an out-of-court settlement with the world's biggest gold mining company, Barrick Gold. Apart from these victims, at least 120 women have lodged claims of rape at the mine.

Although Papua New Guinea is the least urbanized of the Pacific Island countries, with less than 13 per cent of the population living in urban areas, this figure is somewhat deceptive due to the country's large landmass. Papua New Guinea in fact has the largest urban population in the Pacific, while Port Moresby is the region's most sizeable city. This has also led to significant challenges, with some estimates suggesting that

close to half of the city's population live in slums. Similar issues have affected other urban areas in the country, such as the coastal city of Lae, where an influx of migrants from rural areas in Mamose, the New Guinea islands and the Highlands Region has dramatically increased the size of its informal settlements. Though the government, through its National Urbanization Policy (NUP), has committed to improving infrastructure, services and urban management, serious problems persist.

One major challenge in urban areas of Papua New Guinea is violence. Urban conflict has increased as cities have become more ethnically diverse, with tribal fighting – a frequent issue between different ethnic groups in the country – now normalized in major urban centres. Furthermore, Port Moresby is also plagued by so-called 'rascalism'. This phenomenon, centring around youth gangs defined along community and cultural lines, has reinforced ethnic division in the capital. The decline of traditional conflict resolution systems, such as village courts, has meant that some communities have become more dependent on *wantok* for protection. *Wantok* – literally meaning 'one talk', someone who speaks the same language – previously served in part as a social support system among rural communities, but in Port Moresby and other urban areas it is frequently adapted to support identity-based criminal gangs, in the process deepening urban divisions. A particularly high-profile case of ethnic violence occurred in January 2011, when an argument between two men from different highland provinces led to an outbreak of fighting between factions of their communities that killed five people. Women are especially vulnerable in Port Moresby, as the city has high levels of sexual assault, domestic violence and rape.

Solomon Islands

The Solomon Islands are an archipelago of approximately 922 small islands. Ninety-five per cent of the population is indigenous Melanesian, with smaller Chinese, European, Micronesian and Polynesian groups also resident. Due to the relative isolation of its communities, there are many diverse languages, culture and traditions. For this reason, local governance systems, including familial ties, are often more important

than national political institutions.

In November 2014, general elections saw Independent candidates secure 32 seats in the 50-seat parliament, which led to the formation of a ruling coalition known as the Solomon Islands People's Democratic Coalition (SIPDC) and the election of Manasseh Sogavare as the country's prime minister. Sogavare had served as prime minister from 2000 to 2001 and again from 2006 to 2007. The election was the country's first since an Australian-led peacekeeping operation, the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI), transitioned to a police-focused mission in 2013 following ethnic violence that gripped the country between 1997 and 2003.

Despite its return to stability, the Solomon Islands is struggling to cope with rapid urban growth, particularly in the capital of Honiara, as a result of large-scale migration from rural areas. Honiara has experienced a doubling of its population in less than 17 years, and the city's annual urban growth rate of 4.7 per cent is one of the highest in the Pacific. This is putting immense pressure on urban service delivery, already in short supply, and leading to local tensions.

Honiara also faces the challenge of informal urban settlements, where up to 35 per cent of Honiara's residents – the majority of whom are indigenous islanders – now reside. While population growth and increasing rural–urban migration are significant factors contributing to the growth of these informal settlements, a lack of developable land for low- and middle-income earners also drives the trend. Besides poor living conditions and limited or no access to basic services such as sanitation, inhabitants are at increased risk of natural disasters. Over 65 per cent of housing in informal settlements lacks durability, meaning that it would likely not withstand strong winds or earthquakes. The settlements, some of which are located on steep slopes, are therefore at high risk of collapsing in the event of a natural disaster, leaving residents in a situation of extreme vulnerability.

Vanuatu

The majority of Vanuatu's population are indigenous Melanesian, known locally as ni-Vanuatu, though there are also Chinese,

European and Vietnamese minorities, as well as smaller groups of other indigenous peoples, such as Futunans, i-Kiribati and Wallisians. The country has undergone a series of political crises since the 1990s, resulting in numerous changes in leadership. The year 2014 also saw a change in key leadership positions in the country, with then Prime Minister Moana Carcasses Kalosil defeated by Joe Natuman in a no-confidence vote on 15 May 2014. Presidential elections were held in September, resulting in the election of Baldwin Lonsdale.

The year 2014 saw important changes to Vanuatu's legislation on indigenous land rights. The new laws alter the Constitution to include recognition of customary institutions and establish a role for the *Malvatumauri* (National Council of Chiefs) in advising parliament on changes to land law, as well as to strengthen the control of customary institutions while reducing the power of the minister of lands over customary land. It is hoped that this new legislation will prevent leases on customary land being signed off by the minister without the consent of the communities – a recurring issue since the country gained independence in 1980.

In terms of urbanization, Vanuatu has one of the region's highest growth rates, and it is projected that over half of the Vanuatu population will be based in urban centres by 2050. This is particularly the case in Port Vila, Vanuatu's largest city, where ni-Vanuatu face limited land availability – a situation that has been exacerbated by the development of tourism-related facilities and exclusive residential housing, leased on what was regarded until recently as inalienable indigenous land. As much as 80 per cent of the coastland on Etafe Island, where Port Vila is located, has been leased out. As a result, large tracts of territory have been walled off, restricting access to local beaches and marine resources. Some villages in peri-urban areas are now obstructed by commercial resorts and other developments that have blocked off swathes of community land from public use. The impacts of this are especially acute for ni-Vanuatu inhabitants, who have a particularly close connection to the land – an essential element in their traditional culture and local livelihoods.

Although urban areas tend to have better

services than rural areas, poverty rates are highest in urban communities. A recent UNICEF study found that one-third of children in Port Vila live in poverty – a rate nearly 20 per cent higher than the national average. Living conditions for ni-Vanuatu in poorer settlements are also deteriorating as a consequence of overcrowding and limited services or infrastructure. As a result, Port Vila’s poverty levels are 18 per cent, compared to 10 per cent in rural areas. Furthermore, lack of access to safe water, sanitation or waste disposal facilities are contributing to deteriorating health outcomes among urban ni-Vanuatu. Many urban disenfranchised ni-Vanuatu women are particularly affected by poverty and excluded from paid employment.

Vanuatu has been ranked by UN sources as the country with the highest risk of experiencing a natural disaster in the world. March 2015 saw one of the worst disasters in its history when Cyclone Pam hit the island, displacing at least 3,300 people and affecting more than half of its population. In Vanuatu, as with other Pacific islands, large urban areas are especially vulnerable due to the dense concentration of their populations in disaster-prone coastal locations, particularly the poorest and most marginalized. In Port Vila, the cyclone destroyed makeshift housing and weakened already limited basic services, leaving many informal settlements in even deeper poverty. However, given the scale of the disaster, the death toll remained relatively low, with 11 confirmed fatalities in the whole of Vanuatu. While modern communications and early warning systems helped reduce the death toll, the particular characteristics of the indigenous communal houses – known as *nakamals* – also proved critical. This was due to their construction with lightweight materials such as bamboo, as well as the use of traditional design measures that strengthen their resilience to storms. ■

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Case study by Anne-Marie Tupuola-Plunkett
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Resilience despite adversity – adapting indigenous communities to climate change in the Pacific region

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Most of the Pacific region’s island states are still predominantly rural, but rapid urbanization is fragmenting indigenous societies and undermining traditional livelihoods. In the process, new forms of poverty and disadvantage such as unemployment, delinquency and inadequate nutrition are emerging in urban areas. The devastating impacts of climate change are now adding to these hardships, particularly in the region’s most densely populated coastal settlements.

The Pacific is one of the most vulnerable parts of the world to climate change which, combined with limited resources and land, has left indigenous inhabitants and other marginalized groups at the mercy of its effects. As highlighted by Aunese Makoi Simati, the Tuvalu ambassador to the UN, at the 2015 Third World Conference on Disaster and Risk Reduction, ‘[T]he word “vulnerable” goes hand in hand with the words “small island” because there is no high ground. As Tuvalu is small, flat and barely three metres above sea level, “moving” means just going to the other side.’

Many of the Pacific’s low-lying islands and atoll communities are already in fear of extinction or the evacuation of their communities due to rising sea levels, eroding coastlines and water contamination. At the same time, the impact of severe storms, cyclones, global warming and ocean acidification are threatening ecosystems, food

security and indigenous livelihoods. Flooding, landslides and other weather-related hazards are also destroying homes and displacing families from their ancestral lands, in the process erasing heritage and sacred sites unique to these communities. Speaking of the flooding of cemeteries in the wake of Hurricane Pam, Simati described how 'we feel that even the dead are calling for help'.

Notwithstanding the adversity that climate change brings, Pacific communities are demonstrating remarkable resilience, ingenuity and resourcefulness in responding to these challenges. In the words of the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP), 'adaptation to climate change is becoming a Pacific way of life'. The installation of storage tanks and innovative drainage systems has helped to diffuse water contamination and potential health risks arising from unusually long periods of drought and saltwater intrusion. Many Pacific communities are strengthening their biodiversity, planting dense vegetation and building sea walls, mindful of the risks of erosion and landslides to the densely populated areas along their coastlines.

For Samoa, an island group with a growing low-lying urban population, adaptation to climate change is often associated with deforestation and natural disasters. Thus adaptation strategies tend to address the links between climate change and disaster management. For instance, the Samoa Red Cross Society, under the Community Disaster and Climate Risk Management Programme, empowers indigenous communities to become more resilient in the face of disaster threats, as well as build on the skills and resources at hand. One project provides low-income families with free seeds and fertilizers, along with training on how to prepare vegetable beds, so they can grow non-traditional produce like cabbages, tomatoes and cucumbers. This strengthens adaptation by diversifying livelihoods and improving nutrition – both areas where climate change has led to heightened levels of risk.

The increasing threat of climate change has also encouraged renewed interest in traditional

housing in Samoa. Thatched Samoan *fales*, unlike westernized homes, have survived and withstood extreme storms. Their oval shaped, open layout is resistant to strong winds and the natural materials used in their construction are less dangerous than the corrugated iron and concrete blocks of modern houses.

Training locals in the design and building of traditional Samoan architecture therefore promotes resilient housing and may also help minimize the need for residential relocation.

Climate change is a global challenge that affects all of humanity. The rich knowledge and social capital of the Pacific's indigenous populations in responding to climate change is now being disseminated across national and international borders through blogs, websites and multimedia, supported by alliances and partnerships with diverse agencies, corporations and community organizations. A passive response is not an option, most especially for Pacific indigenous communities, as their existence and survival already hang in the balance. In moving forward, climate change must be viewed as a human rights issue for all indigenous peoples, irrespective of where they reside. ■