



UPR Submission

**Spain**

May 2014

## **Summary**

This submission highlights key areas of concern regarding Spain's compliance with its international human rights obligations: migration and asylum policy, sexual and reproductive rights, the right to peaceful assembly, the right to adequate housing, incommunicado detention, and universal jurisdiction.

### **Migration and Asylum Policy**

Spain rejected the recommendation during its previous UPR in 2010 to review readmission agreements, arguing that domestic law includes "ample guarantees of international protection." However Human Rights Watch, other nongovernmental organizations, and Spain's independent human rights institute have documented unlawful summary returns to Morocco from the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla. These summary returns place migrants at serious risk of abuse by Moroccan security forces and violate Spanish domestic law guaranteeing irregular migrants the right to legal counsel and an interpreter during deportation proceedings. Citing increased migration pressure at these borders, the government has indicated that it now wants to legalize this practice through an explicit agreement with Morocco within the framework of its bilateral readmission agreement.

There are also serious concerns about excessive use of force at the enclave borders. Human Rights Watch documented cases of Spanish Civil Guard violence against migrants who succeeded in crossing the Melilla border, including kicking with boots and beatings with batons. Fifteen migrants died on February 6, 2014, as they attempted to reach Ceuta by sea. The Spanish Civil Guard had fired rubber bullets and tear gas into the water. An investigative judge in Ceuta is leading the investigation into the deaths of only the five migrants whose corpses were located in Spanish waters; there has been no in-depth investigation by the Parliament.

### **Sexual and reproductive rights**

In December 2013, the government endorsed draft legislation to restrict access to safe and legal abortions to circumscribed cases. At this writing, the bill had not yet been tabled officially to Parliament. The proposed reforms pose a serious threat to a wide range of human rights of women and girls in Spain, and would likely have a disproportionate impact on the poor, rural, and the marginalized without the resources or the opportunity to seek safe and legal abortions abroad.

Under current law in Spain, women and girls have the right to terminate a pregnancy up until the fourteenth week. The draft legislation would allow abortions only when the woman's physical or mental health is endangered (up to 22 weeks) and when the pregnancy is the result of sexual violence (up to 12

weeks). In addition, the changes would impose unjustified barriers to access to these legal abortions, including the requirement that two specialist doctors testify to the threat to physical or mental health, the obligation to have reported sexual violence to the police, and mandatory counseling and waiting periods.

International human rights law recognizes that access to safe and legal abortion is crucial to women and girls' effective enjoyment and exercise of their human rights, including the rights to life, nondiscrimination and equality, health, privacy, to decide on the number and spacing of children, and to be free from cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment. The UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Health have expressed concern generally about the relationship between restrictive abortion laws, clandestine abortions, and threats to women and girls' lives, health, and well-being. The UN Committee against Torture has found that restrictive abortion laws can constitute inhuman and degrading treatment, and the European Court on Human Rights has ruled that states that allow legal abortions must ensure real and effective access to such services.

### **Right to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly**

In December 2013, the government endorsed draft legislation that would negatively impact the rights to freedom of speech and freedom of assembly in Spain. The bill, which has not yet been tabled in Parliament, would create three tiers of breaches subject to administrative fines. The proposals come as street protests have increased amid the economic crisis in Spain, while courts have quashed government attempts to use existing powers to sanction protesters.

Serious breaches, subject to fines up to €30,000, would include planning or participating in spontaneous protests in front of national and regional parliaments, and for insulting the institutions, symbols or hymns of Spain or any of its autonomous regions "through any medium." Obstructing authorities carrying out administrative or court orders could lead to the same fine. The commission of three serious breaches within two years constitutes a "very serious breach" in the draft legislation, punishable by up to €600,000.

Under the proposed legislation, organizers, de facto leaders, and vaguely-defined "inspirers" of protests would be held jointly responsible for any unlawful acts committed by participants.

The bill also provides for fines up to €1,000 for insulting law enforcement officers during a demonstration or distributing images that offend their honor, as well as for insulting or disrespecting, by any medium, public officials and institutions, when these actions are not liable to criminal prosecution.

The creation of offences, for actions that constitute 'insult', 'offence to honor' or 'disrespect' in particular as they relate to public figures, officials or state institutions is not compatible with respect for free speech. As the UN special rapporteur on freedom of expression has emphasized public figures, the government and authorities are required to tolerate greater criticism. At a minimum these measures could have a chilling effect on peaceful assemblies and speech. The UN Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association has recommended to all countries that spontaneous assemblies should be permissible in law, and that organizers and participants in any kind of demonstration, whether authorized, notified or not, should not be held responsible for other people's unlawful acts.

## **Right to adequate housing**

The Spanish government has failed to take adequate measures to avoid and alleviate the impact of the housing and debt crisis amid economic down-turn in Spain. Since the economic crisis began in 2007, banks have foreclosed on over 500,000 properties under a procedure that leaves individuals and families saddled with significant debt and no realistic pathway towards discharging their debt. Immigrants, women heads of household, women victims of economic abuse, and children are among the vulnerable groups affected by the crisis.

Spain's social crisis around evictions and debt arise in a context of decades of government policies aggressively promoting home ownership and borrowing and inadequate efforts to ensure an appropriate and affordable stock of rental housing and sufficient investment in public housing. Irresponsible lending, unfair terms in mortgage contracts (such as exorbitant default interest rates), unscrupulous behavior by intermediaries such as real estate agencies, and the lack of oversight during the boom economic years contributed to the current situation.

The government of Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy has taken steps to address the mortgage crisis, including measures to protect temporarily certain groups against evictions; amend legal proceedings to ensure the right to contest unfair contractual obligations; and provide guidelines for debt relief and, in some circumstances, debt cancellation. The government created a Social Housing Fund, stocked by roughly 6,000 properties banks have voluntarily turned over, to offer evicted families places to live at affordable rents.

However, the criteria for benefitting from these measures are narrowly drawn, excluding many needy families and individuals. Some of the criteria are arbitrary and do not comport with international law. For example, a two-parent household with a child 3 years or younger can benefit from the moratorium on evictions, while the two-parent family with a child 4 years or older cannot. Under international law, all persons under 18 are considered children and entitled to the rights and protections laid out in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, including the right to shelter. Official data demonstrate that the measures to alleviate debt and provide affordable housing through the Social Housing Fund have benefited only a fraction of those in need.

The government has yet to reform Spain's personal insolvency laws to create an accessible, fair, and efficient mechanism for over-indebted individuals to discharge their debt. Over-indebtedness can have a deeply negative impact on fundamental rights such as the right to an adequate standard of living.

## **Incommunicado Detention**

Spain should revisit its decision during its previous UPR in 2010 to reject recommendations to review the incommunicado detention regime. Severely curtailed rights for certain suspects, including terrorism suspects, remain in place despite repeated concerns expressed by the UN Committee against Torture, UN Special Rapporteurs on torture and on counterterrorism and human rights, and the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights and the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture. The UN Human Rights Committee and the Committee against Torture have called on Spain to abrogate incommunicado detention because it may facilitate torture and constitute in and of itself a form of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment.

The Code of Criminal Procedure permits incommunicado detention for up to thirteen consecutive days. Under this regime, suspects may be held for five days in incommunicado police detention. During this

time, these detainees do not have the right to notify a third party about their detention or whereabouts; to receive visits from family members, spiritual advisors, or a doctor of their own choosing; or to communication or correspondence of any kind. Incommunicado detainees do not have the right to designate a lawyer, but must be assisted instead by a legal aid attorney. Furthermore, these detainees do not have the right to consult privately with their lawyer.

After maximum five days, a judge may order the individual released without charge, released on provisional liberty, or remand the individual into pre-trial detention. At this point, the judge may impose an additional five days of incommunicado status in pre-trial detention, and an additional three days at any time, either immediately or at a later stage.

Incommunicado detainees are held in isolation and have severely curtailed access to counsel at a critical stage in the legal proceedings against them. These detainees only see a lawyer for the first time when they are called to give an official police statement, an event that may occur after three or even five days in custody. Furthermore, they do not have the right to confer in private with their lawyers at any time, neither before nor after the statement to the police or to the judge. The prohibition of a direct, private attorney-client conference deprives the lawyer of any opportunity to collect detailed information relevant to the detainee's case, preventing the lawyer from challenging the lawfulness of the detention and from making an effective application for provisional release as long as incommunicado status is maintained.

### **Universal jurisdiction**

In March 2014, Parliament amended Spain's universal jurisdiction law to limit the ability of Spanish courts to prosecute suspects of grave international crimes committed outside of Spain. The new law introduces an extensive and complex set of requirements related to the suspect's and victims' nationality and the suspect's status in Spain that must be met before Spanish courts can assert jurisdiction. The new law places Spain in breach of certain of its international legal obligations, including under the Convention against Torture and the Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearances.

The law requires courts to assess whether cases, including ongoing cases, meet the new requirements. Spanish courts have already begun applying the new standard and have dismissed charges of crimes against humanity in at least one case involving El Salvador (the case continues with respect to other charges).

### **Recommendations**

*Regarding migration and asylum policy, Spain should:*

- Stop all summary returns to Morocco at the Ceuta and Melilla borders, and suspend all forcible returns to Morocco until that country demonstrates they are no longer at risk of beatings and other abuses upon their return and that their rights are respected;
- Ensure respect for procedural safeguards, including access to a lawyer and an interpreter for migrants detected entering the enclaves irregularly; and
- Ensure diligent investigations of allegations of excessive use of force by its own forces, including up the chain of command.

*Regarding sexual and reproductive rights, Spain should:*

- Abandon proposed changes to Spain's abortion law and ensure access to safe and legal abortion for all women and girls in the country.

*Regarding the right to peaceful assembly, Spain should:*

- Modify the draft Law on Public Security to guarantee the right to spontaneous peaceful assemblies, uphold the principle of individual responsibility, and ensure that fines or other measures to sanction unlawful behavior are strictly necessary and proportionate.

*Regarding the right to adequate housing, Spain should:*

- Adopt measures to help a broader range of individuals and families avoid evictions and secure affordable housing;
- Reform the country's personal insolvency regime to create a fair and accessible means of debt discharge.

*Regarding incommunicado detention, Spain should:*

- Abolish incommunicado detention, and ensure that all suspects in police custody have prompt access to a lawyer at the outset of detention and the right to confer in private with their lawyers.

*Regarding universal jurisdiction, Spain should:*

- Repeal Organic Law 1/2014 modifying Spain's universal jurisdiction laws and ensure that Spain fully honors its international legal obligations with respect to the investigation and prosecution of genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, torture and enforced disappearance.