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## Human rights. Amnesty: "Empty slogans, broken promises and new rules against dissent"

"High-income countries colluded with the corporate giants to mislead citizens with empty slogans and phoney promises of a fair recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in one of the greatest betrayals of our time." The causes include "noxious corporate greed" and "brutal national selfishness", along with "governments' neglect of public health and other public infrastructure." All this has plunged the world into "greater inequality and instability". The Report 2021-2022 on the State of the World's Human Rights released by Amnesty International is a scathing accusation. **New rules to curb dissent, freedom of expression and peaceful demonstrations.** According to the Report, in 2021, at least 67 countries out of 154 (43% of those monitored) introduced new laws to restrict freedom of expression, association or assembly. US lawmakers in at least 36 states introduced more than 80 pieces of draft legislation limiting freedom of assembly, while the UK government drafted legislation that would severely restrict freedom of peaceful demonstrations, including by increasing the powers of security forces. Amnesty International documented the use of unnecessary and/or excessive force against demonstrators in at least 85 countries (55%). Activists and human rights defenders were arbitrarily imprisoned in 84 countries (54%). Refugees or migrants had been unlawfully returned to their countries or pushed across borders in at least 48 of 154 countries monitored (31%). **Rising poverty, greater injustice.** "The global failure to build a global response to the pandemic sowed the seeds of greater conflict and greater injustice – declared **Agnès Callamard**, Secretary General Amnesty International -. Rising poverty, food insecurity and government instrumentalization of the pandemic to repress dissent and protests – all were well planted in 2021, watered by vaccine nationalism and fertilized by greed of the richer countries." **Vaccines, "self-serving nationalism and corporate greed."** Successful vaccination programs have been "undermined by self-serving nationalism and corporate greed." As a result, less than 4% of the population in low-income countries were fully vaccinated by 2021. High-income countries - such as those in the EU, the UK and the US -stockpiled "millions more doses than they could use," reads the Report, while turning a blind eye to Big Pharma's profit-driven refusal to share technology that would have enabled greater vaccine distribution." In 2021, Pfizer, BioNTech and Moderna were set to earn up to \$54 billion while supplying less than 2% of their total production to low-income countries. By the end of the year, less than 8% of Africa overall population had been fully vaccinated, making it the lowest vaccination rate of any continent in the world. Amnesty also criticises the social media providers Facebook, Instagram and Twitter for being "a breeding ground for disinformation." **Vulnerable groups were most severely affected by the failure to properly respond to the pandemic.** According to Amnesty, the collusion "between corporate giants and Western governments" was preceded by "neglect and underfunding of health, economic and social welfare systems over decades". "Millions of people were left not knowing how to make ends meet, many more were left homeless, girls and boys dropped out of education, amidst escalating poverty," Callamard remarked. **Conflicts, "free rein to the invasion of Ukraine".** In 2021, conflicts broke out or continued to flare up in Afghanistan, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Israel/Occupied Palestinian Territory, Libya, Myanmar and Yemen, in the face of "shameful inaction, constant paralysis by multilateral bodies and failed accountability by world powers", which "have contributed to paving the way for Russia's invasion of Ukraine" **Detrimental policies, restrictive regulations and violations also in Italy.** "Detrimental policies, restrictive regulations and violations directed against the most vulnerable persons, minorities, civil society working to defend areas of freedom and solidarity" also occurred in Italy in 2021, according to **Ilaria Masinara**, Campaign Manager at Amnesty International Italy. People fleeing from conflict and poverty were among the most affected groups: as many as 1,553 deaths in the Mediterranean Sea compared with 999 in 2020. Italy continued "to support the Libyan authorities in containing refugees and migrants in Libya, despite evidence of continuing abuses. By the end of

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the year, 32,425 refugees and migrants had been captured at sea by Libyan coastguards, by far the highest figure on record." Moreover, judiciary persecution of solidarity actions continued, with administrative and criminal sanctions. Court cases against rescue NGOs continued. Concerns about torture and other ill-treatment of detainees along with crowding in prisons amidst increased COVID risk persisted. **The right to protest, solidarity with popular movements.** Confronted with government and multinational corporations' poor practices in 2021, people took to the streets to protest and claim their rights: in Colombia against tax increases, in Russia despite mass arrests and prosecutions, in India and the Americas by peasants and indigenous people. "The staunch and persevering resistance of people's movements around the world is a source of hope," Callamard concluded. "Undaunted and fearless, they are voicing a powerful plea for a fairer world." To this end, in the coming weeks Amnesty will launch a global campaign of solidarity with people's movements, demanding respect for the right to protest.

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