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War Crimes Prosecution Watch is a bi-weekly e-newsletter that compiles official documents and articles from major news sources detailing and analyzing salient issues pertaining to the investigation and prosecution of war crimes throughout the world. To subscribe, please email warcrimewatch@pilpg.org and type "subscribe" in the subject line.

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AFRICA

NORTH AFRICA

Libya

UN extends searches on high seas off Libya for illegal arms (Star Herald)

June 4, 2022

The U.N. Security Council approved a resolution Friday extending the authorization for countries and regional organizations to inspect vessels on the high seas off the coast of Libya suspected of violating the U.N. arms embargo on the troubled north African nation.

The vote on the French-sponsored resolution was 14-0, with Russia abstaining. The brief resolution extends the authorization for inspections for a year.

The monitoring effort has been carried out since March 2020 by a European Union mission called Operation Irini, the Greek word for "peace." The EU said at the start that it would have as "its core task the implementation of the U.N. arms embargo through the use of aerial, satellite and maritime assets."

Russia's U.N. Ambassador Vassily Nebenzia said Friday that when Irini started Russia hoped the inspections would contribute to reducing illegal arms trafficking "and therefore promote the long-awaited political settlement of Libya's protracted conflict."

40 years later

"However, this never happened," he said, explaining that Operation Irini and its predecessor, Operation Sophia, have not had "any successful cases of interception of smuggled goods."

Nebenzia said Russia will monitor Irini's activities in the next 12 months and "we will focus on whether the operation is efficient in curbing the illegal arms flows and complies with the Law of The Sea."

In its first two years of activity, Operation Irini said it investigated more than 6,200 ships, conducted almost 250 visits (also

known as friendly approaches) onboard merchant vessels, and 22 inspections. One illegal cargo ship was seized, preventing an illegal export of jet fuel for military aircrafts to Libya, it said.

Irini said it regularly monitors transport activities at 16 Libyan ports and oil facilities and 25 airports and landing strips.

Oil-rich Libya plunged into turmoil after a NATO-backed uprising in 2011 toppled dictator Moammar Gadhafi, who was later killed. It then became divided between rival governments — one in the east, backed by military commander Khalifa Hifter, and a U.N.-supported administration in the capital, Tripoli. Each side is supported by different militias and foreign powers.

In April 2019, Hifter and his forces, backed by Egypt and the United Arab Emirates, launched an offensive to try and capture Tripoli. His campaign collapsed after Turkey stepped up its military support for the U.N.-supported government with hundreds of troops and thousands of Syrian mercenaries.

An October 2020 cease-fire deal led to an agreement on a transitional government in early February 2021 and elections were scheduled for last Dec. 24 aimed at unifying the country. But they were canceled and the country now has rival governments with two Libyans claiming to be prime minister.

Human Rights Council to Hold its Fiftieth Regular Session from 13 June to 8 July 2022 (United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner)

June 8, 2022

The Human Rights Council will hold its fiftieth regular session from 13 June to 8 July 2022 at the Palais des Nations in Geneva.

Michelle Bachelet, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, will address the opening on Monday, 13 June at 10 a.m. with an update on her annual report, to be followed by an interactive dialogue on the update on her report on the central role of the State in responding to pandemics and other health emergencies and the socio-economic consequences thereof in advancing sustainable development and the realisation of all human rights.

The President of the Human Rights Council, Federico Villegas, Permanent Representative of Argentina to the United Nations Office at Geneva, will open the session in room XX. At an organizational meeting, he said that the Council will hold a high-level event to mark the occasion of the fiftieth session of the Council on 15 June, to provide an opportunity for participants to reflect on the achievements made as well as the lessons learned since the first session held in June 2006. The President of the seventy-sixth session of the General Assembly will address the event, and Secretary-General Antonio Guterres will participate via video message. Other speakers include Jan Eliasson, President of the sixtieth session of the General Assembly and former Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations, and Estela Carlotto, President of the Association of Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo (Buenos Aires, Argentina).

During the session, the Council will hold 27 interactive dialogues with Special Procedure mandate holders and mechanisms, and nine interactive dialogues with the High Commissioner.

The Council will hold eight panel discussions, including on the root causes of human rights violations and abuses against Rohingya Muslims and other minorities in Myanmar; on menstrual hygiene management, human rights and gender equality; on good governance in the promotion and protection of human rights during and after the COVID-19 pandemic; on the human rights of people in vulnerable situations in the context of climate change; and on countering the negative impact of disinformation on the enjoyment and realisation of human rights.

The annual full-day discussion on the human rights of women will be divided into two panel discussions focused on exploring the nexus between climate change and violence against women and girls through a human rights lens and on human rights-based and gender-responsive care and support systems. The annual thematic panel discussion on technical cooperation and capacity-building will focus on the theme of the effect of technical cooperation on the full and effective participation of women in decision-making and in public life and on the elimination of violence, with a view to achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls.

The Council is also scheduled to adopt the last 13 outcomes of the Universal Periodic Review's third cycle: Myanmar, Togo, Syria, Iceland, Venezuela, Zimbabwe, Lithuania, Uganda, Timor-Leste, Republic of Moldova, South Sudan, Haiti and Sudan.

First Week of the Session

The Council will start on Monday, 13 June with a presentation by the High Commissioner for Human Rights of an update on her annual report, to be followed by an interactive dialogue with the High Commissioner on the update on her report on the central role of the State in responding to pandemics and other health emergencies and the socio-economic consequences thereof in advancing sustainable development and the realisation of all human rights. In the afternoon, the Council will hold

an interactive dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea, followed by an interactive dialogue with the Independent, International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and in Israel.

On Tuesday, 14 June, the Council will hold an interactive dialogue with the High Commissioner on her oral update on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, and an interactive dialogue on her oral update on her annual report. Wednesday, 15 June will start with a panel discussion on human rights violations against Rohingya and other minorities in Myanmar. The interactive dialogue with the High Commissioner on her annual report will then conclude, and will be followed by an enhanced interactive dialogue on the High Commissioner's report on Sudan and an interactive dialogue on her oral update on Afghanistan.

The dialogue on Afghanistan will conclude on Thursday, 15 June, and will be followed by separate interactive dialogues on the High Commissioner's oral update on Nicaragua, and on her oral update on the situation in Mariupol in Ukraine. There will then be a presentation of the Secretary-General's interim report on the situation of human rights in Iran. Separate interactive dialogues will follow with the Special Rapporteur on sexual orientation and gender identity, and with the Working Group on discrimination against women.

On Friday, 17 June, the Council will conclude its dialogue with the Working Group on discrimination against women, to be followed by separate interactive dialogues with the Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, and the Special Rapporteur on the elimination of discrimination against persons affected by leprosy and their family members.

Second Week of the Session

The Council will start the second week with separate interactive dialogues with the Special Rapporteurs on violence against women, its causes and consequences; on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health; and on the independence of judges and lawyers. On Tuesday, 21 June, it will hold separate interactive dialogues with the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children; and with the Working Group on the issue of human rights and transnational corporations and other business enterprises. In the afternoon, it will hold a panel discussion on menstrual hygiene management, human rights and gender equality.

The Council will hold a panel discussion on good governance in the promotion and protection of human rights during and after the COVID-19 pandemic on Wednesday, 22 June in the morning. This will be followed by separate interactive dialogues with the Special Rapporteurs on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions and on the right to education.

On Thursday, 23 June, the Council will hold separate interactive dialogues with the Special Rapporteurs on the promotion and protection of human rights in the context of climate change and on the human rights of migrants. This will be followed by an interactive dialogue with the Independent Expert on human rights and international solidarity, which will conclude the following day. Also on Friday, 24 June, the Council will hold separate interactive dialogues with the Special Rapporteurs on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression and on extreme poverty and human rights.

Third Week of the Session

The third week will start with the annual full-day discussion on the human rights of women's rights with a morning panel discussion focused on exploring the nexus between climate change and violence against women and girls through a human rights lens; and an afternoon panel on human rights-based and gender-responsive care and support systems. In between, the Council will hold an interactive dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons, followed by the presentation of reports under agenda item three on the promotion and protection of all human rights, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development.

Tuesday, 28 June will see a panel discussion in the morning on the human rights of people in vulnerable situations in the context of climate change and a high-level discussion in the afternoon on countering the negative impact of disinformation on the enjoyment and realisation of human rights. In between, the Council will start its consideration of agenda item four on human rights situations that require the Council's attention and hold an interactive dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Belarus.

On Wednesday, the Council will hold separate interactive dialogues with the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Burundi; the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic; the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar; and with the High Commissioner on her report on the situation of human rights in Venezuela, which will conclude on Thursday. Also on Thursday, the Council will hold an interactive dialogue with the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia, followed by the presentation of reports by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on civilian casualties in Syria and by the Forum on Business and Human Rights.

Thursday afternoon and all day Friday will be devoted to the consideration of the outcomes of the Universal Periodic Review of Myanmar, Togo, Syria, Iceland, Venezuela, Zimbabwe, Lithuania, Uganda, Timor-Leste, Republic of Moldova, South Sudan, Haiti and Sudan.

Fourth Week of the Council

The Council will start the fourth week with the annual thematic panel discussion on technical cooperation and capacity building, which will focus on the theme of the effect of technical cooperation on the full and effective participation of women in decision-making and in public life and on the elimination of violence, with a view to achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls. The rest of Monday, 4 July will be devoted to the Universal Periodic Review.

Tuesday, 5 July will see an interactive dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. This will be followed by an interactive dialogue on the High Commissioner's oral presentation on Ukraine and on the interim report of the Secretary-General on human rights in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol. On Wednesday, the Council will hold separate interactive dialogues with the Independent Expert on the situation of human rights in the Central African Republic, and with the Independent Fact-Finding Mission on Libya. This will be followed by the opening of agenda item 10 on technical assistance and capacity building and the presentation of the oral update on Georgia.

The Council will take action on draft resolutions and decisions on 7 and 8 July, appoint a number of members of Special Procedures, and will then close the session.

The Human Rights Council

The Human Rights Council is an inter-governmental body within the United Nations system, made up of 47 States, which are responsible for strengthening the promotion and protection of human rights around the globe. The Council was created by the United Nations General Assembly on 15 March 2006 with the main purpose of addressing situations of human rights violations and making recommendations on them.

The composition of the Council at its fiftieth session is as follows: Argentina (2024); Armenia (2022); Benin (2024); Bolivia (2023); Brazil (2022); Cameroon (2024); China (2023); Côte d'Ivoire (2023); Cuba (2023); Czech Republic (2023); Eritrea (2024); Finland (2024); France (2023); Gabon (2023); Gambia (2024); Germany (2022); Honduras (2024); India (2024); Indonesia (2022); Japan (2022); Kazakhstan (2024); Libya (2022); Lithuania (2024); Luxembourg (2024); Malawi (2023); Malaysia (2024); Marshall Islands (2022); Mauritania (2022); Mexico (2023); Montenegro (2024); Namibia (2022); Nepal (2023); Netherlands (2022); Pakistan (2023); Paraguay (2024); Poland (2022); Qatar (2024); Republic of Korea (2022); Senegal (2023); Somalia (2024); Sudan (2022); Ukraine (2023); United Arab Emirates (2024); United Kingdom (2023); United States (2024); Uzbekistan (2023); and Venezuela (2022).

Federico Villegas (Argentina) is the President. The Vice-Presidents are Andranik Hovhannisyan (Armenia); Muhammadou M.O. Kah (Gambia); and Katharina Stasch (Germany). Ulugbek Lapasov (Uzbekistan) is the Vice-President and Rapporteur.

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CENTRAL AFRICA

Central African Republic

**Official Website of the International Criminal Court
ICC Public Documents - Cases: Central African Republic**

Security Challenges Threaten to Derail Democratic Strides in Central African Region, Briefers Tell Security Council (United Nations)

June 8, 2022

Marking both democratic strides and worsening security conditions, the situation in

the Central African region remains something of a mixed picture, senior officials told the Security Council today, voicing particular concern over terrorist attacks, population displacement and the resurgence of old armed groups in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Martha Ama Akyaa Pobee, Assistant Secretary-General for Africa in the Departments of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and Peace Operations, noted that while several countries of the region are on track to hold elections in 2022 and 2023, notable challenges threaten to derail those efforts. In Cameroon, the crisis emanating from Boko Haram splinter groups and displaced persons fleeing neighbouring countries has only grown, with the situations in the country's north-west and south-west regions of particular concern as violence flares. In Chad – which is undergoing a transition following political turmoil in 2021 – “the most important challenges lie ahead” as constitutional talks begin. Meanwhile, heinous attacks continue against civilians and Government troops in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and bilateral relations between Kinshasa and its neighbours are deteriorating.

Gilberto Da Piedade Verissimo, President of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), describing the political and security situation in Central Africa as generally stable, highlighted some positive developments. The rule of law continues to be strengthened, with democratic governance and the promotion and protection of human rights now embedded in the institutional landscape of the region's countries. However, he deplored the deteriorating situation on the border between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda, caused by a resurgence of the “March 23 Movement” – known as M23 – which has sparked the largescale movement of displaced persons and mutual accusations of support to rebel groups by both countries. Noting that initiatives are under way in the region to reduce tensions and bring those States to the negotiating table, he said non-State armed groups are also present in north-west and south-west Cameroon.

Meanwhile, civil society representative Jeanne-Danielle Nicole Nlate pointed out that numerous conflicts across Central Africa have led to instability, low levels of regional integration and cooperation, weak State institutions, corruption, poverty and disenfranchisement. Old conflicts have resurfaced in the Great Lakes region, particularly affecting Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Chad and Cameroon. In some cases, these conflicts have led to tensions between neighbours accused of stoking such conflicts, as was the case recently with Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Against that backdrop, she said civil society groups have played an important role in promoting peace and respect for human rights and she called on the United Nations and its partners to provide political, material and financial support to their work.

As Council members took the floor, many expressed support for regional countries' democratic efforts and attempts to combat conflict and armed groups, while also echoing the briefers' concerns.

Gabon's representative, also speaking for Ghana and Kenya, welcomed the measures taken by several States in the subregion to prepare for upcoming elections in 2022 and 2023. Noting that national dialogue can reduce social and political tensions, he also welcomed Chad's organization of a dialogue in Doha and expressed hope that the platform will open the way to an inclusive peace agreement. Additionally, he welcomed the recently improved diplomatic relations between Burundi and Rwanda; Cameroon's adoption of a measure to consolidate the decentralization process and build the capacity of local institutions; and the ongoing process in Nairobi to fight against the insecurity generated by armed groups in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. As well, he echoed the briefers' concerns over emerging bilateral tensions and the impacts of climate change, especially on already serious humanitarian challenges facing the region.

The representative of Norway called attention to the annual list of the world's most neglected displacement crises – recently published by the Norwegian Refugee Council – of which three of the top five are in the Central African region. For a second year running, the Democratic Republic of the Congo “tops” the list, while in Chad a food emergency was recently declared. She also expressed concern about the situations in north-west and south-west Cameroon and about the grave risk posed by piracy. “Moving forward, the region should remain in the driver's seat, with already commendable efforts being scaled up,” she stressed, describing the security situation around the Lake Chad Basin as alarming and warning that the impacts of climate change are only worsening the situation.

Mexico's delegate acknowledged progress made towards regional governance and political dialogue in some Central African countries, while noting that flashpoints of violence, precarious economic recovery and the effects of climate change call for international solidarity. To attain progress towards stability in the region, he called for focused efforts to fight the illicit flow of weapons, the creation of conditions conducive to opposition groups freely expressing their opinions, and a strengthened response to urgent humanitarian crises. He added that the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa (UNOCA) must have solid leadership to carry out its tasks and voiced his hope that a new Special Representative will be swiftly appointed to succeed François Louncény Fall, whose mandate recently ended.

Also speaking were representatives of United Kingdom, United States, France, India, United Arab Emirates, Brazil, Russian Federation, Ireland, China and Albania.

The meeting began at 10:02 a.m. and ended at 12:16 p.m.

Briefings

MARTHA AMA AKYAA POBEE, Assistant Secretary-General for Africa in the Departments of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and Peace Operations, introduced the latest report of the Secretary-General (document S/2022/436) and paid tribute to the outgoing Special Representative of the Secretary-General, François Louncény Fall, whose mandate ended last week. Outlining the latest developments, she said several countries in the subregion are preparing for crucial elections — including the Republic of the Congo, Angola, Sao Tome and Principe and Equatorial Guinea — while presidential elections are expected in 2023 in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Gabon and Equatorial Guinea. Chad is also expected to hold elections at the end of its transitional process. “All stakeholders must work towards conditions conducive to free, fair and peaceful elections, in line with democratic processes,” she stressed, noting that the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa (UNOCA) is supporting such efforts.

However, she went on to say that some countries in the subregion continue to face challenges that risk derailing their political processes and impacting their neighbours and the wider region. In Cameroon, the crisis emanating from Boko Haram splinter groups and displaced persons fleeing neighbouring countries has only grown, with the situations in the country’s north-west and south-west regions of particular concern as violence flares. Urging the international community to step up support to national efforts to end that crisis, she also noted that in Chad “the most important challenges lie ahead”. She expressed hope that the Doha dialogue process will yield a disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process in line with international standards. Expressing concern about the recent killing of some 100 people in the country, she called for efforts to address the root causes of instability, adding that UNOCA is working to strengthen the coalition of civil society organizations in support of peace and stability in the region.

“The Central African Region continues to face persistent security challenges that are best addressed through regional cooperation,” she continued. However, heinous attacks on civilians by armed groups in the Democratic Republic of the Congo are harming bilateral relations between States and contributing to the rise of hate speech. She welcomed the mediating role of the President of Angola in that regard and urged all parties to lay down their arms and join the Nairobi diplomatic process. Central Africa also remains one of the world’s regions most severely affected by climate change, as manifested by clashes between farmers, herders and fishermen in several countries. Highlighting that designated terrorist groups and affiliated and splinter groups are exploiting those challenges, she said UNOCA continues to work with countries and other partners to increase coherence in their responses to violent extremism and in support of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration processes.

Noting that maritime security also remains a key challenge, she called for initiatives on that front to be further strengthened. In that vein, she welcomed the Council’s recent adoption of resolution 2634 (2022) addressing the situation in the Gulf of Guinea. These issues and others were discussed at the recent ministerial-level meeting of the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa. Among several events, ministers and heads of delegations exchanged views on Chad and adopted a declaration renewing their support for that country’s transition process. Also adopted was a declaration reaffirming support for the Central African Republic’s national reconciliation and reconstruction efforts. UNOCA will continue to support those efforts, providing support for capacity-building and the participation of civil society — especially women’s groups — in political processes throughout the region. Noting that UNOCA has continued to demonstrate the utility of United Nations regional offices in the fields of preventive diplomacy and conflict prevention, she stressed that it will continue to do so under the guidance of a new Special Representative of the Secretary-General when one is appointed.

GILBERTO DA PIEDADE VERISSIMO, President of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), described the political and security situation in Central Africa as generally stable. Among the recent positive developments, he noted that the security situation at the borders between Rwanda, Uganda and Burundi had improved, as well as diplomatic relations between these two countries and Rwanda. He also called attention to the recent holding of the first permanent joint cross-border security meeting between Gabon and Cameroon, as well as a technical meeting to verify their maritime border between Angola and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

While observing that no major incidents occurred on borders between ECCAS member States during the period under review, he nevertheless deplored the deteriorating situation on the border between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda by the “March 23 Movement” group — known as M23 — which was thought to have been defeated in 2013. Those events sparked the largescale movement of displaced persons and mutual accusations of support to rebel groups by both countries. Initiatives are now under way in the region to reduce tensions and bring those States to the negotiating table, in an effort to reach a solution to the challenges posed by armed groups on their border.

Against that backdrop, he recalled that the Democratic Republic of the Congo declared a “state of siege” in the affected region and is working with Ugandan armed forces to attempt to disrupt the activities of armed groups. Those rebel groups are also present in north-west and south-west Cameroon, he said, reporting that the presence of rival factions of Boko Haram, Allied

Democratic Forces and other groups demonstrate the significant presence of terrorist groups across the region.

Noting that the rule of law continues to be strengthened in the Central African region, he said democratic governance and the promotion and protection of human rights are now part of the institutional landscape of the countries of the region, despite repeated violations committed by armed groups. However, he expressed concern about the resurgence of intercommunity conflicts, accompanied by hate speech often used for electoral purposes. This constituted a threat to the security and stability of States, particularly in Chad, Cameroon, the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In addition, cattle migration for criminal purposes and maritime piracy were also among the threats in the region.

He also reported that all States in the region, with one exception, have signed the Protocol of the African Peer Review Mechanism. He welcomed the fact that all States respected the timetable for their elections in 2021, adding that it is “a clear sign of collective ownership of our shared values and the deepening roots of democracy in the region”. Nonetheless, he expressed concern about growing mistrust between some stakeholders, as well as the postponement of the inclusive national dialogue in Chad and the ongoing discussions in the Central African Republic with a view to amending the Constitution — particularly in regard to article 35 on the number of presidential terms allowed — which threaten to raise tensions in an already fragile country.

JEANNE-DANIELLE NICOLE NLATE, Vice-President of the Coalition des Organisations de la Société Civile d’Afrique Centrale pour la Préservation de la Paix, la Prévention des Conflits, la Résolution et la Transformation des Crises, pointed out that varied conflicts across Central Africa have led to instability, low levels of regional integration and cooperation, weak State institutions, corruption, poverty and disenfranchisement across the region. Old conflicts have resurfaced in the Great Lakes region, particularly affecting Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Chad and Cameroon. In some cases, these conflicts have led to tensions between neighbours accused of stoking such conflicts, as was the case recently with Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Further, the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated fragilities and vulnerabilities across the populations of Central Africa.

Against that backdrop, she said that civil-society organizations have played an important role in promoting peace, respect for human rights and the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000). Expressing concern over the human-rights situation in Central Africa, she underscored that women are most affected by violations, with their rights to life, fair legal proceedings and freedom of expression and opinion being most abused. This hierarchy of rights demonstrates that people in the subregion are concerned about strategic rather than practical needs, she said, stressing the importance of respecting their dignity. Civil society is working to address these issues, and she welcomed the support provided by ECCAS and its partners — particularly UNOCA and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) — in allowing the Coalition to operate and build capacity towards this end.

She went on to detail the actions conducted by civil society on the ground, including observing elections, defending the rights of those affected by violence, providing support to refugees and internally displaced persons, advocating for the free movement of goods and persons throughout Central Africa and promoting entrepreneurship. However, civil society faces challenges in the region that prevent it from fully playing its role, including lack of financial resources, weak institutional capacity and a civic space that is closed, restricted or suppressed. Noting that Governments often consider civil-society organizations as the opposition, she called on the United Nations and its partners to provide political, material and financial support to such organizations so that they can continue their important work.

Statements

JAMES KARIUKI (United Kingdom), underscoring that the ongoing crises in the north-west and south-west regions of Cameroon require urgent attention, noted that the United Kingdom has given \$25 million of humanitarian aid over the last five years. Inclusive, peaceful and credible political processes are critical for building and sustaining peace in the subregion. UNOCA has an important role to play, he said, reiterating her country’s support to Chad’s ongoing transition to civilian and constitutional rule. He also voiced concern about violence and human rights violations still being committed in the Central African Republic — including by Wagner Group mercenaries — which continue to compound an already acute humanitarian situation. The activities of all security actors operating in the country should be coordinated by the Government, he stressed, while pointing out that the Russian Federation’s illegal and unjustified war in Ukraine is exacerbating economic pressures and food insecurity in Central Africa and beyond.

MICHEL XAVIER BIAN (Gabon), also speaking for Ghana and Kenya, welcomed the measures taken by several States in the subregion to prepare for upcoming elections in 2022 and 2023. Such elections provide an opportunity to consolidate democratic gains and authorities should take all measures necessary to organize free, credible, transparent and inclusive elections. Noting that national dialogue can reduce social and political tensions, he also welcomed Chad’s organization of a dialogue in Doha and expressed hope that this platform will open the way to an inclusive peace agreement. Additionally, he welcomed improved diplomatic relations between Burundi and Rwanda; Cameroon’s adoption of a measure to consolidate the decentralization process and build the capacity of local institutions; and the ongoing process in Nairobi to fight against the

insecurity generated by armed groups in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

He expressed concern, however, over emerging tensions between that country and Rwanda, reiterating the African Union's calls for resolving differences through diplomatic means with the support of regional and subregional mechanisms. He also detailed the challenges Africa is facing, including terrorism and violent extremism, cross-border crime, the persistence of armed groups, maritime insecurity, exploitation of natural resources and intercommunity violence. Central African States are aware of these issues, and efforts to strengthen ECCAS' peace and security architecture can reduce the risk of crises spreading across the subregion. More so, climate change is exacerbating humanitarian crises and eroding security across Central Africa, he said, spotlighting the need to preserve the rainforest in the Congo Basin. As increasing extreme weather events are impacting agricultural production, the international community must respect its commitments to finance policies for adaptation and mitigation.

JUAN GÓMEZ ROBLEDO VERDUZCO (Mexico), while acknowledging progress made towards regional governance and political dialogue in some Central African countries, noted that flashpoints of violence, precarious economic recovery and the effects of climate change call for international solidarity. He called on UNOCA to continue supporting the transition in Chad; contributing to a political solution for the violence prevailing in parts of Cameroon; and supporting the organization of municipal elections in the Central African Republic, also spotlighting that country's recent abolition of the death penalty. To attain progress towards stability in Central Africa, he called for focused efforts to fight the illicit arms trafficking flowing towards and within the region; to create the appropriate conditions for opposition groups to freely express their viewpoints and participate in the public space; and to respond to the urgent humanitarian situation in the region to prevent greater tragedies. He added that UNOCA must have solid leadership to carry out its tasks, expressing hope that a new Special Representative for the region will be appointed as soon as possible.

RICHARD M. MILLS (United States) spotlighted the climate crisis and food insecurity, two issues that are exacerbating existing challenges in the Central African region. Describing the former as a "threat multiplier", he encouraged UNOCA to take climate into account, in line with its mandate. Some 2.2 million people in the Central African Republic are projected to experience high levels of food insecurity in 2022 due to conflict and population displacement. Those challenges have been worsened by the Russian Federation's illegal invasion of Ukraine. He underlined the importance of a peaceful, timely transition to a civilian Government in Chad and urged all combatants in Cameroon to help pave the way for a national dialogue without preconditions. In addition, he urged the Government of the Central African Republic and all security actors in that country to deconflict their actions with MINUSCA and ensure their actions do not harm civilians. Condemning the actions of terrorist groups associated with Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), also known as Da'esh, in the region, he also voiced concern about the activities of the Moscow-based Wagner Group, which threaten the safety and security of peacekeepers and prevent them from protecting civilians.

SHERAZ GASRI (France) expressed her hope that the ongoing talks in Doha will help pave the way for a peaceful future in Chad. She expressed support for mediation and reform initiatives aimed at a resolution of Cameroon's political crisis. In Burundi, progress has been made in protecting human rights, leading the European Union to lift financial restrictions; such steps must continue. Efforts must also be redoubled throughout the region to protect women and other civilians, she said, condemning attacks by non-State armed groups on civilian populations and United Nations personnel. Hailing the creation by ECCAS of a network of women mediators, as well as the promotion of young people's role in peace processes, she said that same inclusive spirit should guide all upcoming elections throughout the region. Regional integration must also be strengthened. In that vein, she urged countries to extend their cooperation in the fight against climate change and the illegal exploitation of natural resources, while recalling the creation by France and other partners of the Tropical Forest Preservation Alliance.

RAVINDRA RAGUTTAHALLI (India) expressing hope that upcoming elections in Angola, Equatorial Guinea, Sao Tome and Principe and the Congo will further deepen democracy in the region, with greater participation of women. Despite the positive trends, complex political and security challenges still exist in the region, he said, stressing that inclusive political processes, including electoral reforms, are necessary to strengthen political institutions. On the security front, terrorist groups such as Islamic State-West Africa Province have continued to expand their activities, mainly in the Lake Chad region, he said, also strongly condemning terror attacks perpetrated by terrorist groups such as Boko Haram and the Lord's Resistance Army. Noting the impacts of the Ukraine conflict and climate change on the region, he stressed that no artificial link should be drawn between climate change and security-related issues without any firm scientific basis. He also noted that his country has contributed credits worth \$2 billion for projects in critical sectors such as agriculture, transport, power and water supply.

GHASAQ YOUSIF ABDALLA SHAHEEN (United Arab Emirates) stressed the need to follow a comprehensive approach to tackle security threats that undermine stability and affect regional development and economic integration, including cross-border and regional ones such as organized crime, extremism, terrorism and piracy. On that point, she stressed the need to address maritime insecurity in the Gulf of Guinea, which is a strategic imperative for the economy and security of the region. Further, it is critical to continue promoting inclusive political dialogue in non-mission settings and coordinate with local

actors to consolidate peace, resolve tensions and prevent or mitigate political crises. She went on to underscore the importance of understanding the impacts of — and potential solutions to — the repercussions of climate change in Central Africa, welcoming UNOCA's initiatives towards this end. Also highlighting the need for continued international support to affected countries, she reported that her country provided around \$55 million between 2016 and 2022 to help alleviate suffering in the region.

JOÃO GENÉSIO DE ALMEIDA FILHO (Brazil) cited the numerous positive developments in the Central African region, including the peaceful transfer of power in Sao Tome and Principe, regional elections in several countries and the efforts of the Government of Burundi to normalize relations with its neighbours and with the international community. Among other things, he expressed hope that the pre-dialogue between political actors from Chad in Doha will allow for the convening of an inclusive national dialogue. The Central African region faces multidimensional and cross-border threats to peace and security, particularly terrorism, including the presence of ISIL and Boko Haram. Further, the situation in Cameroon is concerning. That country is not only directly affected by the violence in the Lake Chad Basin, but also has been facing protracted conflicts in its English-speaking regions, he added. Turning to social-economic developments, he pointed out that rising food prices may plunge large numbers of people in the region into acute poverty amid the recovery from COVID-19.

ANNA M. EVSTIGNEEVA (Russian Federation) said the situation in Central Africa is characterized by terrorist threats, conflicts and a lack of sufficient military capacity to protect civilians. Radical Islam is becoming more popular with the population and terrorist groups are carrying out serious attacks. Calling for strengthened cooperation between regional States, she welcomed UNOCA's work, while also voicing concern about a high number of raids on commercial vessels in the Gulf of Guinea. More monitoring and capacity-building is needed, as are better early warning systems to detect potentially dangerous phenomenon in maritime communications. Welcoming new anti-piracy initiatives and spotlighting the Russian Federation's contributions in that area, she went on to reject politicized statements made by delegations today that blame Moscow for the global food crisis. In fact, that crisis existed prior to the start of the situation in Ukraine and has been worsened by the introduction of unilateral coercive measures by Western countries. In addition, Western States' notions of governance — imposed around the world through military interventions — have also worsened those conditions for decades, she said.

GERALDINE BYRNE NASON (Ireland) said the national dialogue in Chad was key to its political transition. Reiterating the call for the link between climate change and security to be appropriately recognized in the Security Council's work, she highlighted the effects of climate change on the stability of the region. Such effects included a rise in intracommunal clashes due to water shortages and floods and drought leading to significant population displacement. She went on to express concern about the dire humanitarian situation, increasing food insecurity, and higher rates of sexual and gender-based violence in the region, urging all parties to ensure the safety and security of humanitarian personnel and unhindered access to humanitarian assistance. Turning to human rights, she noted that violations and abuses against civilians in Cameroon are persisting, with 700,000 students having been deprived of their right to education due to attacks against schools.

TRINE SKARBOEVIK HEIMERBACK (Norway) called attention to the recently published annual list of the Norwegian Refugee Council on the world's most neglected displacement crises. Out of five crises, three were in the Central African region: the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Cameroon, and Chad. Adding that the situation in the Central African Republic also remains a challenge, she stressed that while preventive diplomacy rarely reaches the headlines, it serves a critical purpose in such cases. For a second year running, the Democratic Republic of the Congo "tops" the world's most neglected displacement crises, while in Chad a food emergency was recently declared. She also expressed continued concern about the situations in north-west and south-west Cameroon. As well, piracy remains a grave risk. "Moving forward, the region should remain in the driver's seat, with already commendable efforts being scaled up," she stressed, describing the security situation around the Lake Chad Basin as alarming due to the activities of armed groups, terrorists and violent extremists. Meanwhile, the impacts of climate change are only worsening the situation, she added.

DAI BING (China) welcomed the improved security situation in the Central African Republic; promotion of national dialogue and decentralization in Cameroon; advancement of a national dialogue in Chad; and the ongoing preparations for upcoming elections in several Central African countries. He called on the international community and UNOCA to continue supporting regional States in solving their own problems, strengthening national governance and building capacity in accordance with their specific situations. Expressing concern over the security situation in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, he urged increased regional trust and cooperation, along with increased provision of international resources and assistance to counter-terrorism efforts. Further, developed countries must honour their climate-finance commitments and enhance the resilience of regional countries to adapt to climate shocks. He added that the international community must ensure adequate humanitarian funding to the region and not reduce investment in or attention to Central Africa due to other crises.

ALBANA DAUTLLARI (Albania), President of the Council for June, speaking in her national capacity, commended the positive developments in the region, including improved relations between Burundi and its neighbours, as well as the progress achieved domestically in safeguarding civil and political rights. However, she expressed concern about reports of attacks,

torture and disappearances of political opponents allegedly attributable to law enforcement authorities. In Cameroon, dialogue is being hindered by tensions in the north-west and south-west regions, where political violence persists and clashes are still raging between State forces and non-State armed forces, she said, condemning attacks on civilians and humanitarian staff. While welcoming efforts towards enhancing a national dialogue in Chad and the republican dialogue in the Central African Republic, she noted that the security situation in the latter remains highly volatile. In addition, climate security has a deep and sizable impact on the region's stability, she said, pointing to tensions among communities, the rising number of displaced people and the increase of those in urgent need of humanitarian assistance. She also highlighted the socioeconomic impact of both the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine, which might be fuelling popular frustration in the region.

Martha Ama Akyaa Pobee, Assistant Secretary-General for Africa in the Departments of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and Peace Operations, noted that while several countries of the region are on track to hold elections in 2022 and 2023, notable challenges threaten to derail those efforts. In Cameroon, the crisis emanating from Boko Haram splinter groups and displaced persons fleeing neighbouring countries has only grown, with the situations in the country's north-west and south-west regions of particular concern as violence flares. In Chad – which is undergoing a transition following political turmoil in 2021 – “the most important challenges lie ahead” as constitutional talks begin. Meanwhile, heinous attacks continue against civilians and Government troops in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and bilateral relations between Kinshasa and its neighbours are deteriorating.

Gilberto Da Piedade Verissimo, President of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), describing the political and security situation in Central Africa as generally stable, highlighted some positive developments. The rule of law continues to be strengthened, with democratic governance and the promotion and protection of human rights now embedded in the institutional landscape of the region's countries. However, he deplored the deteriorating situation on the border between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda, caused by a resurgence of the “March 23 Movement” – known as M23 – which has sparked the largescale movement of displaced persons and mutual accusations of support to rebel groups by both countries. Noting that initiatives are under way in the region to reduce tensions and bring those States to the negotiating table, he said non-State armed groups are also present in north-west and south-west Cameroon.

Meanwhile, civil society representative Jeanne-Danielle Nicole Nlate pointed out that numerous conflicts across Central Africa have led to instability, low levels of regional integration and cooperation, weak State institutions, corruption, poverty and disenfranchisement. Old conflicts have resurfaced in the Great Lakes region, particularly affecting Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Chad and Cameroon. In some cases, these conflicts have led to tensions between neighbours accused of stoking such conflicts, as was the case recently with Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Against that backdrop, she said civil society groups have played an important role in promoting peace and respect for human rights and she called on the United Nations and its partners to provide political, material and financial support to their work.

As Council members took the floor, many expressed support for regional countries' democratic efforts and attempts to combat conflict and armed groups, while also echoing the briefers' concerns.

Gabon's representative, also speaking for Ghana and Kenya, welcomed the measures taken by several States in the subregion to prepare for upcoming elections in 2022 and 2023. Noting that national dialogue can reduce social and political tensions, he also welcomed Chad's organization of a dialogue in Doha and expressed hope that the platform will open the way to an inclusive peace agreement. Additionally, he welcomed the recently improved diplomatic relations between Burundi and Rwanda; Cameroon's adoption of a measure to consolidate the decentralization process and build the capacity of local institutions; and the ongoing process in Nairobi to fight against the insecurity generated by armed groups in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. As well, he echoed the briefers' concerns over emerging bilateral tensions and the impacts of climate change, especially on already serious humanitarian challenges facing the region.

The representative of Norway called attention to the annual list of the world's most neglected displacement crises – recently published by the Norwegian Refugee Council – of which three of the top five are in the Central African region. For a second year running, the Democratic Republic of the Congo “tops” the list, while in Chad a food emergency was recently declared. She also expressed concern about the situations in north-west and south-west Cameroon and about the grave risk posed by piracy. “Moving forward, the region should remain in the driver's seat, with already commendable efforts being scaled up,” she stressed, describing the security situation around the Lake Chad Basin as alarming and warning that the impacts of climate change are only worsening the situation.

Mexico's delegate acknowledged progress made towards regional governance and political dialogue in some Central African countries, while noting that flashpoints of violence, precarious economic recovery and the effects of climate change call for international solidarity. To attain progress towards stability in the region, he called for focused efforts to fight the illicit flow of weapons, the creation of conditions conducive to opposition groups freely expressing their opinions, and a strengthened response to urgent humanitarian crises. He added that the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa (UNOCA) must have solid leadership to carry out its tasks and voiced his hope that a new Special Representative will be swiftly appointed to succeed François Louncény Fall, whose mandate recently ended.

Also speaking were representatives of United Kingdom, United States, France, India, United Arab Emirates, Brazil, Russian Federation, Ireland, China and Albania.

The meeting began at 10:02 a.m. and ended at 12:16 p.m.

Briefings

MARTHA AMA AKYAA POBEE, Assistant Secretary-General for Africa in the Departments of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and Peace Operations, introduced the latest report of the Secretary-General (document S/2022/436) and paid tribute to the outgoing Special Representative of the Secretary-General, François Louncény Fall, whose mandate ended last week. Outlining the latest developments, she said several countries in the subregion are preparing for crucial elections — including the Republic of the Congo, Angola, Sao Tome and Principe and Equatorial Guinea — while presidential elections are expected in 2023 in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Gabon and Equatorial Guinea. Chad is also expected to hold elections at the end of its transitional process. “All stakeholders must work towards conditions conducive to free, fair and peaceful elections, in line with democratic processes,” she stressed, noting that the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa (UNOCA) is supporting such efforts.

However, she went on to say that some countries in the subregion continue to face challenges that risk derailing their political processes and impacting their neighbours and the wider region. In Cameroon, the crisis emanating from Boko Haram splinter groups and displaced persons fleeing neighbouring countries has only grown, with the situations in the country’s north-west and south-west regions of particular concern as violence flares. Urging the international community to step up support to national efforts to end that crisis, she also noted that in Chad “the most important challenges lie ahead”. She expressed hope that the Doha dialogue process will yield a disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process in line with international standards. Expressing concern about the recent killing of some 100 people in the country, she called for efforts to address the root causes of instability, adding that UNOCA is working to strengthen the coalition of civil society organizations in support of peace and stability in the region.

“The Central African Region continues to face persistent security challenges that are best addressed through regional cooperation,” she continued. However, heinous attacks on civilians by armed groups in the Democratic Republic of the Congo are harming bilateral relations between States and contributing to the rise of hate speech. She welcomed the mediating role of the President of Angola in that regard and urged all parties to lay down their arms and join the Nairobi diplomatic process. Central Africa also remains one of the world’s regions most severely affected by climate change, as manifested by clashes between farmers, herders and fishermen in several countries. Highlighting that designated terrorist groups and affiliated and splinter groups are exploiting those challenges, she said UNOCA continues to work with countries and other partners to increase coherence in their responses to violent extremism and in support of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration processes.

Noting that maritime security also remains a key challenge, she called for initiatives on that front to be further strengthened. In that vein, she welcomed the Council’s recent adoption of resolution 2634 (2022) addressing the situation in the Gulf of Guinea. These issues and others were discussed at the recent ministerial-level meeting of the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa. Among several events, ministers and heads of delegations exchanged views on Chad and adopted a declaration renewing their support for that country’s transition process. Also adopted was a declaration reaffirming support for the Central African Republic’s national reconciliation and reconstruction efforts. UNOCA will continue to support those efforts, providing support for capacity-building and the participation of civil society — especially women’s groups — in political processes throughout the region. Noting that UNOCA has continued to demonstrate the utility of United Nations regional offices in the fields of preventive diplomacy and conflict prevention, she stressed that it will continue to do so under the guidance of a new Special Representative of the Secretary-General when one is appointed.

GILBERTO DA PIEDADE VERISSIMO, President of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), described the political and security situation in Central Africa as generally stable. Among the recent positive developments, he noted that the security situation at the borders between Rwanda, Uganda and Burundi had improved, as well as diplomatic relations between these two countries and Rwanda. He also called attention to the recent holding of the first permanent joint cross-border security meeting between Gabon and Cameroon, as well as a technical meeting to verify their maritime border between Angola and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

While observing that no major incidents occurred on borders between ECCAS member States during the period under review, he nevertheless deplored the deteriorating situation on the border between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda by the “March 23 Movement” group — known as M23 — which was thought to have been defeated in 2013. Those events sparked the largescale movement of displaced persons and mutual accusations of support to rebel groups by both countries. Initiatives are now under way in the region to reduce tensions and bring those States to the negotiating table, in an effort to reach a solution to the challenges posed by armed groups on their border.

Against that backdrop, he recalled that the Democratic Republic of the Congo declared a “state of siege” in the affected region and is working with Ugandan armed forces to attempt to disrupt the activities of armed groups. Those rebel groups are also present in north-west and south-west Cameroon, he said, reporting that the presence of rival factions of Boko Haram, Allied Democratic Forces and other groups demonstrate the significant presence of terrorist groups across the region.

Noting that the rule of law continues to be strengthened in the Central African region, he said democratic governance and the promotion and protection of human rights are now part of the institutional landscape of the countries of the region, despite repeated violations committed by armed groups. However, he expressed concern about the resurgence of intercommunity conflicts, accompanied by hate speech often used for electoral purposes. This constituted a threat to the security and stability of States, particularly in Chad, Cameroon, the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In addition, cattle migration for criminal purposes and maritime piracy were also among the threats in the region.

He also reported that all States in the region, with one exception, have signed the Protocol of the African Peer Review Mechanism. He welcomed the fact that all States respected the timetable for their elections in 2021, adding that it is “a clear sign of collective ownership of our shared values and the deepening roots of democracy in the region”. Nonetheless, he expressed concern about growing mistrust between some stakeholders, as well as the postponement of the inclusive national dialogue in Chad and the ongoing discussions in the Central African Republic with a view to amending the Constitution — particularly in regard to article 35 on the number of presidential terms allowed — which threaten to raise tensions in an already fragile country.

JEANNE-DANIELLE NICOLE NLATE, Vice-President of the Coalition des Organisations de la Société Civile d’Afrique Centrale pour la Préservation de la Paix, la Prévention des Conflits, la Résolution et la Transformation des Crises, pointed out that varied conflicts across Central Africa have led to instability, low levels of regional integration and cooperation, weak State institutions, corruption, poverty and disenfranchisement across the region. Old conflicts have resurfaced in the Great Lakes region, particularly affecting Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Chad and Cameroon. In some cases, these conflicts have led to tensions between neighbours accused of stoking such conflicts, as was the case recently with Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Further, the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated fragilities and vulnerabilities across the populations of Central Africa.

Against that backdrop, she said that civil-society organizations have played an important role in promoting peace, respect for human rights and the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000). Expressing concern over the human-rights situation in Central Africa, she underscored that women are most affected by violations, with their rights to life, fair legal proceedings and freedom of expression and opinion being most abused. This hierarchy of rights demonstrates that people in the subregion are concerned about strategic rather than practical needs, she said, stressing the importance of respecting their dignity. Civil society is working to address these issues, and she welcomed the support provided by ECCAS and its partners — particularly UNOCA and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) — in allowing the Coalition to operate and build capacity towards this end.

She went on to detail the actions conducted by civil society on the ground, including observing elections, defending the rights of those affected by violence, providing support to refugees and internally displaced persons, advocating for the free movement of goods and persons throughout Central Africa and promoting entrepreneurship. However, civil society faces challenges in the region that prevent it from fully playing its role, including lack of financial resources, weak institutional capacity and a civic space that is closed, restricted or suppressed. Noting that Governments often consider civil-society organizations as the opposition, she called on the United Nations and its partners to provide political, material and financial support to such organizations so that they can continue their important work.

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JAMES KARIUKI (United Kingdom), underscoring that the ongoing crises in the north-west and south-west regions of Cameroon require urgent attention, noted that the United Kingdom has given \$25 million of humanitarian aid over the last five years. Inclusive, peaceful and credible political processes are critical for building and sustaining peace in the subregion. UNOCA has an important role to play, he said, reiterating her country’s support to Chad’s ongoing transition to civilian and constitutional rule. He also voiced concern about violence and human rights violations still being committed in the Central African Republic — including by Wagner Group mercenaries — which continue to compound an already acute humanitarian situation. The activities of all security actors operating in the country should be coordinated by the Government, he stressed, while pointing out that the Russian Federation’s illegal and unjustified war in Ukraine is exacerbating economic pressures and food insecurity in Central Africa and beyond.

MICHEL XAVIER BIANG (Gabon), also speaking for Ghana and Kenya, welcomed the measures taken by several States in the subregion to prepare for upcoming elections in 2022 and 2023. Such elections provide an opportunity to consolidate democratic gains and authorities should take all measures necessary to organize free, credible, transparent and inclusive elections. Noting that national dialogue can reduce social and political tensions, he also welcomed Chad’s organization of a

dialogue in Doha and expressed hope that this platform will open the way to an inclusive peace agreement. Additionally, he welcomed improved diplomatic relations between Burundi and Rwanda; Cameroon's adoption of a measure to consolidate the decentralization process and build the capacity of local institutions; and the ongoing process in Nairobi to fight against the insecurity generated by armed groups in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

He expressed concern, however, over emerging tensions between that country and Rwanda, reiterating the African Union's calls for resolving differences through diplomatic means with the support of regional and subregional mechanisms. He also detailed the challenges Africa is facing, including terrorism and violent extremism, cross-border crime, the persistence of armed groups, maritime insecurity, exploitation of natural resources and intercommunity violence. Central African States are aware of these issues, and efforts to strengthen ECCAS' peace and security architecture can reduce the risk of crises spreading across the subregion. More so, climate change is exacerbating humanitarian crises and eroding security across Central Africa, he said, spotlighting the need to preserve the rainforest in the Congo Basin. As increasing extreme weather events are impacting agricultural production, the international community must respect its commitments to finance policies for adaptation and mitigation.

JUAN GÓMEZ ROBLEDO VERDUZCO (Mexico), while acknowledging progress made towards regional governance and political dialogue in some Central African countries, noted that flashpoints of violence, precarious economic recovery and the effects of climate change call for international solidarity. He called on UNOCA to continue supporting the transition in Chad; contributing to a political solution for the violence prevailing in parts of Cameroon; and supporting the organization of municipal elections in the Central African Republic, also spotlighting that country's recent abolition of the death penalty. To attain progress towards stability in Central Africa, he called for focused efforts to fight the illicit arms trafficking flowing towards and within the region; to create the appropriate conditions for opposition groups to freely express their viewpoints and participate in the public space; and to respond to the urgent humanitarian situation in the region to prevent greater tragedies. He added that UNOCA must have solid leadership to carry out its tasks, expressing hope that a new Special Representative for the region will be appointed as soon as possible.

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SHERAZ GASRI (France) expressed her hope that the ongoing talks in Doha will help pave the way for a peaceful future in Chad. She expressed support for mediation and reform initiatives aimed at a resolution of Cameroon's political crisis. In Burundi, progress has been made in protecting human rights, leading the European Union to lift financial restrictions; such steps must continue. Efforts must also be redoubled throughout the region to protect women and other civilians, she said, condemning attacks by non-State armed groups on civilian populations and United Nations personnel. Hailing the creation by ECCAS of a network of women mediators, as well as the promotion of young people's role in peace processes, she said that same inclusive spirit should guide all upcoming elections throughout the region. Regional integration must also be strengthened. In that vein, she urged countries to extend their cooperation in the fight against climate change and the illegal exploitation of natural resources, while recalling the creation by France and other partners of the Tropical Forest Preservation Alliance.

RAVINDRA RAGUTTAHALLI (India) expressing hope that upcoming elections in Angola, Equatorial Guinea, Sao Tome and Principe and the Congo will further deepen democracy in the region, with greater participation of women. Despite the positive trends, complex political and security challenges still exist in the region, he said, stressing that inclusive political processes, including electoral reforms, are necessary to strengthen political institutions. On the security front, terrorist groups such as Islamic State-West Africa Province have continued to expand their activities, mainly in the Lake Chad region, he said, also strongly condemning terror attacks perpetrated by terrorist groups such as Boko Haram and the Lord's Resistance Army. Noting the impacts of the Ukraine conflict and climate change on the region, he stressed that no artificial link should be drawn between climate change and security-related issues without any firm scientific basis. He also noted that his country has contributed credits worth \$2 billion for projects in critical sectors such as agriculture, transport, power and water supply.

GHASAQ YOUSIF ABDALLA SHAHEEN (United Arab Emirates) stressed the need to follow a comprehensive approach to tackle security threats that undermine stability and affect regional development and economic integration, including cross-

border and regional ones such as organized crime, extremism, terrorism and piracy. On that point, she stressed the need to address maritime insecurity in the Gulf of Guinea, which is a strategic imperative for the economy and security of the region. Further, it is critical to continue promoting inclusive political dialogue in non-mission settings and coordinate with local actors to consolidate peace, resolve tensions and prevent or mitigate political crises. She went on to underscore the importance of understanding the impacts of — and potential solutions to — the repercussions of climate change in Central Africa, welcoming UNOCA's initiatives towards this end. Also highlighting the need for continued international support to affected countries, she reported that her country provided around \$55 million between 2016 and 2022 to help alleviate suffering in the region.

JOÃO GENÉSIO DE ALMEIDA FILHO (Brazil) cited the numerous positive developments in the Central African region, including the peaceful transfer of power in Sao Tome and Principe, regional elections in several countries and the efforts of the Government of Burundi to normalize relations with its neighbours and with the international community. Among other things, he expressed hope that the pre-dialogue between political actors from Chad in Doha will allow for the convening of an inclusive national dialogue. The Central African region faces multidimensional and cross-border threats to peace and security, particularly terrorism, including the presence of ISIL and Boko Haram. Further, the situation in Cameroon is concerning. That country is not only directly affected by the violence in the Lake Chad Basin, but also has been facing protracted conflicts in its English-speaking regions, he added. Turning to social-economic developments, he pointed out that rising food prices may plunge large numbers of people in the region into acute poverty amid the recovery from COVID-19.

ANNA M. EVSTIGNEEVA (Russian Federation) said the situation in Central Africa is characterized by terrorist threats, conflicts and a lack of sufficient military capacity to protect civilians. Radical Islam is becoming more popular with the population and terrorist groups are carrying out serious attacks. Calling for strengthened cooperation between regional States, she welcomed UNOCA's work, while also voicing concern about a high number of raids on commercial vessels in the Gulf of Guinea. More monitoring and capacity-building is needed, as are better early warning systems to detect potentially dangerous phenomenon in maritime communications. Welcoming new anti-piracy initiatives and spotlighting the Russian Federation's contributions in that area, she went on to reject politicized statements made by delegations today that blame Moscow for the global food crisis. In fact, that crisis existed prior to the start of the situation in Ukraine and has been worsened by the introduction of unilateral coercive measures by Western countries. In addition, Western States' notions of governance — imposed around the world through military interventions — have also worsened those conditions for decades, she said.

GERALDINE BYRNE NASON (Ireland) said the national dialogue in Chad was key to its political transition. Reiterating the call for the link between climate change and security to be appropriately recognized in the Security Council's work, she highlighted the effects of climate change on the stability of the region. Such effects included a rise in intracommunal clashes due to water shortages and floods and drought leading to significant population displacement. She went on to express concern about the dire humanitarian situation, increasing food insecurity, and higher rates of sexual and gender-based violence in the region, urging all parties to ensure the safety and security of humanitarian personnel and unhindered access to humanitarian assistance. Turning to human rights, she noted that violations and abuses against civilians in Cameroon are persisting, with 700,000 students having been deprived of their right to education due to attacks against schools.

TRINE SKARBOEVIK HEIMERBACK (Norway) called attention to the recently published annual list of the Norwegian Refugee Council on the world's most neglected displacement crises. Out of five crises, three were in the Central African region: the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Cameroon, and Chad. Adding that the situation in the Central African Republic also remains a challenge, she stressed that while preventive diplomacy rarely reaches the headlines, it serves a critical purpose in such cases. For a second year running, the Democratic Republic of the Congo "tops" the world's most neglected displacement crises, while in Chad a food emergency was recently declared. She also expressed continued concern about the situations in north-west and south-west Cameroon. As well, piracy remains a grave risk. "Moving forward, the region should remain in the driver's seat, with already commendable efforts being scaled up," she stressed, describing the security situation around the Lake Chad Basin as alarming due to the activities of armed groups, terrorists and violent extremists. Meanwhile, the impacts of climate change are only worsening the situation, she added.

DAI BING (China) welcomed the improved security situation in the Central African Republic; promotion of national dialogue and decentralization in Cameroon; advancement of a national dialogue in Chad; and the ongoing preparations for upcoming elections in several Central African countries. He called on the international community and UNOCA to continue supporting regional States in solving their own problems, strengthening national governance and building capacity in accordance with their specific situations. Expressing concern over the security situation in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, he urged increased regional trust and cooperation, along with increased provision of international resources and assistance to counter-terrorism efforts. Further, developed countries must honour their climate-finance commitments and enhance the resilience of regional countries to adapt to climate shocks. He added that the international community must ensure adequate humanitarian funding to the region and not reduce investment in or attention to Central Africa due to other crises.

ALBANA DAUTLLARI (Albania), President of the Council for June, speaking in her national capacity, commended the positive developments in the region, including improved relations between Burundi and its neighbours, as well as the progress achieved domestically in safeguarding civil and political rights. However, she expressed concern about reports of attacks, torture and disappearances of political opponents allegedly attributable to law enforcement authorities. In Cameroon, dialogue is being hindered by tensions in the north-west and south-west regions, where political violence persists and clashes are still raging between State forces and non-State armed forces, she said, condemning attacks on civilians and humanitarian staff. While welcoming efforts towards enhancing a national dialogue in Chad and the republican dialogue in the Central African Republic, she noted that the security situation in the latter remains highly volatile. In addition, climate security has a deep and sizable impact on the region's stability, she said, pointing to tensions among communities, the rising number of displaced people and the increase of those in urgent need of humanitarian assistance. She also highlighted the socioeconomic impact of both the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine, which might be fuelling popular frustration in the region.

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Sudan & South Sudan

**Official Website of the International Criminal Court
ICC Public Documents - Situation in Darfur, Sudan**

Sudan opposition condemns 'ethnically-based attacks' in southern Khartoum (Dabanga)
June 7, 2022

In a press statement on Saturday, the Sudanese Congress Party (SCP) strongly criticised the recent "ethnically-based attacks" by a joint force against residents of Angola neighbourhood in Mayo in southern Khartoum "under the pretext of combating crime".

These people "are mostly displaced from areas of conflict and war in the west of the country and Blue Nile state" – "in a repetition of the despicable scenarios followed by the former regime before its fall".

The SCP referred to a video report of the 3Ayin Media Network last week in which various residents of Angola testify about a security force consisting of army soldiers, paramilitaries of the Rapid Support Forces, policemen, and "individuals believed to be affiliated with the notorious security apparatus" holding them on the street or raiding their homes and accusing them of petty crimes*.

Families were terrorised last month "in a horrific and humiliating manner, without the forces presenting legal documents to back their actions," Nouredin Babiker, the official spokesperson for the Sudanese opposition party, stated. The people were robbed of their money, mobile telephones, but also televisions and other devices.

The SCP says it categorically rejects any discrimination between Sudanese women and men on an ethnic, regional or religious basis. "We believe that this disgraceful behaviour has nothing to do with fighting crime, and only reveals the obvious flaws in the approaches of the regular forces," the statement concludes.

Sudanese revolutionaries boycott UN-brokered talks as brutal crackdown continues (Morning Star)

By Ben Chacko
June 8, 2022

Sudan's democracy movement boycotted UN-brokered talks with the military that began today, saying they were farcical when the junta continued to kill protesters daily.

Medics said a five-year-old girl was the latest victim of the army's savage crackdown, run down by a police car chasing protesters on Tuesday.

The United Nations, African Union and Intergovernmental Authority in Development started talks involving army chiefs and some civilian politicians to agree a "transition to democracy," eight months after General Abdel-Fattah Burhan seized power and three years into the revolution that forced out long-term dictator Omar al-Bashir in 2019.

Gen Burhan claimed he was “fully committed to work with everybody to end the transitional period as soon as possible with fair and transparent elections,” but the Forces for the Declaration of Freedom and Change, an umbrella group of democracy organisations, said his stance was a sham since he had not released protesters from prison and continued to forcibly crush demonstrations which have been held in the capital, Khartoum, daily since the end of May, when the junta theoretically lifted a state of emergency.

The Sudanese Communist Party said the army hoped to get a stamp of international approval for unfair elections which would echo the rigged elections of 2010 under the Bashir regime.

The whole purpose of the military seizure of power last autumn was to “block the uprising” and prevent revolutionary forces from achieving the “complete overthrow of the system,” it charged, saying the army intended on restoring the previous regime “in a new dress.”

The “transitional military council” and its Rapid Reaction Forces bore full responsibility for the “treacherous massacres” of protesters and should be put on trial for “genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity” at The Hague.

But the communists saluted the courage of demonstrators who continued to stage mass protests in the face of lethal violence.

“The persistence of the Sudanese people despite the massacres, their determination to complete the revolution, has thwarted plans to change the balance of forces and the awakened people will continue the uprising, clear out the remnants of the old regime and overthrow the military council and its allies,” the party declared.

Sudan: ICC - More Witnesses Testify Against Darfur Janjaweed Leader Ali Kushayb (Dabanga)

June 9, 2022

The proceedings of former Darfur janjaweed leader, Ali Muhammad Ali Abdelrahman (known as 'Ali Kushayb'), who has been accused of 31 counts of war crimes and crimes against humanity between 2003 and at least 2004, continued as witnesses gave their testimonies in the Trial Chamber I of the International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague, the Netherlands on Monday.

The prosecution brought forth compelling witness testimonies to support the allegations against *Abdelrahman. The court heard from the expert witness and Executive Director of the World Peace Foundation, Professor Alex de Waal, who answered questions about his report on Darfur and presented his accounts of the region.

Professor de Waal stated that during his time in Darfur in the early 2000s, he observed a huge discrepancy in inequality between Khartoum and Darfur. According to de Waal's experiences, the infrastructure of most small towns in Darfur were in such disarray, that it would be rare to find a clinic, and in half those cases, "the clinic would have lost its roof".

He also stated that Darfur was extremely rudimentary in comparison with the many places he had travelled to in Africa, saying that he was shocked and had "never seen a place with such low levels of health care and education".

In turn, the defence council asked de Waal more details about the conflict in Darfur, particularly about the years 2001 and 2002, which was a time when the conflict deepened in Darfur.

The defence were particularly interested in de Waal's explanation of the Arab and inter-tribal components of the conflict in Sudan.

'... It's common knowledge, those (janjaweed) are the tribes that killed people' - Witness P0712, unnamed witness in Kushayb trial.

The Trial Chamber also granted protective measures to some of the witnesses, such as in the case of one of the factual witnesses under the pseudonym, Witness P0712, who had their voice and image disguised, as well as having their testimony heard from a private location.

Witness P0712 spoke of attacks on villages they were in and described, burning, looting, and arrests, identifying the perpetrators of the attacks as the janjaweed.

P0712 explained the meaning of the word janjaweed, saying that they are a "group of people from Arab tribes who ride on horseback, own weapons, and kill people from different tribes". He went on to list different examples of janjaweed atrocities in Darfur, explaining how they "pillaged and burnt down villages".

Background

*From the start of pre-trial proceedings, Ali Kushayb's defence has always pivoted on 'mistaken identity', saying that he is not the person who perpetrated these crimes. However, on the opening day of the trial on Tuesday, senior trial lawyer for the prosecution, Julian Nicolls, told the court that the prosecution intends to present several witnesses (referred to only by a number for anonymity), who will testify that the accused is indeed Ali Kushayb, the feared so-called 'Colonel of Colonels'.

Lead-up to trial

On November 2, 2021, The Appeals Chamber of the ICC unanimously rejected an appeal by Ali Kushayb, against the Pre-Trial Chamber II decision of 17 May 2021, rejecting a challenge of the court's jurisdiction by Kushayb's defence counsel.

The Appeals Chamber of the ICC, composed of Judge Piotr Hofmański, presiding in this appeal, Judge Luz del Carmen Ibáñez Carranza, Judge Perrin de Brichambaut, Judge Solomy Balungi Bossa, and Judge Gocha Lordkipanidze, decided unanimously to reject the appeal against the Pre-Trial Chamber II decision of 17 May 2021 on the Defence's jurisdictional challenge (exception d'incompétence).

Presiding Judge Piotr Hofmański, in rejecting the Defence's four grounds of appeal, the Appeals Chamber highlighted, among other matters, that it found no error in the reasons given by the Pre-Trial Chamber defining a "situation" before the Court as defined in terms of temporal, territorial and in some cases personal parameters. It also found that the non-funding by the United Nations of the activities of the Court arising from a referral by the Security Council does not invalidate the UNSC resolution 1593 which referred the situation to the ICC. As for the alleged failure of the Pre-Trial Chamber to consider the lack of the Security Council logistical and security support to the Court in Sudan, the Appeals Chamber finds that the Defence has not demonstrated how this alleged error of law relates to the jurisdiction of the Court.

Finally, and referring to the principle of legality, *nullum crimen sine lege*, the Appeals Chamber found that the referral of the Situation in Darfur, Sudan took place in the wake of serious violations of human rights and humanitarian law that were criminalised under international law at the time.

The Appeals Chamber also found that the crimes under the Statute were intended to be generally representative of the state of customary international law when the Statute was drafted. This weighs heavily in favour of the foreseeability of facing prosecution for such crimes even in relation to conduct occurring in a State not party to the Statute. Judge Ibáñez expressed her separate views concerning this ground of appeal and while agreeing with the outcome reached by the majority, she considered that, in her view, the jurisdiction of the Court over the conduct in this case pre-dates UNSC Resolution 1593, which only triggered the Court's jurisdiction and thus there is no need to refer to any other sources of law.

Sudanese officials, Darfur rebels discuss peace and return from Libya (Sudan Tribune)

June 11, 2022

Sudanese government delegation held informal talks with seven armed factions from the Darfur region in Niger's capital to discuss ways to join the peace process in Sudan and end their presence in Libya.

On Thursday, several rebel factions based in Libya signed the "Democratic Path Forces", calling to complete peace in Sudan, end war and address the root causes of the Sudanese crisis.

The declaration was followed by a two-day meeting (10-11 June) with a government delegation in Niamey held under the auspices of the Promediation Organization, a French NGO including professional mediators and experts in the field of mediation and negotiation.

The government delegation to the talks was led by the head of military intelligence, Major General Mohamed Ahmed Sabir and included Maj Gen Hamza Youssif Burah of the General Intelligence Service and three other military officers.

The rebel factions that took part in the meeting are the Revolutionary Awakening Council, of the tribal leader Musa Hilal, the New Sudanese Justice and Equality Movement (NSJEM) led by Mansour Arbab, the Revolutionary Movement for Justice and Equality led by Yassin Osman, the Sudan Liberation Movement-Independent leadership headed by Abbas Ahmed Aseel (aka Jebel Moon), the Awakening Council- Collective Leadership led by Ali Al-Safana, the Corrective Justice and Equality Movement headed by Zakaria Aldash and the Revolutionary Awakening Council for Change and Reform led by Abdallah Hussein.

"The aim of this informal, preliminary meeting, (between) non-signatory armed movements based in Libya and a high-level government's delegation, was to discuss the inclusion of these movements in the peace process," Eric Blanchot Promediation's Director-General told the Sudan Tribune.

Also, the process seeks to ensure "the withdrawal of their fighters from Libya and reintegration in the security forces and

society,” Blanchot further stressed.

He added that the success of this process, which would contribute to the stabilization of both Sudan and Libya, requires the support of the international community.

Darfur armed movements sought refuge in Libya where they served as mercenary groups alongside the warring parties.

However, their continued presence in Libya is no longer desired as the international community seeks to bring stability to the North African country.

Also, the military rulers seem interested to bring back home the armed groups who are seen as potential allies in their power struggle with the civilian forces. During the discussions, the parties agreed on the need to expedite the implementation of security arrangements, a matter that requires huge financial means.

NSJEM leader Arbab told the Sudan Tribune that the discussions on security arrangements focused on the technical details such as the assembly sites, DDR process and timetable for the return of fighters present in Libya.

“The parties agreed to continue their efforts to advance the technical, logistical and financial aspects of this process,” he added.

Several rebel leaders pointed to the failure to implement the security arrangement agreed in the Juba Peace Agreement and insisted on the need for more guarantees that their fighters would be integrated quickly.

Arbab further criticized the Juba Peace Agreement. He said it had caused numerous problems in Darfur. Also, he accused the signatory groups of excluding influential groups.

The participants discussed if there is a need for a new deal or to join the Juba peace deal. Ismail Agbach, the rapporteur of the “Democratic Path Forces”, told the Sudan Tribune that the government delegation, Niger’s government and Promediation put two proposals on the table the first is to join the political process facilitated by the tripartite mechanism (which means joining Juba process) or reach a new peace agreement.

“We believe that the (Juba agreement) and the tripartite mechanism will not lead to radical solutions to the political crisis. So, we have proposed a new agreement with the government under the auspices of the international community,” he said.

The groups that are taking part in the process include Arab and Massalit factions.

The Sudan Liberation Movement of Abdel Wahid al-Nur and its commander in Libya Youssif Karakula are not part of the process as the holdout group rejects any talks with the military component.

Also, Abdallah Banda, an ICC-wanted rebel commander for war crimes, did not join the initiative.

Also, it is not clear how the process will deal with signatory groups that still keep some fighters in Libya such as the SLM Minni Minnawi.

A source close to the process told the Sudan Tribune the international community may abstain from supporting the initiative because of the coup d’état and the absence of a civilian government.

ICC trial of Darfur janjaweed ‘Colonel of Colonels’ Ali Kushayb resumes tomorrow (Dabanga)

June 12, 2022

An official statement by the ICC press office says that the Abdelrahman trial is set to resume on Monday, with the testimony of the 16th prosecution witness, ‘Witness P-0892’. For security and protection of witnesses, the Trial Chamber has granted protective measures to some of the witnesses to testify under a pseudonym, have their voice and image disguised, as well as having their testimony heard from a private location.

“The witness is expected to testify about the link between Mr Abdelrahman and the nickname Ali Kushayb,” the ICC statement says. It is noteworthy that from the start of pre-trial proceedings, Ali Kushayb’s defence has always pivoted on ‘mistaken identity’, saying that he is not the person who perpetrated these crimes. However on the first day of the trial, following Prosecutor Khan’s opening, senior trial lawyer Julian Nicolls, told the court that the prosecution intends to present several witnesses (referred to only by a number for anonymity), who will testify that the accused is indeed Ali Kushayb, the feared so-called ‘Colonel of Colonels’.

The ICC press office says that Witness P-0892 will also testify about an alleged attack on the witness's village by Sudanese government forces and the militia/janjaweed in February 2004, his alleged displacement with other villagers to Mukjar, displaced persons allegedly beaten and their belongings looted under the orders of the accused. Testimony will also include Sudanese government forces and the militia/janjaweed allegedly arresting displaced persons in Mukjar, detention conditions at Mukjar police station, alleged torture and execution of detainees, and the discovery of a mass grave outside of Mukjar around March/April 2004.

In previous sessions last week, The prosecution brought forth compelling witness testimonies to support the allegations against Abdelrahman. The court heard from the expert witness and Executive Director of the World Peace Foundation, Professor Alex de Waal, who answered questions about his report on Darfur and presented his accounts of the region.

Professor de Waal stated that during his time in Darfur in the early 2000s, he observed a huge discrepancy in inequality between Khartoum and Darfur. According to de Waal's experiences, the infrastructure of most small towns in Darfur were in such disarray, that it would be rare to find a clinic, and in half those cases, "the clinic would have lost its roof".

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P0712 explained the meaning of the word janjaweed, saying that they are a "group of people from Arab tribes who ride on horseback, own weapons, and kill people from different tribes". He went on to list different examples of janjaweed atrocities in Darfur, explaining how they "pillaged and burnt down villages".

Background: From the start of pre-trial proceedings, Ali Kushayb's defence has always pivoted on 'mistaken identity', saying that he is not the person who perpetrated these crimes. However following Prosecutor Khan's opening, senior trial lawyer Julian Nicolls, told the court that the prosecution intends to present several witnesses (referred to only by a number for anonymity), who will testify that the accused is indeed Ali Kushayb, the feared so-called 'Colonel of Colonels'. He also emphasised that rather than just ordering the commission of atrocities, Kushayb was an "enthusiastic active participant" in many of the atrocities with which he is charged. Nicolls also mooted that "after a perilous journey through the jungle across the border from Darfur", Ali Kushayb surrendered voluntarily to the ICC in the Democratic Republic of Congo citing the arrest warrant in that name. Nicolls suggested that Kushayb was fleeing possible arrest and trial in post-Al Bashir Sudan, for crimes that would carry the death penalty in that country. As the trial continues, the first expert witness is scheduled to start testifying tomorrow.

According to a statement by the ICC public affairs unit, Alex De Waal is a joint OTP/Defence expert witness. He is the Executive Director of The World Peace Foundation and Professor at Tufts University. He is expected to testify about, among other topics, an overview of the relevant events which took place before and during the armed conflict in Darfur in 2003-2004, as well as the root causes of the armed conflict, and the relationship between the militia/janjaweed and Sudanese government forces during Darfur conflict.

Lead-up to trial

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The Appeals Chamber of the ICC, composed of Judge Piotr Hofmański, presiding in this appeal, Judge Luz del Carmen Ibáñez Carranza, Judge Perrin de Brichambaut, Judge Solomy Balungi Bossa, and Judge Gocha Lordkipanidze, decided unanimously to reject the appeal against the Pre-Trial Chamber II decision of 17 May 2021 on the Defence's jurisdictional challenge (exception d'incompétence).

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party to the Statute. Judge Ibáñez expressed her separate views concerning this ground of appeal and while agreeing with the outcome reached by the majority, she considered that, in her view, the jurisdiction of the Court over the conduct in this case pre-dates UNSC Resolution 1593, which only triggered the Court's jurisdiction and thus there is no need to refer to any other sources of law.

South Sudan: The Road to a Living Hell, Paved with Peace Deals (Just Security)

By James P. McGovern and John Prendergast

June 13, 2022

As the international community debates how much and how soon to pressure Ukraine to resume peace talks and consider concessions to end Russia's full-scale assault, a different kind of conflict illustrates what happens when badly crafted peace deals actually extend – and even worsen – a war. Once hailed as the world's newest nation, South Sudan has had a series of false starts in its peace process since civil war erupted in 2013, just two years after its independence. The standard tools for reconstructing a war-torn country – power-sharing deals and elections – have failed. A violent kleptocracy has captured the state and is bleeding the nation's resources dry in every way imaginable, exacerbating conditions of extreme violence, repression, famine, and a lack of health care, education, and employment. In its mere 11 years of existence, South Sudan has now become the most corrupt country in the world.

Yet instead of focusing on the wellbeing of the South Sudanese people, the international community continues trying to broker deals among elites. Well-intended or not, this choice has paved a road to a living hell. South Sudan, which for years already has generated the largest refugee crisis in Africa, is on the verge of returning to full-scale civil war. War crimes are being committed in more and more places. Rape has become a routine weapon of war. Looting of humanitarian aid and attacks on aid workers are on the rise.

Clearly, the international community – led by the United States and its Troika partners Norway and the United Kingdom, with the backing of the European Union and other key supporters of South Sudan like Australia and Canada – needs a new approach.

The warring parties have signed one peace agreement after another since 2014, some internal to the fractured ruling party, and some brokered by regional bodies. The most recent and most ambitious deal was signed in 2018, but relatively few of its terms have been implemented. The relationship between President Salva Kiir and his longtime rival, Vice President Riek Machar, remains volatile and full of mutual suspicion.

Peace processes and elections have legitimized Juba's feuding leaders and put them into positions where they could violently plunder the resources and assets of the country, further centralizing control of political and economic power. They steal the proceeds from the nation's primary source of revenue, oil, along with everything else, while the international humanitarian system places huge Band-Aids over gaping human rights wounds by providing hundreds of millions of dollars a year in emergency aid while not addressing the underlying drivers of mass atrocities. But the strain on global food supplies and fuel deliveries due to Russia's all-out invasion of Ukraine this year is causing that Band-Aid to weaken and will likely mean that many more South Sudanese will die this year of sickness and hunger.

These same leaders have gutted the basic levers of governance in the country. The only essential services provided are those delivered by international organizations and their South Sudanese non-governmental partners. No transparency exists in budgeting or contracting, so most of the resources are stolen. The army, police, and intelligence services offer no security – in fact, most often the opposite, as they are the primary perpetrators of abuses and corruption. Nonpartisan voices, local peacemakers, women and youth leaders, and local journalists are ruthlessly suppressed, and there is no semblance of an independent legislature or judiciary.

South Sudan is a classic failed state. But it is a deliberate failure – the state works fine for those in charge. The networks in power have hijacked the state and intentionally fomented conflict between ethnic groups to singularly profit themselves. And little that the international community has done in the past decade-plus has seemed to change that dynamic appreciably.

The most urgent objective now should be to dismantle the violent kleptocratic networks that have overtaken South Sudan. This is a prerequisite before any peace deal can reduce the violence, before any election can deliver genuine representation, and before any government can create a properly functioning state.

The United States should begin by leading a full-fledged blitz on the networks controlling the security services and the presidency. The office of the presidency sits atop this criminal state structure, and the leaders of the security services are the

enforcers — hit men and bag men for the leaders. The United States and its allies should impose network-based sanctions on Kiir, his inner circle, and the leaders of the National Security Service and its Intelligence Directorate, as well as their businesses, commercial partners, and facilitators; that would go a long way toward dismantling the warped incentives that undermine peace agreements and ensure continued conflict. To ensure history is not repeated, opposition faction leaders such as Machar should also be sanctioned for their own human rights abuses and corruption.

The United States, United Kingdom, and European Union have imposed sanctions on South Sudanese individuals and entities. These include corruption-related Global Magnitsky sanctions levied by the U.S. government. The United Nations Security Council also has sanctioned a handful of South Sudanese senior officials and imposed an arms embargo.

But these sanctions designations are much too few and far between. To influence the calculations of the key kleptocrats, a much more ambitious and escalating financial pressure strategy needs to be deployed.

Remember one of the key lessons from the neighbor to the north, Sudan: the international community mistakenly relied on the Sudanese military to do the right thing after popular protests led to the 2019 overthrow of long-time dictator Omar al-Bashir. The kleptocratic system Bashir had built was left largely untouched, and soon a new general was in charge. The international community applied little pressure, built no new leverage, and created no forms of accountability. Not surprisingly, the system quickly snapped back to an authoritarian kleptocracy. Why wouldn't it? There were simply no consequences for hijacking the state.

In South Sudan, a complete onslaught on the opaque and illicit finances of its leaders is needed. Relying solely on yet another peace process and another election while leaving the underlying corruption untouched will only perpetuate South Sudan's deadly history.

UN says latest bout of tribal violence in Sudan killed 145 (Star Tribune)

By Samy Magdy

June 14, 2022

Clashes in Sudan killed at least 145 people and injured over 180 others this month, the United Nations said Tuesday, the latest tribal violence to rock the war-wrecked east African nation.

The violence in West Darfur and South Kordofan provinces, some of the deadliest in recent years, comes as Sudan's turmoil worsens after an October military coup. The takeover upended the country's short-lived transition to democratic rule after a popular uprising forced the military's removal of longtime autocrat Omar al-Bashir in April 2019.

The most recent bout of violence erupted last week in West Darfur's town of Kulbus over a land dispute between Arab and African tribes, according to the U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. Local Arab militias then attacked multiple villages in the area, OCHA said. A total of 126 people were killed, including 101 from the Gimir tribe and 25 from the Arab Rizeigat tribe, it said. More than 130 others, mostly from the non-Arab tribe, were injured in the weeklong clashes, it added.

OCHA said at least 25 villages in the Kulbus area were attacked, looted and burned and that at least 50,000 people were forced to flee their homes in West Darfur and neighboring North Darfur province, where the clashes spread.

In South Kordofan, at least 19 people were reportedly killed, and 54 others injured in separate tribal clashes earlier this month, according to OCHA.

The violence in the town of Abu Jubayhah, which lasted for three days, grew out of a robbery of a tuk tuk, a three-wheeled vehicle, on June 5, it said. The fighting displaced more than 15,000 people after six neighborhoods in the town were burned down, it added.

OCHA said the fighting subsided following the deployment of troops to the area. Authorities declared a nightly curfew last week, but the situation remains tense, it said.

The past week's fighting was the latest bout of tribal violence in Darfur, a vast region in western Sudan that was wrecked by two decades of conflict. The violence puts into question the U.N. Security Council decision last year to dismantle the joint U.N.-African Union peacekeeping force's mandate in the region.

The Darfur conflict began in 2003 when ethnic Africans rebelled, accusing the Arab-dominated government in the capital of Khartoum of discrimination. Al-Bashir's government was accused of retaliating by arming local nomadic Arab tribes and unleashing militias known as the janjaweed on civilians there — a charge it denied.

Al-Bashir, who has been in prison in Khartoum since he was ousted from power in 2019, was indicted over a decade ago by the

International Criminal Court for genocide and crimes against humanity perpetrated in Darfur.

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Democratic Republic of the Congo

Official Website of the International Criminal Court
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Lake Chad Region – Chad, Nigeria, Niger, and Cameroon

ISWAP blamed for church massacre in Nigeria (Al Jazeera)

By Ope Adetayo

June 9, 2022

The Nigerian government has blamed an ISIL-affiliated armed group in the country for carrying out an attack that killed dozens of worshippers at a church.

Security experts, however, expressed scepticism about the allegation.

The responsibility for Sunday's deadly bomb and gun assault in Owo town, Ondo state, which killed at least 40 churchgoers, belonged to the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), according to Nigerian officials.

The accusation was made to the press by Interior Minister Rauf Aregbesola after a National Security Council meeting on Thursday in the capital Abuja. The minister added that the armed forces are on the hunt for the perpetrators.

However, the armed group has yet to claim responsibility for the Sunday morning attack, and analysts noted this is unusual because ISWAP is known to quickly take credit for past violence.

"I think we should be prudent," Vincent Foucher, a research fellow at the National Centre for Scientific Research, told Al Jazeera. "It is better not to pin it on them too quickly because they usually claim and they usually claim quite fast."

'A bit strange' ISWAP is credited for several deadly incidents in Nigeria's northeast, its major sphere of operations. But recently, the armed group has expanded its attacks elsewhere.

Last month, it claimed responsibility for an assault on a cultural event in Kogi state, and also a bombing in Taraba state that

caused 30 casualties.

Data about the number of casualties Nigeria has suffered from ISWAP's attacks is hard to come by, but there has been an increase in its operations.

Security analysts have noted the possibility of its expansion to the southern part of the country. However, some are saying the Owo massacre might have been carried out by another group.

"There is a lapse because ISWAP [readily] claims responsibility for their attacks," Idayat Hassan, the director of Abuja's Centre for Democracy and Development, a research think-tank, told Al Jazeera.

"It rises their profile within the Islamic State hierarchy. They love publicity," she said.

Foucher pointed to discrepancies between the Owo attack and others the group has taken credit for.

"I find [it] a bit strange because it is not just the same style of attack – they use several attackers and it was not just about throwing some explosives," Foucher said.

"Their network is not strong in the south and I don't think they would expose a group of about five or six attackers just for an attack. They would make more economic use of their staff."

Expansion of armed groups? While religiously motivated attacks are rare in southern Nigeria, ISWAP would not be the first group to want to expand its area of operations.

The armed group Boko Haram has attacked areas in Niger, Abuja, Kano and other states. In 2015, the Department of State Services, the nation's intelligence agency, said it arrested members in Lagos, Nigeria's largest city.

But analysts say the expansion of armed groups in the south is unlikely to materialise because of a lack of local support and inadequate logistics.

"It is really going to be a challenge, [however], it does not mean they cannot get away with doing some attacks like [Owo]," Foucher said.

Observers say religion could be a reason for the Owo attack, noting religious differences between Nigeria's north and south. But Aregbesola, the interior minister, said the massacre had no origins in religion.

While Hassan is sceptical about the government's finger-pointing at ISWAP for being behind the church attack, she said officials may be trying to douse the flames of reprisal attacks, which have been reported following Sunday's bloodshed.

"I think the government might be calming nerves because there have been reports of reprisal attacks in some parts of the state," Hassan told Al Jazeera.

Nigerian troops find another kidnapped Chibok schoolgirl (Al Jazeera)

June 15, 2022

Nigerian soldiers have found one of the more than 200 schoolgirls abducted by Boko Haram operatives eight years ago in the conflict-torn northeast, the military has said.

The April 2014 attack on a girls' boarding school in the town of Chibok and the mass kidnapping that followed sparked international outrage and a global campaign called #BringBackOurGirls.

The military said on Twitter on Wednesday that troops on patrol had found the young woman, Mary Ngoshe, carrying a baby near Ngoshe village.

"Troops of 26 Task Force Brigade on patrol around Ngoshe in Borno State on 14 June 2022 intercepted one Mrs Mary Ngoshe and her son," the statement said.

"She is believed to be one of the abducted girls from GGSS (Government Girls Secondary School) Chibok in 2014," it added, releasing a picture of a young woman and a child.

Of the 276 pupils aged 12 to 17 who were abducted by the group on April 14, 2014, 57 of the girls managed to escape by jumping off trucks they had been herded on.

Eighty-two others were later released in exchange for some detained Boko Haram commanders following back-channel talks with the Nigerian government.

More than a hundred girls are still missing. Some are believed to have been married off to fighters according to propaganda videos released by Abubakar Shekau, Boko Haram's late leader.

Since the Chibok school mass abduction, different armed groups have carried out several mass abductions and deadly attacks on schools in northern Nigeria.

The violence has contributed to keeping students out of schools, and the UN estimates that more than 18.5 million Nigerian children have no access to education.

Police Arrest 87 Suspected Boko Haram Terrorists, Kidnappers, Others In North-East Nigeria (Sahara Reporters)

June 15, 2022

At least, 87 persons are in police custody for alleged terrorism, abductions, rape and culpable homicide in North-East Nigeria, SaharaReporters learnt on Wednesday.

According to the Borno State Police command, some of the suspects arrested were found with lethal firearms and have been charged with criminal offences including cattle rustling.

Parading the suspects on Wednesday in Maiduguri, the state police commissioner, Abdu Umar disclosed that the suspects were arrested in Maiduguri metropolis, Jere, Konduga, Gwoza and Hauwul councils and some parts of Adamawa and Taraba states.

Umar said, "The Police arrested five terror suspects and recovered 3 gun trucks, machine guns and two AK-47 rifles with live ammunition."

He added that the suspects had links to Boko Haram and the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) terrorists.

He noted that investigations were in progress, as some of the suspects were in the custody of the military.

He added that "6 suspects were arrested on May 30, 2022, for alleged kidnappings in Borno, Adamawa and Taraba states.

"The police crack team stormed a Rural Grazing Area (RUGA) in Njimtilo area of Maiduguri, some of them are leaders of kidnap syndicates in the North-East.

"They are Abubakar Ali of Njimtilo, who also specialized in cattle rustling and also harboured criminals in the community."

The police commissioner added that Abdul Isa, Bala Musa, Abdullahi Bukar, Garba Usman and Jordi Garba were also arrested for kidnapping, cattle rustling and receiving stolen property.

He further disclosed that all the suspects had confessed to their alleged crimes, including theft of armoured cables.

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Mali

UN Peacekeeping Convoy Attacked in Mali; 1 Killed, 3 Hurt (New Delhi Times)

June 2, 2022

Suspected terrorists attacked a U.N. peacekeeping convoy in northern Mali on Wednesday, the United Nations said. A Jordanian peacekeeper was killed and three other Jordanians were wounded.

U.N. spokesman Stephane Dujarric said the supply convoy was under sustained fire for about an hour from attackers who used small arms and rocket launchers.

U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres strongly condemned the attack and sent his deepest condolences to the families of the peacekeepers and the government and people of Jordan, Dujarric said.

According to the U.N. peacekeeping mission in Mali, the attack was the fifth incident in the northern Kidal region in one week, Dujarric said. "It is a tragic reminder of the complexity of the mandate of the U.N. mission and of its peacekeepers, and the threats peacekeepers face on a daily basis," he said.

The Security Council later released a statement condemning the attack and calling on authorities in Mali to investigate and bring those responsible to justice. The statement added that the Security Council "underlined that attacks targeting peacekeepers may constitute war crimes under international law." Mali has struggled to contain an Islamic extremist insurgency since 2012. Extremist rebels were forced from power in Mali's northern cities with the help of a French-led military operation, but they regrouped in the desert and began attacking the Malian army and its allies. Insecurity has worsened with attacks in the northern and central regions on civilians and U.N. peacekeepers.

Mali's military returned to Kidal, a longtime rebel stronghold in the north, in February 2020, six years after its forces retreated amid violence. U.N. peacekeepers have also been deployed in the north.

Deadliest mission

The U.N. force has said more than 250 of its peacekeepers and personnel have died since 2013, making Mali the deadliest of the U.N.'s dozen peacekeeping missions worldwide.

The U.N. special representative for Mali, El Ghassim Wane, issued a statement Wednesday saying the U.N. mission remained determined to support Mali's people and government in their quest for peace and security, Dujarric said.

In August 2020, Malian President Boubacar Ibrahim Keita, who died in January, was overthrown in a coup that included Assimi Goita, then an army colonel. Last June, Goita was sworn in as president of a transitional government after carrying out his second coup in nine months.

In mid-May, Goita's government said security forces had thwarted a countercoup attempt that it said was supported by an unnamed Western government. The accusations of foreign interference came as Goita's regime has become increasingly isolated. A day earlier, the government announced that Mali was dropping out of a five-nation regional security force known as the G5. It was also sharply critical of former colonial power France, which announced in February that it was pulling its troops out of Mali.

While Mali's junta initially agreed to an 18-month transition back to civilian rule, it failed to organize elections by the deadline in February. Last month, the government said it would need two more years in power before it could organize a vote.

Mali: UN condemns second 'cowardly' attack in three days against peacekeepers (United Nations)
June 3, 2022

Two Egyptian peacekeepers serving with the UN Mission in Mali, MINUSMA, were killed on Friday - the second fatal attack this week on a peacekeeping convoy in the West African country.

The blue helmets were killed, and another injured, when their Armoured Personnel Carrier hit an improvised explosive device outside the town of Douentza, located in the Mopti region in central Mali.

UN Spokesperson Stéphane Dujarric, said the incident also marked the sixth time a Mission convoy has been hit since 22 May.

A 'very hard week'

"The Secretary-General condemns this new attack on our peacekeepers, who, as you know, are just fulfilling the mandate in Mali given to them by the Security Council in extremely challenging conditions," he told journalists in New York.

The UN chief also wished a prompt recovery to the injured peacekeepers.

In a written statement issued later in the day on Friday, Mr. Dujarric said the Secretary-General recalled that attacks targeting United Nations peacekeepers may constitute war crimes under international law. The UN chief also called on the transitional authorities in Mali to "spare no effort in identifying the perpetrators of this attack, so that they can be brought to justice swiftly."

El-Ghassim Wane, head of MINUSMA, took to Twitter to condemn "this new attack by extremist elements."

In another post, he wrote that this has been “a hard, very hard week for us.”

‘Another cowardly attack’ On Wednesday, a MINUSMA logistics convoy in Kidal, northern Mali, came under direct fire from suspected members of a terrorist group for roughly an hour.

Four peacekeepers from Jordan were injured, one of whom died from his wounds after being evacuated.

The head of UN Peacekeeping, Jean-Pierre Lacroix, also tweeted his condemnation for what he called “yet again another cowardly attack against our peacekeepers”.

Mr. Lacroix said “these crimes are a blatant violation of international law,” adding that they “shall not go unpunished.”

Also strongly condemning the attack and echoing the words of the UN peacekeeping chief, the members of the UN Security Council, called on the transitional Government of Mali to swiftly investigate the attack against peacekeepers and bring the perpetrators to justice, and keep the relevant troop-contributing country informed of the progress.

In a press statement, the Council members underlined that attacks targeting peacekeepers may constitute war crimes under international law. They went on to stress that involvement in planning, directing, sponsoring or conducting attacks against MINUSMA peacekeepers constitutes a basis for sanctions designations pursuant to Security Council resolutions.

Commitment to serve

Mali continues to be among the most dangerous places to serve as a peacekeeper.

MINUSMA - the French acronym for the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali – was established in April 2013 in the wake of a military coup and the occupation of the north by radical Islamists.

The Mission supports political processes and carries out numerous tasks related to security and protection of civilians.

Despite the challenging circumstances, MINUSMA personnel continue their mandated work, the UN Spokesperson said.

Mr. Dujarric reported that the Mission recently helped to rehabilitate two bridges in the Mopti region which had been destroyed in earlier attacks.

The development will bring relief to the population, and will also facilitate the resumption of travel, commerce and other economic activity, including between Mopti city and the town of Bandiagara, some 65 kilometres to the southeast.

Meanwhile, peacekeepers have assisted people in two towns in the Kidal and Gao regions, as part of their ongoing support to communities in northern Mali.

2 UN Peacekeepers Killed in 6th Incident in Mali in 2 Weeks (U.S. News and World Report)

By Edith M. Lederer

June 4, 2022

Two U.N. peacekeepers were killed Friday when their armored personnel carrier hit an improvised explosive device in central Mali in the sixth incident in less than two weeks targeting the U.N. mission in the West African nation that has faced a decade-long Islamic insurgency.

U.N. spokesman Stephane Dujarric said the device that killed the Egyptian peacekeepers and wounded one other was planted on a road outside the town of Douentza in the Mopti region.

Their APC was escorting a civilian convoy and was on its way from Douentza to Timbuktu when it hit the device, he said. “The intent is to disrupt the lives of the Malian people, to disrupt transport, to disrupt security,” Dujarric said. “These roads are used by civilians, civilian trucks, civilian buses, but also by the security forces, whether it’s the Malian army or U.N. peacekeepers ... (who) have been victims over and over again of improvised explosive devices.”

It was the sixth incident in which a U.N. peacekeeping mission convoy was hit since May 22 and the second fatal attack on a convoy this week, the U.N. spokesman said.

A U.N. peacekeeping convoy was attacked by suspected terrorists in the northern Kidal region on Wednesday and a Jordanian peacekeeper was killed and three other Jordanians were wounded. Dujarric said the supply convoy came under sustained fire for about an hour from attackers who used small arms and rocket launchers.

Mali has been in turmoil since a 2012 uprising prompted mutinous soldiers to overthrow the president. The power vacuum that resulted ultimately led to an Islamic insurgency and a French-led war that ousted the jihadists from power in 2013. But insurgents remain active and extremist groups affiliated with al-Qaida and the Islamic State group have moved from the arid north to more populated central Mali since 2015, stoking animosity and violence between ethnic groups in the region.

Mali's current ruling junta seized power in August 2020, and in April the junta leaders said a transition to civilian, democratic rule would take at least two years.

The U.N. Security Council and U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres strongly condemned Friday's attack in separate statements and called on Mali's transitional government to swiftly identify the perpetrators and bring them to justice. They both underlined that attacks on peacekeepers may constitute war crimes.

The secretary-general "pays tribute to the determination and the courage of peacekeepers, who continue to implement their mandates in extremely challenging circumstances in support of the people of Mali," U.N. spokesman Stephane Dujarric said. The Security Council stressed that involvement in planning, directing, sponsoring or conducting attacks against peacekeepers also constitutes a basis for U.N. sanctions.

Council members "expressed their concern about the security situation in Mali and the transnational dimension of the terrorist threat in the Sahel region" and urged full implementation of a 2015 peace agreement "without further delay."

The U.N. mission says over 255 of its peacekeepers and personnel have died since 2013, making Mali the deadliest of the U.N.'s dozen peacekeeping missions worldwide.

"The word grateful isn't strong enough to express how we feel towards those member states which continue to provide many peacekeepers around the world," Dujarric said. "Egyptians, Jordanians, Chadians and others have given their lives for the people of Mali for the cause of peace and we're eternally grateful for their continued support."

The head of the U.N. mission in Mali, El Ghassim Wane, condemned Friday's attack on the U.N. convoy, saying such attacks can constitute war crimes.

He also condemned an attack Wednesday near Kayes in western Mali by gunmen riding motorcycles against a vehicle marked with the Red Cross emblem that killed a worker for the Dutch Red Cross and the car's driver.

Mali: Civilians Bear Brunt of Heavy Fighting in Mali (allAfrica)

By Chrispin Mwakideu and Kate Hairsine

June 11, 2022

Mali's northeast is seeing heavy fighting as Mali's army, together with pro-government militias, battle insurgents. Hundreds of civilians have been killed and tens of thousands are displaced.

"The principle victims are civilians," said Ibrahima Garigo, director of the regional station Radio Rurale de Meneka, in a telephone interview with DW.

The fighting between Mali's army and its Tuareg allies against Islamist militant groups in Mali's northeast Menaka region has intensified in the past weeks.

The local wing of extremist group known as the Islamic State has killed hundreds in the area since March, in retaliation for attacks by the Tuareg militias.

Hundreds of civilians have been killed in reprisal killings, Garigo said.

The extremists have also looted and burned homes, markets and vehicles.

Many pastoralists in the region have also lost the animals they make their livelihoods from in the fighting, according to Garigo.

Aid workers in Menaka told Garigo at least 32,000 people had been displaced in the region. Most of those fleeing the violence are women and children.

"The security situation has deteriorated since March," Fatoumata Maigia, president of the Menaka-based Association of Women for Peace Initiatives said, adding that there were enormous human rights violations going on in Menaka at the moment.

Describing an attack in early March, when the fighting initially flared, she recounted how women were raped and thrown alive into wells. "This is inexplicable. This is not good for Mali," she said.

The head of MINUSMA, the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali, El Ghassim Wane, described the situation in the Menaka region as "extremely dramatic" during a visit at the end of May.

Who controls Menaka?

The fiercest battles are currently around Anderamboukane, a strategically important town near the border with Niger.

The Movement for the Salvation of Azawad, a largely Tuareg militia, and its ally, the Imghad Tuareg and Allies Self-Defense Group, known as GATIA, are trying to push the extremists out of Anderamboukane and the surrounding area.

These pro-government forces said last weekend that they had "total control" of Anderamboukane and had "routed" the extremists, the AFP news agency reported.

Since then, there have been conflicting reports over who actually controls the town and the region.

"A big part of the Menaka region is under the control of the jihadists today," Abdoul Wahab Ag Ahmed Mohamed, head of Menaka's interim authorities, told AFP on Tuesday.

Asked about this by DW, radio director Garigo said there was definitely territory in Menaka region "where the symbols of the state weren't present."

Vacuum left after French withdrawal

The increased militant activity comes amid the withdrawal of French troops, who had been operating in the West African nation since 2013. They withdrew after a breakdown in relations with Mali's ruling military junta.

Military and police from the UN mission, along with Malian forces, have stepped up day and night patrols in Menaka.

Malian forces pulled out of Anderamboukane in late 2019 as part of a redeployment in the face of relentless attacks, mostly by the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara, or IS-GS.

The Tuareg movements fighting the group have complained that the army isn't doing enough in Menaka.

"The Malian government has not even bothered to issue a communique to deplore the unprecedented number of citizens killed," complained GATIA's Fahad Ag Al Mahmoud to the French language news magazine, Jeune Afrique in April.

"We are facing hundreds of fighters who are massacring civilians and the Malian army does not intervene. Is this a lack of sincerity on the part of the authorities in the fight against terrorism, or a deliberate desire to let the IS-GS decimate the Tuareg?"

Why is violence happening?

In 2012, the Tuareg separatist group, the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad, backed by a loose alliance of Islamist militant factions, moved to take control of territory in Mali's north.

The failure of former president, Amadou Toumani Toure, to end this rebellion led to his ousting in a coup in March 2012.

The Tuareg and Islamist groups quickly took much of Mali's north. But their alliance was short-lived. The National Movement broke with the jihadists over their push to impose Sharia law.

Several years later, these largely Tuareg armed groups signed what is known as the 2015 Algiers Peace Agreement to end years of violent conflict in the country.

International forces

With the rebel groups advancing southwards towards the capital, Bamako, Mali's government appealed to France for help. Some 1,700 French troops were originally deployed in 2013, with this expanded to a 5,000-strong force known as Operation Barkhane.

That same year, the UN approved sending in peacekeepers to protect the civilian population under their own mission. This includes German forces.

The MINUSMA mission is considered the most dangerous UN operation in the world.

But even the increased presence of local and international counterterrorism forces has failed to stem the spread of Islamic militancy in Mali.

This again led to political turmoil. The first coup occurred in 2020 when the country's elected leader, Ibrahim Boubacar Keita, was deposed because of his failure to rein in extremist activity.

The military then took control of the transitional government in May 2021. They are still in charge.

Some observers have compared the security problems in Menaka province to the situation in 2012 and 2013.

But according to Baba Dakono, an analyst in Mali, there are several differences.

Ten years ago, the Tuareg and extremist groups occupied almost all of northern Mali, including the important towns of Gao and Kidal and the city of Timbuktu, for nearly eight months, he said.

This time, he believes, the extremists are not interested in permanently controlling the region. Rather, he says, they want to control "territory which doesn't have a continuous presence of defense and security forces."

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Liberia

Prosecutor Appeal War Crimes Acquittal (GNN Liberia)

By Cholo Brooks

June 7, 2022

A Tampere resident was acquitted of charges related to crimes allegedly committed during the Sierra Leonean and Liberian civil wars between 1999 and 2003.

Prosecutors will appeal the decision by the Pirkanmaa District Court to acquit Gibril Massaquoi of charges including murder, aggravated rape and aggravated war crimes, public prosecutor Tom Laitinen has confirmed to news agency STT.

"The main grounds of the appeal are related to the assessment of the evidence, that in our opinion the district court has incorrectly assessed the evidence presented in the case," Laitinen wrote in an email to STT.

Last month, the court dismissed all charges against Massaquoi — which related to offences allegedly committed during the Sierra Leonean and Liberian civil wars between 1999 and 2003 — ruling that the prosecution in the case had not proved beyond reasonable doubt that he was guilty.

However, the court also noted that there was reason to suspect the defendant had committed the crimes he was charged with. The prosecutor had demanded that Massaquoi receive a sentence of life imprisonment.

During the trial, which lasted nearly a year, the court made trips to West Africa to hear testimony from dozens of witnesses and visit the sites of the alleged crimes.

The prosecutors' evidence in the case was based almost entirely on the testimony of the witnesses, but in its ruling the court noted that many witnesses changed their accounts "in very important respects" during the course of the trial.

U.S. Immigration Authority Deports Liberian Fugitive To Liberia (GNN Liberia)

By Cholo Brooks

June 9, 2022

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's (ICE) Enforcement and Removal Operations (ERO) Saint Paul removed an unlawfully present foreign fugitive and former member of both the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) and the Liberian National Police Special Operations Division (LNPSOD) from the United States, June 1, 2022.

Eddie Jenner Murphy Karpoleh was flown from Saint Paul to Liberia on a flight coordinated by ICE's Air Operations Unit. Upon arrival, the fugitive was turned over to Liberian officials.

On Oct. 14, 2008, Karpoleh legally entered the U.S. to appear as a defense witness in the criminal trial of Roy Belfast Jr., aka “Chuckie” Taylor, the first U.S. criminal torture prosecution. Karpoleh absconded without testifying and was designated an ICE fugitive.

An investigation led by Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) Philadelphia, with assistance from the ICE’s Office of Principal Legal Advisor and Human Rights Violators and War Crimes Center (HRVWCC), revealed that Karpoleh had been a former fighter in the NPFL, which was infamous for forcing children to kill and torture. Karpoleh was later a commander in LNPSOD, a unit known as “Sons of the Devil” for its brutality to local villagers. As a leader in these armed groups, Karpoleh was implicated in incidents of murder and sexual assault during Liberia’s two civil wars.

On Aug. 19, 2013, an immigration judge ordered Karpoleh removed. Between Nov. 24, 2014, and March 23, 2022, Karpoleh remained on an order of supervision while complying with reporting instructions, pending additional immigration applications.

On March 23, 2022, ERO St. Paul revoked Karpoleh’s order of supervision and on April 19, 2022, ERO Des Moines officers arrested Karpoleh during a targeted enforcement operation.

The HRVWCC is the only government entity focused completely on investigating global atrocities and the perpetrators of human rights violations and war crimes. Initiated by HSI in 2008, the HRVWCC leverages the knowledge and expertise of a select group of special agents, attorneys, intelligence analysts, criminal research specialists and historians who are charged with preventing the United States from becoming a safe haven for individuals who engage in the commission of war crimes, genocide, torture and other forms of serious human rights abuses from conflicts around the globe.

Members of the public who have information about foreign fugitives or foreign nationals suspected of engaging in human rights abuses or war crimes are urged to contact ICE by calling the toll-free ICE tip line at 1-866-DHS-2423 or internationally at 001-1802-872-6199. They can also email HRV.ICE@ice.dhs.gov or complete ICE’s online tip form.

Since 2003, ICE has arrested more than 480 individuals for human rights-related violations of the law under various criminal and/or immigration statutes. During that same period, ICE obtained deportation orders against and physically removed more than 1,085 known or suspected human rights violators from the United States. Additionally, ICE has facilitated the departure of an additional 181 such individuals from the United States.

Currently, HSI has more than 160 active investigations into suspected human rights violators and is pursuing more than 1,700 leads and removals cases involving suspected human rights violators from 95 different countries. Since 2003, the HRVWCC has issued more than 78,000 lookouts for individuals from more than 110 countries and stopped over 350 human rights violators and war crimes suspects from entering the United States.

Undocumented migrants processed for removal may receive their legal due process from federal immigration judges in the immigration courts, which are administered by the Executive Office for Immigration Review (EOIR). EOIR is an agency within the U.S. Department of Justice and is separate from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and ICE. Immigration judges in these courts make decisions based on the merits of each individual case. ICE officers carry out the removal decisions made by the federal immigration judges.

Regardless of nationality, ICE makes custody determinations on a case-by-case basis, in accordance with U.S. law and DHS policy, considering the merits and factors of each case while adhering to current agency priorities and guidelines. ICE focuses its civil immigration enforcement priorities on the apprehension and removal of noncitizens who pose a threat to our national security, public safety, and border security.

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Somalia

Killings In Somalia War Crimes, Deception, and Impunity (Byline Times)

By Mohamed Gabobe
June 15, 2022

After taking a motorbike ride from Mogadishu’s bustling Taleh junction to a dirt road on the outskirts of the Somali capital, where I trekked past a row of shanty homes, I caught my first glimpse of the elderly woman I was scheduled to meet. Standing before me with the warmest of smiles, she gestured towards her home, inviting me to enter.

She didn’t know much about me, only that I was eager to hear her story. She tells me her name is Sadiya, and that her family hails from the village of Buurane in the Middle Shabelle province, a region synonymous with militancy and where the rules of engagement are often non-existent.

When I offer a smile in the direction of three young children sitting on an old rug, she says, “These are my son’s children. They were left with me after he was murdered.”

Sadiya tells me how her 18-year-old son Sharmarke and his friends were cutting onions on the porch of her home, the day they were approached by coalition troops from Burundi serving under the UN-backed African Union Mission in Somalia, commonly referred to as AMISOM. The troops ordered the young men to go inside for reasons Sadiya doesn’t know.

AMISON soldiers routinely patrol the village of Buurane and its surrounding areas – often implementing curfews and detaining civilians under the mere pretext of suspicion. Many are often held under arbitrary detention for weeks – sometimes even longer.

On this occasion, however, the AMISOM troops departed without incident. Sadiya’s son and his friends went back to their chores, before starting a card game.

Moments later, a massive blast punctured the air, and a cloud of thick black smoke billowed into the night sky. A roadside bomb had struck a nearby AMISOM convoy.

Not long after that, AMISOM troops returned to her home. She remembers spotting one peering through the window seconds before they opened fire. Screams and falling glass engulfed the tiny home. Her son was cut down by a hail of bullets, piercing his heart and spine, and striking his friend sitting directly behind him.

The friend died instantly, but her son clung to life, screaming for his mother to stop the bleeding while mouthing the words to the Shahada (the Islamic declaration of faith).

The AMISOM troops barged into the home and pointed their weapons at Sadiya and her dying son, she says. Sadiya pleaded with the soldiers to allow her to tend to her son's wounds, but to no avail. Her son bled to death in front of her eyes.

As Sadiya tells me this, she slumps to her knees, and sobs uncontrollably.

"It's one thing to watch your child be shot in front of you. It's another to watch them bleed out while begging for your help," she says.

Sadiya's account is consistent with testimonies of other eyewitnesses to mass killings carried out by AMISOM troops. A scathing report by Human Rights Watch revealed how AMISOM troops targeted wedding-goers near the Somali port town of Merka in 2015, killing six men, and denying medical care to the lone survivor, who later died of his wounds.

Sadiya said the soldiers remained in her home for two hours after her son bled out, leaving only when Somali Government troops arrived to retrieve the lifeless bodies of her son and his friend. Murdered at 18 years-of-age, Sharmarke would never get to see the arrival of his third child.

Moreover, in the weeks and months that followed, Sadiya endured relentless threats and intimidation from AMISOM troops, who would repeatedly show up at her home and order her to leave, she claims, often threatening to burn down her home if she continued to refuse their demands.

Sadiya says the AMISOM troops told her that they were carrying out military operations in the area and she needed to vacate the home, but this was an order given only to her, and nobody else in the village. The same troops that brutally murdered her son were now forcefully displacing her from the only home she's ever known.

Many of her neighbours advised Sadiya to heed the warnings and not risk losing the three young grandchildren, but she refused to leave and instead pleaded her case to local authorities located several kilometres away in the district of Mahaadey.

But she was turned away.

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Ethiopia

Ethiopia PM Says Committee Created to Negotiate With Tigray Forces

By Henry Wilkins

June 14, 2022

Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed has announced the formation of a committee to begin peace talks with the leadership in the northern Tigray region after 18 months of war.

Abiy spoke to parliament on Tuesday about the conflict in comments broadcast on state television.

"We need to repeat the victory that we made on the battlefield in peace talks," he said, adding that the war is hindering the country's development. "Every bullet that is shot is like a dollar lost."

Abiy said that the committee would be led by Deputy Prime Minister Demeke Mekonnen and would be given 10 to 15 days to decide what will be up for negotiation.

Although the talks may have the potential to bring an end to Ethiopia's civil war, William Davison, an analyst with the International Crisis Group, a Belgium-based non-profit research group, told VOA that important details are yet to emerge.

“We don’t have a clear idea of the participants,” Davison said. “To achieve a sustainable peace that would need the representation from other actors in the conflict.”

The return of forces allied with the Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF) to the disputed region of Western Tigray, which was occupied by Amhara regional forces, Amhara militia known as “Fano” and Ethiopia’s federal forces in the recent conflict, is likely to be a major sticking point in peace talks.

Last week TPLF spokesperson Getachew Reda denied claims that the TPLF has “abandoned claims to Western Tigray.”

The regional leadership later issued a statement on June 11 saying that “the depiction of Western Tigray as a contested land is ... unacceptable and inimical to any peace-making efforts. The expansionist Amhara elite has seized it by force and that is simply unacceptable.”

The next day, Yilikal Kefale, chief administrator of the Amhara region, issued a statement on June 12, saying negotiations regarding Western Tigray or the area which is referred to as Welkait by the Amhara region is “our red line,” he said.

In April, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch released a joint report saying forces from Ethiopia’s Amhara region may have committed war crimes and ethnic cleansing in Western Tigray.

Speaking to VOA after the report was issued, Amnesty International's Horn of Africa researcher Fisseha Tekle said that forces from the Amhara region, aided by government troops, seized control of Western Tigray and began a campaign of ethnic cleansing.

The conflict in Tigray between the Ethiopian federal government and the TPLF began in November 2020. Neighboring Eritrea joined the fight against TPLF, deploying its forces to Tigray where they are accused of committing war crimes.

The conflict quickly exploded into a civil war which, along with famine, has killed and displaced hundreds of thousands of people and forced 2.2 million to flee from their homes, according to the U.N.

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EUROPE

The Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina, War Crimes Chamber

Official Court Website [English translation]

Kosovo Arrests Serb on War Crime Charges (Balkan Insight)

By Perparim Isufi and Ilirjana Hoti

June 3, 2022

Kosovo Police arrested a Serb, reported to be a former reservist policeman, on suspicion of committing a war crime against the civilian population during the 1998-99 conflict.

Kosovo Police announced on Friday that a Serb has been arrested near the western town of Istog/Istok for allegedly committing a war crime against the civilian population.

“After an investigative work from the War Crimes Investigative Unit, police identified and arrested a Serb for war crimes against civilian population in Kosovo during 1998-1999,” a police statement said.

The police did not name of the suspect but the Serbian government’s office for Kosovo identified him as Caslav Jolic, a father of four children who lives in central Serbia.

The head of Kosovo's Special Prosecution, Blerim Isufaj, told BIRN that the man is suspected of committing war crimes in the Peja/Pec region.

"The suspect is from Istog, he is 54 years old," Isufaj said.

Kosovo media have reported that Jolic, a former reservist in the Serbian police, is suspected of beating up a Kosovo Albanian from the village of Gurrakoc/Djurakovac, shortly before the end of war in Kosovo in June 1999.

According to the Serbian government's office for Kosovo, Jolic has been to Kosovo many times during last 23 years and "had no problem at all until yesterday when he was arrested under suspicious pretexts and circumstances".

"He went [to Kosovo] to undertake certain administrative activities relating to the probate after the death of his father, when he was suddenly arrested over the recent indictment, which sheds special light on his case," it said.

"The Pristina judiciary is constantly filing secret indictments of Serbs from Kosovo with non-credible witnesses to discourage them from returning to their homes [in Kosovo] or claiming their property rights," it added.

A report on war crimes prosecutions published by the Humanitarian Law Centre Kosovo in April this year criticised Kosovo for its slow pace in war crimes case investigations, saying that only one new indictment was filed in 2021 and only two people were arrested on suspicion of war crimes.

Bosnian Serb Ex-Military Policeman Pleads Not Guilty to Massacre (Balkan Insight)

By Enes Hodzic

June 8, 2022

Former Bosnian Serb Army military policeman Nikola Koprivica denied he was there when 44 Bosniaks were killed in the village of Novoseoci, near Sokolac, during the war in 1992.

Nikola Koprivica, alias Nidza, pleaded not guilty at the Bosnian state court on Tuesday to the charge that he committed a crime against humanity in the village of Novoseoci in September 1992.

"I didn't do it, nor was I there at all," the defendant told the plea hearing.

The indictment accuses him of participating in an attack on the Bosniak-inhabited village in the Sokolac municipality on September 21 and 22, 1992.

He took part in the attack as a Bosnian Serb Army military policeman, alongside other members of the military police force, the indictment says.

"After the attack, women and children were separated from the men, and the captured men were transported by military trucks to a landfill at Ivan Polje, a few kilometres from Novoseoci, where they were brought to the edge of the landfill, and shot and killed with gunfire," the prosecution said in a statement when the indictment was issued.

Koprivica is accused of personally participating in the killings by firing at the victims with an automatic weapon.

Of the 44 people who were killed, the youngest was 14 and the oldest was 77.

After the killings, the local mosque was destroyed, and the rubble was thrown onto the bodies of the victims at the Ivan Polje landfill, the prosecution alleges.

In April this year, Koprivica was extradited to Bosnia from Canada, where he had been living for several years.

Another court case is already ongoing for the killings in Novoseoci. Among those on trial are Dragomir Obradovic, former commander of the police's Public Security Station in Sokolac, Momcilo Pajic, former commander of the Military Police Company with the Second Romanija Motorised Brigade of the Bosnian Serb Army, and his deputy Aleksa Gordic.

Also on trial are Miladin Gasevic, former deputy commander of the Reconnaissance Company of the Second Romanija Motorised Brigade of the Bosnian Serb Army, as well as Momir and Branislav Kezunovic, Zeljko Gasevic and Jadranko Suka, all former members of the company.

Kosovo War Court Extends Ex-President Thaci's Detention Again (Balkan Insight)

By Xhorxhina Bami

June 9, 2022

The Kosovo Specialist Chambers war crimes court in The Hague extended the

detention of ex-President Hashim Thaci and ex-parliamentary speaker Kadri Veseli, citing concerns that they might abscond or interfere with witnesses.

The pre-trial judge at the Kosovo Specialist Chambers, Nicolas Guillou, decided on Thursday that Hashim Thaci and Kadri Veseli should remain in detention ahead of their trial for war crimes and crimes against humanity allegedly committed during the 1998-99 conflict in Kosovo.

Judge Guillou turned down a defence request for the release of Thaci and Veseli, who were two of the wartime leaders of the guerrilla Kosovo Liberation Army, KLA. The two men have been in detention for around a year and a half, since November 2020.

Judge Guillou concluded that “the risks that Mr Thaci (and Mr Veseli) will abscond, obstruct the progress of SC [Specialist Chambers] proceedings, or commit further crimes against those perceived as being opposed to the KLA, including witnesses who have provided or could provide evidence in the case and/or are due to appear before the SC, continue to exist”.

The so-called Special Court ruled that house arrest is also out of the question because Thaci and Veseli wield significant authority in Kosovo and because their defence teams have not introduced new arguments in their latest requests for their release.

“The pre-trial judge further recalls that he found that the evidence reveals that while Mr Veseli was at the head of the SHIK [Kosovo Intelligence Agency], members of the SHIK were involved in witness interference,” judge Guillou said, explaining the risk of witness-tampering if Veseli was released from detention.

Thaci was political director of the KLA and became Kosovo’s president in the post-war period, while Veseli was head of the KLA’s intelligence service and later became parliament speaker. He was the leader of the opposition Democratic Party of Kosovo, PDK, at the time of his arrest.

The two men are awaiting trial on war crimes charges alongside two of their former comrades-in-arms, also important political figures in Kosovo – the head of the parliamentary group of the Vetevendosje Movement opposition party, Rexhep Selimi, and the chairman of the national council of the Social Democratic Initiative (NISMA) party, Jakup Krasniqi.

Thaci, Veseli, Selimi, and Krasniqi are accused of being responsible for crimes committed by themselves and other former members of the KLA in various parts of Kosovo but also in northern Albania against hundreds of civilians and non-combatants.

Most of the crimes were committed in detention centres in 17 municipalities in Kosovo and two districts of Albania, Kukes and Has.

The Kosovo Specialist Chambers were set up to try crimes allegedly committed during and just after the Kosovo war from 1998 to 2000. They are part of Kosovo’s judicial system but located in the Netherlands and staffed by internationals.

They were set up under pressure from Kosovo’s Western allies, who feared that Kosovo’s justice system was not robust enough to try KLA cases and protect witnesses from interference.

The so-called ‘special court’ is widely resented by Kosovo Albanians who see it as an insult to the KLA’s war for liberation from Serbian rule.

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International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia **(ICTY)**

Official Website of the ICTY

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Domestic Prosecutions In The Former Yugoslavia

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Turkey

Turkey Is Threatening War Against Syrian Kurds (The Progressive Magazine)

By Edward Hunt

June 8, 2022

The United States is preparing for the possibility that Turkey, a NATO member, may invade Rojava, an autonomous region in northeastern Syria where both U.S. and Russian soldiers are currently stationed.

With Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan making increasingly ominous threats to launch a military intervention in Rojava, officials from the Biden Administration have been working to address these threats, aware that a NATO country could be the aggressor in the world's next major war.

“Basically, Turkey wants to do the same thing that Russia is doing in Ukraine, which is to come in and commit war crimes against the citizens here,” said Nadine Maenza, the former chair of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, when she visited Rojava late last month. “I do hope the international community and the United States stand up.”

For several years, Turkey has been trying to destroy Rojava, a Kurdish-led enclave. The Turkish government wants to eliminate the region's revolutionary Syrian Kurds, who have created an autonomous region inside Syria while providing a model of self-government for Turkey's minority Kurdish population.

Erdoğan portrays Rojava's Kurdish militants as terrorists. He accuses them of being part of the Kurdistan Workers' Party, a revolutionary movement that has been seeking Kurdish liberation in Turkey.

Turkey has already, in recent years, launched several incursions into Rojava. Its last major intervention, conducted in October 2019 with the support of the Trump Administration, devastated the area, leaving Turkey in control of a large swathe of territory.

Ceasefire agreements have created a highly complex environment, with security forces from several countries stationed in Rojava. Both Russia and the United States conduct military patrols, sometimes coming into conflict with one another.

Despite the Trump Administration's backing of Turkey's 2019 invasion, the United States has maintained a close partnership with Rojava's Kurdish militants. Since the Syrian Civil War, the U.S. military has worked closely with the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces in combating the Islamic State, and U.S. officials have repeatedly praised them for their bravery.

As a presidential candidate, Joe Biden described the Kurdish-led forces as “courageous” and indicated that he would continue to support them.

The Syrian Kurds have created a revolutionary new society on a model that they call “democratic confederalism.” Since the early years of the Syrian Civil War, they have been building a confederated and autonomous region in northeastern Syria that is democratic, pluralist, feminist, and multi-ethnic.

“Progressives should support their effort to build a secure base for direct democracy, feminism, and pluralism,” Meredith Tax wrote earlier this year in *The Nation*.

Though many U.S. officials oppose the Syrian Kurds' revolutionary project, sometimes even working against it, others have praised them for their achievements. At a hearing last month by the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, several participants commended Rojava for its religious freedom and ethnic diversity, conditions that are unique to north and east Syria. And for the second year in a row, the commission called on the U.S. government to grant political recognition to Rojava.

“They’ve built a government where they have these remarkable conditions of acceptance and tolerance that really the rest of the world can learn from,” Maenza said during her visit to Rojava in May.

Turkey’s recent threats follow moves by Finland and Sweden to join NATO. Since Finland and Sweden have been sympathetic to the Syrian Kurds, with Sweden providing Rojava with financial and political support, Turkey has opposed NATO membership for the two countries.

Some analysts believe that Erdoğan is hoping the West will ignore another Turkish-led military intervention in exchange for Turkey’s support for Finland and Sweden to join NATO.

So far, the Biden Administration has moved slowly to address Turkey’s provocations. Though several high-level officials have stated their opposition to another Turkish military intervention, they have acknowledged that they are looking for ways to accommodate Turkey.

“Concerns that Turkey has raised directly with Finland and Sweden are being addressed by the Finns and the Swedes with the assistance of NATO,” said U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken in a press briefing last week. “We want to make sure that all allies have their security concerns taken into account, and that, of course, includes Turkey.”

For now, the main factor that could prevent the Biden Administration from siding against the Syrian Kurds is Rojava’s strategic importance in the Syrian Civil War. With the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces still controlling most of northeastern Syria, they have prevented Syrian President Bashar al-Assad from regaining control of an important region where oil reserves and wheat fields are located.

“That’s a point of leverage because the Syrian government would love to have dominion over those resources,” Blinken said in 2020, referring to the region’s oil. “We should not give that up for free.”

As Turkey continues to threaten Rojava, the situation is growing increasingly precarious, with recent reports indicating that Turkey has already begun conducting military operations. Any major Turkish-led military incursion could spark a broader conflict, which would be especially dangerous with U.S. and Russian forces continuing to operate in the area.

“A potential war will not be an easy one,” warned Mazloum Abdi, the leader of the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces, in a recent interview. “It will not end in a short period of time—unlike Turkey’s expectations. It will be a hard war and will last for a long time.”

'Possible Turkish operation against YPG in Syria has 3 main goals' (Daily Sabah)

By Ugur Yildirim

June 13, 2022

Turkey's possible military operation targeting northern Syria has three main goals: to fight the PKK terrorist organization's Syrian branch YPG that threatens the security of the country on the border, to prevent a terror state that may emerge under the control of the YPG and finally to take a step that will facilitate the return of Syrians.

Serhat Erkmen, an academic from Altınbaş University, said the Western media sustains an inaccurate argument that the YPG is not attacking Turkey.

"As a branch of the PKK, the YPG continues its attacks not only in Syria but also inside Turkey. They attacked our border post in Karkamış a short time ago. There have been many such attacks. In this context, the first objective of this operation is to fight terrorism. Direct attacks are taking place on our presence in Idlib, our presence in Afrin, and our presence in the Euphrates Shield region from Tal Rifaat, one of the main targets. As part of the fight against terrorism, Turkey wants to end the PKK/YPG presence in Tal Rifaat," Erkmen said.

According to Erkmen, the second dimension of this operation is the strategic one. One of the biggest recent changes in Syria has been in the U.S. sanctions against Syria, he said, noting that the YPG regions were excluded from the embargoes against Syria.

"Some privileges were introduced for these regions. We have seen that the first steps have been taken to separate this region from Syria economically. From our point of view, this shows that the operation in Syria is not only fighting terrorism but has become a strategic necessity to solve a bigger threat such as the YPG state that would be established in the region in the long run," he explained.

The United States lifting sanctions on northeastern Syrian territories held by the YPG is an attempt to legitimize the terrorist group, Turkey said recently.

Last month, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan commented on the U.S. decision to exempt the economic activities of some regions of Syria that are not under regime control from the U.S. Caesar Act sanctions.

"The YPG is a terrorist organization. The YPG is what the PKK is. Therefore, it is not possible for us to accept this mistake made by the United States," he said.

Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu also said: "It's a selective, discriminatory approach, and they have introduced flexibility in these Caesar Act sanctions for certain regions."

The Caesar Act is United States legislation that sanctions the Syrian regime, including its leader Bashar Assad, for war crimes against the Syrian population. It was signed into law by then-President Donald Trump in December 2019 and became effective on June 17, 2020.

"They do not want to expand these exceptions to the regions controlled by the regime, but they favor the regions that the regime does not control at the moment. Especially in places where the PKK/YPG is dominant, they stretch it. For example, it covers the region we cleared of terrorism of Daesh, but not the region like Afrin, which we cleared of the PKK."

The U.S. imposed sweeping sanctions on the regime and its leadership in retaliation for atrocities the regime has committed during the Syrian conflict, which is now in its 12th year. The PKK/YPG remains in control of large swathes of northeastern Syria with U.S. backing.

Third, and one of the long-term goals of the operation, is the return of Syrians to their homeland, Erkmén also said and added: "More than 2.5 million people live in the Euphrates Shield and Olive Branch regions. Despite all of Turkey's aid, there are still infrastructural deficiencies. It is not easy for the region, which has been left behind for hundreds of years, to rise up again in a conflict environment. Turkey needs more space to enable people to return to their homes in such an environment. To enable more Syrians to return to their homes, it is necessary to give them more space. Tal Rifaat and Manbij are very important places in this sense. Achieving these targets will ensure a long-term return from Turkey to Syria."

Stating that the operations will continue in northern Syria, Erkmén said: "We are currently living the continuation of an unfinished story. Within the framework of the fight against the PKK/YPG, Turkey aims to control a wider area and minimize the separatist organization's sphere of influence in Syria. At the point we have reached today, due to the partial change in the internal balances in Syria and the change in the international conjuncture, the fight against terrorism has become an opportunity to move to an advanced stage. Turkey is currently seizing this opportunity. This struggle will be spread over a very long phase. This operation will not be the last."

Erdoğan said two weeks ago that Turkey would launch new military operations in Syria to extend the 30-kilometer (20-mile) deep "safe zones" along the border, aiming at the Tal Rifaat and Manbij regions and other areas further east.

"We are taking another step in establishing a 30-kilometer security zone along our southern border. We will clean up Tal Rifaat and Manbij," he said, adding that the planned military operations will gradually continue in other parts of northern Syria.

Erdoğan has said that since the United States and Russia have failed to live up to their commitments to provide a safe zone along the border region, Turkey is ready to mount an operation to protect the nation and locals in northern Syria from the PKK/YPG terrorist threat.

In October 2019, Russia committed to removing the terrorist group from Tal Rifaat and Manbij after reaching an agreement with Turkey during Operation Peace Spring. Moscow also promised that the terrorists would be pulled back 30 kilometers from the border on the M4 highway and in the area outside the Operation Peace Spring zone. Likewise, U.S. then-Vice President Mike Pence pledged to Turkey that the YPG/PKK terrorist group would withdraw from the Operation Peace Spring region. But neither Moscow nor Washington kept their promises.

The YPG/PKK mostly carries out terrorist attacks in Manbij, Ain al-Arab and the Tal Rifaat district of Aleppo, even using these regions as bases for its attacks. The YPG, which occupies roughly a third of Syria's territory with the support of the United States, frequently targets Azaz, Marea, al-Bab, Jarablus, Afrin, Tal Abyad and Ras al-Ain in the north of the country with heavy weapons.

Turkish-backed operations in previous years have ousted the YPG/PKK from the northwestern enclave of Afrin and a series of border towns further east. Since 2016, Ankara has launched a trio of successful anti-terror operations across its border in northern Syria to prevent the formation of a terror corridor and enable the peaceful settlement of residents: Euphrates Shield (2016), Olive Branch (2018) and Peace Spring (2019).

The YPG has controlled much of northeastern Syria since the forces of Syrian regime leader Bashar Assad withdrew in 2012.

Assad's forces have recovered most of Syria but some areas remain outside his control. Turkish forces are deployed in much of the north and northwest, the last opposition stronghold, and U.S. forces are stationed in the YPG-controlled east and northeast.

The PKK is a designated terrorist organization in the U.S., Turkey and the European Union, and Washington's support for its Syrian affiliate has been a major strain on bilateral relations with Ankara. The U.S. primarily partnered with the YPG in northeastern Syria to fight the Daesh terrorist group. On the other hand, Turkey strongly opposed the YPG's presence in northern Syria. Ankara has long objected to the U.S.' support for the YPG, a group that poses a threat to Turkey and that terrorizes local people, destroying their homes and forcing them to flee.

While acknowledging Turkey's security concerns, Washington has voiced concerns about Ankara's plans, saying a new operation could undermine regional stability and put American forces at risk. Russia also said last week it hoped Turkey "refrains from actions which could lead to a dangerous deterioration of the already difficult situation in Syria."

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Russia

Ukraine/Russia: "Death sentences" against three foreign members of Ukrainian forces by separatists' "courts" a blatant violation of international law (Amnesty International)

June 9, 2022

Responding to the news that a separatist "court" in Russia-occupied Donetsk ordered the death of two captured two British nationals and a captured Moroccan national, Denis Krivosheev, Amnesty International's Deputy Director for Eastern Europe and Central Asia, said:

"This is a blatant violation of international humanitarian law on so many counts.

"The three were members of the Ukrainian regular forces and under the Geneva Conventions, as prisoners of war, they are protected from prosecution for taking part in hostilities. The only exception is prosecution for alleged war crimes, in which case there must be sufficient admissible evidence, and fair trial standards must be ensured. Not only this is not the case in this scenario – they were not tried by an independent, impartial regularly constituted court but by Russian proxies. The so-called 'charges' against them would not constitute war crimes. And most outrageously of all, the taking of their lives as result of the grossly unfair proceedings would constitute arbitrary deprivation of life.

"In fact, wilfully depriving a prisoner of war or other protected person of the right to a fair and regular trial constitutes a war crime. Russia, as the occupying power, bears responsibility for the treatment of all prisoners of war and others deprived of their liberty. They must ensure this so-called 'sentence' is immediately quashed, and that these men are treated in full compliance with international humanitarian law."

Background

The "death sentence" against British nationals Sean Pinner and Aiden Aslin and Moroccan national Saadun Brahim, was pronounced on 9 June by the de-facto Supreme Court of the so-called Donetsk People's Republic, a self-proclaimed separatist entity under Russian occupation of eastern Ukraine.

They were "convicted" of being foreign mercenaries and "actions aimed at violent seizure of power and overthrow of the

constitutional order of the DNR". The three were taking part in the fighting with Russia as members of the regular Ukrainian forces, and were taken captive in May by Russian forces in Mariupol in south-eastern Ukraine.

UN issues war crimes warning over death sentences in Ukraine war (Al Jazeera)

June 10, 2022

The United Nations has declared that unfair trials of prisoners of war amounts to war crimes, after three foreigners captured while fighting with Ukraine forces were sentenced to death by pro-Russian rebels.

British citizens Aiden Aslin, Shaun Pinner, and Moroccan national Saadoun Brahim were sentenced to death on Thursday by pro-Russian separatist authorities in eastern Ukraine's breakaway Donetsk People's Republic (DPR).

The spokeswoman for the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights said on Friday that authorities in the pro-Russian self-proclaimed republics in Ukraine had not met essential fair trial guarantees for some years, and "in the case of the use of the death penalty, fair trial guarantees are all the more important".

"OHCHR is concerned about the so-called Supreme Court of the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic sentencing three servicemen to death," UN spokesperson Ravina Shamdasani said in a statement.

"According to the chief command of Ukraine, all the men were part of the Ukrainian armed forces and if that is the case, they should not be considered as mercenaries," Shamdasani said.

"Such trials against prisoners of war amount to a war crime," she added.

"Since 2015, we have observed that the so-called judiciary in these self-proclaimed republics has not complied with essential fair trial guarantees".

Kyiv has been battling a pro-Russian armed uprising since 2014 that has gained control in two breakaway eastern regions of Ukraine.

'Mercenaries'

Aslin and Pinner surrendered in April in Mariupol, the southern Ukrainian port city that was captured by Russian troops in May after a weeks-long siege. Saadoun surrendered in March in the eastern Ukrainian town of Volnovakha.

The three were charged with violating four articles of the DPR's legal code, including attempting to "seize power" and "training in order to conduct terrorist activity", the separatist-affiliated Donetsk News Agency reported.

The separatists argued that the men were "mercenaries" and not entitled to the usual protections accorded prisoners of war.

Aslin's and Pinner's families have said that the two men were long-serving members of the Ukrainian military.

Saadoun's father told a Moroccan online newspaper that his son is not a mercenary and that he holds Ukrainian citizenship.

The British government said Russia must take responsibility for the "sham trial" of their citizens.

Government minister Robin Walker said that it was "an illegal court in a sham government" but that the UK would use "all diplomatic channels to make the case that these are prisoners of war who should be treated accordingly".

British Foreign Secretary Liz Truss is due to speak to her Ukrainian counterpart Dmytro Kuleba later on Friday about the case.

The UK has not announced any plans to speak to Russian officials – and it does not recognise the self-proclaimed Donetsk republic and will not officially contact the authorities there.

Russia is the only UN member state to recognise the DPR, much of which is still controlled by Ukraine, as independent.

Russian foreign ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said in a statement that the UK should appeal directly to the DPR authorities, and said London's reaction to such cases was "often hysterical".

Germany's Foreign Office said the death sentences underlined "Russia's complete disregard for international humanitarian law".

Bucolic Ukraine forest is site of mass grave exhumation (Associated Press)

By Oleksandr Stashevskiy

June 13, 2022

The lush green beauty of a pine forest with singing birds contrasted with the violent deaths of newly discovered victims of Russia's war in Ukraine, as workers exhumed bodies from another mass grave near the town of Bucha on Kyiv's outskirts.

The hands of several victims were tied behind their backs. The gruesome work of digging up the remains coincided with the Ukrainian police chief's report that authorities have opened criminal investigations into the killings of more than 12,000 people since Russia' invaded Ukraine on Feb. 24.

Workers wearing white hazmat suits and masks used shovels to exhume bodies from the soil of the forest, marking each section with small yellow numbered signs on the ground. The bodies, covered in cloth and dirt, attracted flies.

"Shots to the knees tell us that people were tortured," Andriy Nebytov, head of the Kyiv regional police, said at the scene. "The hands tied behind the back with tape say that people had been held (hostage) for a long time and (enemy forces) tried to get any information from them."

Since the withdrawal of Russian troops from the region at the end of March, authorities say they have uncovered the bodies of 1,316 people, many in mass graves in the forest and elsewhere.

The horrors of Bucha shocked the world after Russian troops left. The mass grave that reporters saw Monday was just behind a trench dug out for a military vehicle. The bodies of seven civilians were retrieved. Two of the bodies were found with their hands tied and gunshot wounds to the knees and head, Nebytov said.

National police chief Igor Klimentenko told the Interfax-Ukraine news agency on Monday that criminal investigations into the deaths of more than 12,000 Ukrainians included some found in mass graves. He said the mass killings also were done by snipers firing from tanks and armored personnel carriers. Bodies were found lying on streets and homes, as well as in mass graves.

He didn't specify how many of the more than 12,000 were civilians and how many were military.

Complete information about the number of bodies in mass graves or elsewhere isn't known, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy told the American Jewish Committee on Sunday. He cited the case of two children who died with their parents in the basement of an apartment building in Mariupol in a Russian bombing. Zelenskyy, who is Jewish and lost relatives in the Holocaust, asked:

"Why is this happening in 2022? This is not the 1940s. How could mass killings, torture, burned cities, and filtration camps set up by the Russian military in the occupied territories resembling Nazi concentration camps come true?"

Amnesty says Russia guilty of war crimes in Kharkiv shelling (Reuters)

June 13, 2022

Russia's relentless shelling of the eastern Ukrainian city of Kharkiv with cluster munitions and scatterable land mines amounts to a war crime that indiscriminately killed hundreds of civilians, Amnesty International said on Monday.

Ukraine's second largest city Kharkiv was under near-constant bombardment from the beginning of Russia's invasion of Ukraine on Feb. 24 until Ukrainian forces pushed the Russians away from the city in May. Ukraine has said 606 civilians were killed there and 600,000 evacuated.

Amnesty said that it had found during a 14-day investigation in April and early May evidence that Russia had used cluster munitions and scatterable mines in Kharkiv.

"The repeated bombardments of residential neighbourhoods in Kharkiv are indiscriminate attacks which killed and injured hundreds of civilians, and as such constitute war crimes," Amnesty said in a report.

Russia's defence ministry did not respond to a Reuters request for comment on the Amnesty report. In the past, Russia has denied targeting civilians and accused Ukraine of faking evidence of war crimes.

Neither Russia nor Ukraine are signatories to an international agreement that bans cluster munitions. But the use of such weapons is still a war crime if it is indiscriminate and kills or harms civilians, Amnesty International research consultant Jean-Baptiste Gallopin told Reuters.

As an example, he cited a cluster munitions strike on a playground on Kharkiv's Mira Street, which he said killed nine people and wounded 35.

Gallopin said Amnesty had also found that Ukrainian forces had violated international humanitarian law by positioning

artillery near residential buildings, attracting Russian fire, though he said this "in no way justifies the relentless indiscriminate shelling of the city by Russian forces".

Ukraine's defence ministry could not be reached for immediate comment.

On Russia War Crimes In Ukraine, UN Says "Too Early To Confirm" (NDTV)

June 15, 2022

The UN's Ukraine commission on Wednesday confirmed receiving multiple allegations of rights abuses by Russian forces, but said it was too early to say whether they constituted war crimes.

"In Bucha and Irpin, the commission has received information about arbitrary killings of civilians, destruction and looting of property, as well as attacks on civilian infrastructure, including schools," commission chairman Erik Mose told a press conference in Kyiv.

In the Kharkiv and Sumy regions, the commission has observed "the destruction of large urban areas, which is believed to be the result of aerial bombardment, shelling or missile strikes against civilian targets," he added.

But Mose said the UN was "not in a position at this stage" to provide a full legal characterisation of the events that took place near Kyiv in March.

He said the evidence the commission collected could, "if confirmed later", support allegations of human rights violations, "including war crimes and crimes against humanity".

His remarks came as the independent international commission of inquiry on Ukraine, established by the UN Human Rights Council in March, was due to wrap up its first mission, which began on June 7 and will end on Thursday.

During visits to Bucha, Irpin, Kharkiv and Sumy, the commission collected testimonies from civilians and also met with local authorities and civil society organisations.

"It is one thing to witness mass destruction, for example, or receive accounts of deliberate killings, but it is another to come to a decision on responsibility with the legal qualification of these facts," said commission member Pablo de Greiff.

The commission, which was tasked last month with examining the events that took place in Ukraine in February and March, will return to the country next month to continue its work.

The UN inquiry is one of several international investigations into possible war crimes in Ukraine, including one opened by the International Criminal Court (ICC) whose prosecutor Karim Khan recently visited Kharkiv.

"Prosecutor Khan is carefully examining the crime sites and asking our prosecutors important questions," Ukraine's prosecutor general Iryna Venediktova said in a statement on Wednesday.

Khan visited the Kharkiv neighbourhoods most affected by the shelling where nine people were killed, among them a five-month-old baby, and another 17 injured in a bombing on May 26.

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Syria

US lawmakers push sanctions for Syria's Tadamon massacre (al-Monitor)

By Elizabeth Hagedorn

June 3, 2022

A pair of lawmakers are calling for the Biden administration to sanction a group of Syrians believed to be responsible for a near decade-old massacre of civilians in the Damascus suburb of Tadamon.

“Even as we struggle to cope with our own national tragedies, as co-chairs of the Friends of a Free, Stable, and Democratic Syria Caucus here in Congress, we write to call your attention to another horrific massacre that occurred thousands of miles away,” read the letter from Reps. Adam Kinzinger (R-Ill.) and Brendan Boyle (D-Pa.) sent to President Joe Biden on Wednesday.

Leaked video obtained by researchers at the University of Amsterdam's Holocaust and Genocide Center and recently published by The Guardian newspaper offers the latest evidence of sweeping war crimes carried out by the regime of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad during the country's 11-year-long civil war.

The newly released footage from Tadamon documents the April 2013 killing of at least 41 unarmed civilians who were rounded up by officers in the notorious Branch 227 of the military intelligence service. The video shows blindfolded and handcuffed detainees marched toward an execution pit and shot dead by a nearby Syrian officer. The bodies in the mass grave were then set on fire.

The US State Department has condemned the atrocities depicted in the video.

In the letter provided to Al-Monitor, the lawmakers urged Biden to sanction Branch 227 commander Jamal al-Ismael and his commanding officer Shafiq Massa as well as the two unit members alleged to have carried out the gruesome massacre, Jamal al-Khatib and Amjad Youssef.

“We are highlighting the information collected and developed at the University of Amsterdam's Holocaust and Genocide Center with our deep-seated hope that your administration impose sanctions under E.O.13572 against the individuals who have been documented to have participated in this heinous act of inhumanity,” Kinzinger and Boyle wrote.

“While Syrian dictator Bashar al Assad bears ultimate responsibility for all war crimes committed against the Syrian people, his allies continue to act on his behalf and must be held accountable,” they said.

Why it matters: Their call for sanctions comes as some Arab states who long shunned the regime for its crimes are gradually resuming ties with Damascus. Some lawmakers say Biden could be doing more to discourage Syria's neighbors from rehabilitating Assad, including by expanding economic sanctions under the Caesar Act.

Last year, the administration announced largely symbolic designations of a number of Syrian detention centers and prison officials accused of perpetrating human rights abuses. Branch 227 was among the military intelligence bodies sanctioned by the Biden administration.

The University of Amsterdam researchers who investigated the 2013 massacre have turned over their videos and notes to prosecutors in the Netherlands, Germany and France. The three countries have broad universal jurisdiction laws, which allow for the prosecution of grave crimes committed in another country.

The White Helmets and other Syrian groups have also urged US Ambassador to the United Nations Linda Thomas-Greenfield to address the 2013 killings with the UN Security Council.

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Yemen

NGOs bring Yemen war crimes case against French arms firms (The Manila Times)

June 4, 2022

Three non-governmental groups said Thursday (Friday in Manila) they had filed a criminal complaint against French arms manufacturers Dassault, Thales and MBDA France for "complicity in war crimes" in Yemen.

The firms "export arms to the (Saudi-led) coalition while knowing it has been committing war crimes since 2015," said Cannelle Lavite of the European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights (ECCHR), one of the plaintiffs.

Alongside Yemeni rights group Mwatana and France's Sherpa, the ECCHR says French-made fighter jets, missiles and guidance systems are being used in coalition airstrikes that "may amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity", adding there is evidence of attacks on civilians and homes, markets, hospitals and schools.

Lavite gave the example of Dassault's sale to coalition member the UAE and continuing maintenance of 59 Mirage fighters, which the ECCHR says makes such airstrikes possible.

A further sale of 80 Rafale jets, agreed in December, could be seen as "encouragement" to violate international humanitarian law, she said.

Besides Dassault, missile maker MBDA has sold Storm Shadow and Scalp weapons to the combatants, the ECCHR says, while Thales has provided missile guidance systems known as Damocles and Thalios.

"If you provide arms to the suspected perpetrator of repeated crimes, you're enabling them to commit those crimes," Lavite said.

Riyadh and Abu Dhabi did not immediately comment on the criminal complaint lodged by the NGOs, when asked by Agence France-Presse (AFP).

Investigative journalism website Disclose uncovered in 2019 an intelligence memo from the previous year which confirmed French-made weapons were being used in Yemen.

The Saudi-led coalition supports Yemeni government forces against Iran-backed Huthi rebels in a war that began in 2015.

Seen by the UN as one of the world's worst humanitarian crises, the fighting has killed hundreds of thousands of people and displaced millions, leaving many on the brink of famine.

'Countless victims'

"The countless Yemeni victims deserve credible investigations into all perpetrators of crimes, including those potentially complicit," said Mwatana chief Abdulrasheed al-Faqih.

"We're hoping that French courts can play a role in starting to fill the current cavernous accountability gap".

Mwatana and Sherpa estimate "at least 3,000 dead and 4,000 wounded" in around 1,000 attacks on civilians with "modern weapons".

Al-Faqih said the response to alleged war crimes in Yemen was far behind the international reaction following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, where Western nations have called for investigations into acts by Moscow's forces -- unlike in the poor Gulf nation.

Neither Dassault, Thales nor MBDA France responded immediately when contacted by AFP for comment on the criminal complaint.

Saudi-led war on Yemen has killed well over 3,000 children: Rights group (PresSTV)

June 5, 2022

A human rights group says the nearly eight-year long Saudi-led war on Yemen has claimed the lives of well over 3,000 children.p>

In a report released on Sunday, the Yemeni Coalition to Monitor Human Rights Violations, also known as 'Rasad' Coalition, said it had documented the killing of 3,182 children, including 2,795 males and 387 females, in various regions.

They lost their lives due to relentless enemy bombardment against 20 provinces, the group said, adding that over 970 children were killed by artillery and airstrikes, and at least 1,580 minors were killed on the battlefronts.

According to the report, 250 children were killed by live bullets and over 150 by landmine explosions. Nine children were killed under torture.

More than 2,800 children have been injured. They have no access to medical facilities for treatment, the monitoring group said.

In October 2021, the United Nations children's agency, UNICEF, said 10,000 Yemeni children had been killed or maimed since the regime in Riyadh launched the war in March 2015. A total of 11 million kids need humanitarian assistance, with 400,000 of whom suffering from severe acute malnutrition.

International rights groups have said time and again that killing of children amounts to war crime.

The Saudi-led coalition has on several occasions admitted to making mistakes due to technical errors or bad intelligence. In some incidents, the coalition has denied responsibility.

No international investigation has taken place into war crimes committed by the coalition.

The United States and certain Western countries have not stopped supporting the coalition with intelligence, logistics and whopping arms deals.

The war's objective was to reinstall the Riyadh-friendly regime of Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi and crush Yemen's Ansarullah resistance movement, which has been running state affairs in the absence of a functional government in Yemen. The coalition has failed to meet any of its objectives.

And the war has killed hundreds of thousands of Yemenis and spawned the world's worst humanitarian crisis.

U.S. Fails to Assess Civilian Deaths in Yemen War, Internal Report Says (New York Times)

By Edward Wong

June 7, 2022

The State Department and the Defense Department have failed to assess civilian casualties caused by a Saudi-led coalition in the catastrophic war in Yemen and the use of American-made weapons in the killings, according to an internal government report.

The report from the Government Accountability Office focuses on attacks in recent years by a Saudi-led coalition that is fighting Houthi rebels for control of Yemen. The alliance, which includes the United Arab Emirates, has carried out deadly strikes using combat jets and munitions that have been supplied and maintained largely by American companies with the approval of the State Department and the Pentagon.

The report spans the Obama, Trump and Biden administrations, covering the period from 2015, when the war against the Houthis began, to 2021. It is the second major report by a U.S. agency that lays out government shortcomings in preventing civilian casualties in Yemen. In August 2020, the State Department inspector general issued a report that said the department had failed to take proper measures to reduce civilian deaths.

The new report comes as President Biden is making plans to visit Saudi Arabia this summer. Mr. Biden aims to rebuild ties with the kingdom and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman despite vowing earlier to make the nation a "pariah" for its human rights atrocities, including the mass killings in Yemen and the murder of a journalist who was a U.S. resident. U.S. officials spoke about the report on the condition of anonymity because the Government Accountability Office has not released it publicly yet. A version labeled "sensitive but unclassified" has circulated in executive and legislative offices. The report is required by Congress as a result of budget legislation.

The website of the accountability office lists a document on its "restricted reports" page that has the title "Yemen: State and D.O.D. Need Better Information on Civilian Impacts of U.S. Military Support to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates." The publication date is April 27, 2022. The page says the reports cannot be released publicly because the executive branch has determined they contain classified information or "controlled unclassified information."

The State Department has been in discussions with the accountability office to get parts of the report put into a classified

section, officials say. The agency also wants some lines redacted.

The Government Accountability Office expects to receive clearance from the State Department and the Pentagon to release a public version this month, said Sarah Kaczmarek, a spokesperson for the office.

Several officials said they were worried the State Department could hide important findings from the public through that process. In the case of the 2020 report that addressed civilian casualties, the State Department legal office under Mike Pompeo, the previous secretary of state, pressured the department's inspector general to put major findings into a classified annex. That section had heavy redactions that even members of Congress could not read.

Antony J. Blinken, the current secretary of state, has not declassified any parts of that report.

A State Department press officer said the agency did not have a comment on the new report because it was pending public release. The Pentagon also declined to comment.

On June 15, eight days after this story was first published, the Government Accountability Office released a public version of the "sensitive" report issued in April, with some details omitted at the request of the State Department and Pentagon. That version said the two agencies "have not fully determined the extent to which U.S. military support has contributed to civilian harm in Yemen."

The report also said the Pentagon and State Department provided no evidence that they had conducted any investigations of the potential unauthorized use of American-made equipment. The office recommended that the State Department and Pentagon develop guidance for such investigations.

The Pentagon managed \$54.6 billion of military aid to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates from 2015 to 2021, according to the report. The Pentagon has 140 advisers working in Saudi Arabia on training missions, and they mostly focus on tasks related to weapons sales.

"The Saudi and U.A.E. attacks in Yemen have a huge civilian impact," Radhya Almutawakel, a co-founder of Mwatana for Human Rights, an organization based in Yemen, said on June 9, after the publication of this story. "In many of them, we could find remnants of U.S.-made weapons. It is shameful that the State Department and Pentagon don't have sufficient measures or procedures in place to assess and investigate civilian deaths for the Saudi- and U.A.E.-led coalition."

She added that the Biden administration could prove a commitment to ending the atrocities in Yemen by supporting the creation of an independent investigative mechanism at the U.N. Human Rights Council.

State Department and Pentagon officials said the United States consistently puts high-level pressure on Saudi Arabia to avoid civilian casualties and regularly sends teams to train the Saudis on investigating episodes.

The officials also pointed to a United Nations report that said 2021 was the third year in a row that civilian casualties from airstrikes had decreased — 185 of 2,500 civilian deaths were caused by strikes. However, the report said civilian deaths from airstrikes surged at the end of last year. The total civilian toll includes victims of Houthi violence.

Officials said the main finding in the new report was that the State Department and the Pentagon have failed to collect sufficient data and evidence on civilian casualties or monitor the use of American-made weapons.

A Pentagon official said U.S. agencies rely on open-source intelligence to assess the deaths and do not have military personnel in Yemen who can go to sites of attacks.

The New York Times published a series of articles last year that revealed the civilian toll of U.S. airstrikes in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria, and the government's failure to investigate civilian casualties.

In Yemen, civilian casualties from the Saudi-led airstrikes were highest in the early years of the war. They began rising again a half-year ago, but have declined during a cease-fire that began in early April and was extended last Thursday.

The strikes have hit hospitals, schools, buses and a funeral hall, among other sites. On Jan. 21, an airstrike on a prison run by the Houthis killed at least 70 people and injured dozens of others, according to Houthi officials and international aid groups.

More than 150,000 people have been killed in the war, including nearly 15,000 civilians, according to an estimate by the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project. The conflict has resulted in what the United Nations has called the worst man-made humanitarian crisis.

In February 2021, Mr. Biden said in a speech at the State Department that he would end all American support for "offensive operations" in Yemen, including "relevant arms sales." He and other American officials have not said publicly what that

entails. For now, new sales of air-to-ground projectiles have been suspended, officials say. The Washington Post recently published an investigative report on how a substantial number of air raids in Yemen have been carried out by jets developed, maintained and sold by U.S. companies and by pilots trained by the U.S. military.

“It’s hard to say definitively that the U.S. is not supporting the offensive campaign there,” said Dalia Dassa Kaye, a Middle East expert at the Burke Center for International Relations at the University of California at Los Angeles. “That remains a concern.”

“A lot of ammunition, supplies, things in the pipeline are still continuing,” she added.

Bombs made by Raytheon have been among the deadliest weapons used by the Saudi-led coalition in the airstrikes that have killed civilians. The State Department approved the sales of the munitions, which puts agency officials at risk of prosecution for war crimes, according to an internal legal memo from 2016.

In 2016, after an airstrike at a funeral hall killed more than 100 people and injured hundreds of others, the Obama administration blocked the sale by Raytheon of about 16,000 guided munitions kits to Saudi Arabia. The Trump administration restarted the sales as it strengthened ties to Saudi Arabia and the Emirates.

The conflict is widely considered a quagmire for Prince Mohammed, the de facto ruler of Saudi Arabia, who aimed to quickly oust the Houthis after they seized Sanaa, the capital of Yemen, in 2014.

Mr. Biden has made promises of ending U.S. involvement in the war since his 2020 presidential campaign. And he has denounced Saudi Arabia for the 2018 murder by Saudi agents of Jamal Khashoggi, a Virginia resident who wrote columns for The Washington Post. In February 2021, the Biden administration released a U.S. intelligence report that said Prince Mohammed had approved the assassination.

But last week, U.S. officials said Mr. Biden would travel to oil-rich Saudi Arabia. Mr. Biden is trying to bring down energy prices as the United States and its partner nations boycott Russian oil to punish President Vladimir V. Putin for his invasion of Ukraine.

Mr. Biden’s planned trip carries political risks. Democrats and some Republicans in Congress have condemned Prince Mohammed for the killing of Mr. Khashoggi and the Yemen war. The Biden administration is trying to wring concessions from Saudi Arabia in order to make the trip look palatable, U.S. officials say. The issues being discussed include the Yemen war.

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Special Tribunal for Lebanon

Official Website of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon
In Focus: Special Tribunal for Lebanon (UN)

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Israel and Palestine

Israeli forces kill four Palestinians in occupied West Bank (Al Jazeera)

June 2, 2022

Four Palestinians have been killed by Israeli forces in less than 48 hours in separate incidents.

A 17-year-old Palestinian has been killed by Israeli forces near the occupied West Bank city of Ramallah, the Palestine Red Crescent Society has said.

Palestinian Ma'an news agency quoted the Red Crescent as saying that the boy, identified as Odeh Mohammed Odeh, arrived at the Palestine Medical Complex in Ramallah with "a bullet wound to the chest". He was shot by Israeli forces in al-Midya, a village west of Ramallah, it added.

"Doctors tried to save his life, but he died of as a result of a very critical injury," the Red Crescent was quoted as saying on Thursday.

Odeh was the fourth Palestinian to be killed by Israeli forces in the West Bank in two days.

Ayman Mahmoud Mheisen, 29, was killed on Thursday morning during a pre-dawn Israeli military raid on the Dheisheh refugee camp in the southern city of Bethlehem, according to the Palestinian Ministry of Health.

Mheisen was a father of three and a former prisoner who spent three years in Israeli jails, Palestinian prisoner rights groups said.

Separately, Israeli forces killed 24-year-old Bilal Awad Qabaha during a raid on the village of Yabad, outside of Jenin city in the northern West Bank late on Wednesday, the ministry said.

Qabaha was in a critical condition when he was transferred to a hospital in Jenin, where he died.

The army had raided Yabad in the evening to destroy the home of Diaa Hamarsheh, who carried out a shooting attack on March 29 in the town of Bnei Brak near Tel Aviv, killing five people. Hamarsheh was killed in a shoot-out with Israeli police at the scene.

The army also arrested Hamarsheh's 59-year-old father, Ahmad, after the demolition.

Israel destroys the homes of Palestinian assailants as part of a policy that has long been criticised by rights groups as collective punishment towards their families and towns.

Confrontations broke out with the Israeli army in Yabad shortly after the raid began, with several serious live ammunition injuries reported.

On Wednesday morning, Israeli forces shot dead Palestinian female journalist Ghufraan Warasneh, 31, at the entrance to the Arroub refugee camp north of Hebron, in the occupied West Bank.

The Israeli army claimed she was in possession of a knife and had tried to stab soldiers, but witnesses told Al Jazeera that Warasneh, who was on the third day of a new job at a radio station, had posed little threat.

Israeli forces attacked Warasneh's funeral procession at the camp on Wednesday, firing live bullets at mourners and tear gas directly into the crowd. At least one Palestinian was seriously wounded and being treated in hospital after being hit by a live bullet during the funeral.

Warasneh is the second Palestinian journalist to be killed by Israeli forces in less than a month.

On May 11, the Israeli army shot dead Al Jazeera correspondent Shireen Abu Akleh while she was covering a military raid in Jenin. Israeli forces also attacked her funeral procession in occupied East Jerusalem in an attempt to prevent it from advancing on foot.

According to the Palestinian Ministry of Health, Israeli forces have killed 61 Palestinians since January 1.

Local and international rights groups have condemned what they call Israel's excessive use of force and "shoot-to-kill policy" against Palestinians, including suspected assailants, in the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Senior Israeli politicians – including Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett – have encouraged the use of lethal force and given orders to shoot Palestinians who did not pose an imminent threat.

Israeli anti-torture body refers Israel to International Criminal Court (Middle East Eye)

By Lubna Masarwa

June 10, 2022

Public Committee Against Torture in Israel says after 30 years it has concluded

Israeli authorities not interested and unable to stop abuse of Palestinians

An Israeli anti-torture body has referred its own country to the International Criminal Court (ICC) after concluding that Israel is “not interested and unable to stop the use of torture against Palestinians”.

The Public Committee Against Torture in Israel (PCATI) said on Friday it had demanded that Israelis involved in torture be tried as part of an investigation by the Hague-based ICC over suspected war crimes committed by Israel in the occupied Palestinian territories.

It said that after 30 years of fighting torture it had “reached the unfortunate conclusion” that Israel has no wish to end torture, honestly investigate victims' complaints and prosecute those responsible.

"For us, this is a necessary and obligatory step today in our struggle for the moral image of Israeli society, and for the sake of justice for the victims we represent," it said in a statement.

Established in 1990, the PCATI has represented and worked to protect Israelis, Palestinians, refugees and migrants who have suffered torture and inhuman or degrading treatment in detention.

The PCATI noted that over 1,300 complaints of torture victims had been filed with Israeli law enforcement authorities between 2001 and 2021 in the belief that the system will fulfil its duty, conduct fair and exhaustive investigations and do justice to the victims.

However, the group said, that led to zero indictments and just two criminal investigations - including in cases where “unequivocal evidence of serious violations of the law” has been collected.

“The law in Israel backs up the culture of falsehood and cover-up that still exists in the security system,” the PCATI said.

Tal Steiner, PCATI’s executive director, told Middle East Eye that appealing to the international court is a very radical step.

“We understood after 30 years that the system of Israeli courts is unwilling and unable to create change. They have a culture of immunity,” she said.

“We are the first Israeli organisation to take such a step and we expect very hard and difficult reactions.” The PCATI appeal represents 17 clients who Steiner says “went through very severe physical torture”.

“All of their complaints were rejected in Israel. Maybe finally justice can be achieved for them in the international court,” she said.

Unlike the Palestinian Authority, Israel is not a signatory of the ICC’s Rome Statute, which the country says means the court has no jurisdiction there.

However, the ICC prosecutor in March 2021 formally began probing war crimes allegedly committed in the occupied Palestinian territories – by both Israel and Palestinian groups such as Hamas.

Then in April 2022, the International Federation of Journalists, the Palestinian Journalists Syndicate and the International Centre of Justice for Palestinians filed a complaint with the ICC alleging that Israel's "systematic targeting" of Palestinian journalists and its failure to investigate their killings amounts to war crimes.

When Israeli forces killed Al Jazeera journalist Shireen Abu Akleh in the occupied West Bank's Jenin last month, the Palestinian Authority asked the ICC to add her case to other alleged crimes being investigated.

Investigations are opened by the ICC in places where the domestic authorities are unable or unwilling to probe allegations of abuse. Israel has previously said it will not cooperate with any ICC investigation.

The PCATI application is submitted in cooperation with the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), an organisation that unites 192 human rights organisations from around the world.

"Israeli security agents and other state officials have systematically tortured, degraded, and inhumanely treated Palestinian individuals suspected of involvement in national security crimes," said Alice Mogwe, FIDH president.

"They have unlawfully deported them from the Palestinian territories into Israel for the purpose of such treatment. They have denied them the fundamental right to a fair trial."

The PCATI is not the first Israeli human rights organisation to conclude that the country's authorities are unwilling and

unable to investigate abuses. In 2016, leading human rights group B'Tselem ceased submitting complaints to the Israeli army regarding the alleged mistreatment of Palestinians, complaining the system's real function was to cover up abuses.

Israel killed 5,418 Palestinians in Gaza over 15 years, says rights group (Middle East Monitor)

June 15, 2022

Over the course of 15 years, Israeli military attacks have killed 5,418 Palestinians in the besieged Gaza Strip, Al-Mezan Centre for Human Rights announced yesterday.

In a report entitled '15 years Too Long', the organisation explained that 23 per cent of the victims were "children, nine per cent were women".

"Between 14 June 2007 and 14 June 2022, Israeli attacks have destroyed 3,118 commercial facilities, 557 factories, 2,237 vehicles, 2,755 public facilities, 12,631 residential units and partially damaged 41,780 others," the report added.

It pointed out that the Israeli occupation forces had employed "excessive and lethal force against Palestinian children attempting to cross the perimeter fence," adding that they had arrested "204 children."

The rights group said that the Israeli authorities had put in place a "prohibitive and complex permit regime" for Palestinians wishing to leave Gaza to access medical treatment.

"Between 2010 and February 2022, Israeli authorities either rejected or delayed 30 percent of patients' permit requests," it said, noting that the denied and deferred permits had left 72 patients dead, ten of whom were children and 25 women.

The humanitarian organisation called on the international community "to desist from double standards in dealing with human rights violations," and to "assume its legal and moral responsibilities in ending the siege imposed on Gaza."

"They must also hold accountable and prosecute all those who commit war crimes against the Palestinians," the report stressed.

In 2007, Israel imposed a siege on Gaza, causing living conditions to deteriorate. Unemployment jumped to 50 per cent.

The Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor reports that unemployment and poverty rates have been on a steep rise in the Strip since Israel imposed its illegal blockade with more than half of Gaza's 2.3 million population living below the poverty line.

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Gulf Region

Inside Saudi Arabia's Secret Detention Facilities Where Women Disappear A shadowy network of detention centers in Saudi Arabia exists to punish women for disobedience—often for reporting their abusers to the police—and other such "crimes." (Elle)

By Lynzy Billing

June 6, 2022

"Every Saudi girl and woman knows about Dar Al Reaya—we are brought up fearing Dar Al Reaya," says Farida, a former detainee in her twenties, who was sentenced to two years in one of Saudi Arabia's notorious detention centers for women after she filed a police complaint in February 2019 about physical harassment she was experiencing from a male family member whom she was living with at the time. "I remember growing up, driving past these facilities—big blocks, with shutters down on every window, just down the road from us and the shopping malls—and I would think, Who is inside there now? How many are inside? I never thought I would be one of the girls who ended up there. Never."

Dar Al Reaya, or "Homes of Care," are a network of detention facilities whose official purpose is to hold women under the age of 30 who need "social correction," "strengthening of their religious faith," or those who are under investigation or trial,

according to an official at Saudi Arabia's Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development, which oversees Dar Al Reaya. But former detainees say they have been sent to the facilities on charges of disobedience or even because of minor disagreements at home. Other women interviewed for this story say they were held in the facilities without being charged.

Farida, whose name has been changed for her protection, is one of the few former detainees to speak out about life inside Dar Al Reaya. Those who are released from Dar Al Reaya say they were pressured into signing pledges to never speak of their detention. Social media accounts describing a myriad of mistreatment and physical abuses in Dar Al Reaya have been suspended and there are no statistics on how many women and children are being held. The homes are in different government buildings and not officially marked, though some are labeled "Social Protection Unit." Four former detainees I spoke with said they were held in facilities across major cities in the Kingdom including Riyadh, Jeddah, Tabuk, Dammam, and Jazan. Houthis abduct dozens of civilians in wake of deadly Marib siege (Arab News)

The Iran-backed Houthis have raided homes in Abedia district, south of Marib district, abducting dozens of civilians and transporting them to undisclosed locations, a Yemeni rights group said.

The Mothers of Abductees Association, an umbrella organization for thousands of female relatives of war prisoners, documented the abduction of 47 civilians in Abedia as the Houthis broke into the houses of residents, searching for Yemeni army soldiers and tribesmen who resisted their occupation of the district.

The militia abducted and questioned relatives of the fighters, including some children, and intimidated them into revealing information about the whereabouts of their relatives.

They also abducted wounded civilians and turned public facilities such as schools into detention centers, the organization said.

"We hold the Houthi armed group fully responsible for the lives and safety of all its captives, and demand that they immediately stop all abduction operations, and release all captives," the organization said in the statement, urging international rights groups to exercise pressure on the militia.

"We call upon the UN and its special envoy for Yemen, the Office of the High Commissioner Office for Human Rights and the international community to mount the needed pressure upon the Houthi armed group in order to release all captives and forcibly disappeared persons from Abedia."

Last week, the Houthis seized control of most of Abedia after laying siege on more than 35,000 civilians and government troops who took up arms and fought off incursions into the district.

The Houthi siege of Abedia pushed trapped civilians into starvation as the rebels obstructed the distribution of humanitarian aid and banned people from entering or leaving the district.

The siege sparked outrage inside and outside Yemen as activists and international bodies, including the UN Security Council, demanded that the Houthis allow aid workers and humanitarian assistance to reach trapped citizens.

However, the militia ignored the appeals and intensified missile and ground attacks until they forced a breakthrough last week and managed to storm the district's center.

Local activists believe that the Houthis have abducted and forcibly disappeared more than 100 people in Abedia, blown up houses of government officials and looted property.

"The Houthi militia has committed brutal crimes in Abedia, far from the eyes of the media and local and international human rights organizations," Mohammed Al-Salehi, editor of news website Marib Press, told Arab News on Monday.

In Sanaa, meanwhile, local and international rights groups and government officials said that the Houthis have expelled the families of two dozen dead academics at Sanaa University from their homes.

Ordered by the Houthi-allied president of Sanaa University Al-Qassem Abbas, armed militia members on Sunday stormed the houses of the families in Sanaa and asked them to leave voluntarily, threatening eviction by force.

In the past, the Houthis asked families of dead and pensioned professors to leave homes and flats given to them by Sanaa University as the movement sought to replace them with new academics.

The families said that they would be forced to sleep in the streets if they left the rent-free homes as the Houthis have not paid the salaries of their dead relatives and other public servants since late 2016.

The Geneva-based SAM Organization for Rights and Liberties warned that the Houthis prevented some families of dead professors from entering homes and looted furniture and valuables, demanding the group stop raids on the houses of Sanaa

academics.

Yemeni Information Minister Muammar Al-Eryani condemned the raids and urged the international community and rights groups to pressure the Houthis into ending evictions.

“This terrorist crime is part of a series of abuses by Houthi militia against the elite of society, including academics, scholars and intellectuals, restricting them in their livelihoods and pushing them to emigrate,” he said on Twitter.

“After I went to the police, desperate for help, they called my abuser ... There is no one you can trust.” Farida was released after 16 months, in mid 2020. She says most of her fellow detainees were being held for reporting abuse to authorities. “After I went to the police, desperate for help, they called my abuser into the police station to sign a pledge, approving my detainment in Dar Al Reaya,” Farida says. “There is no one you can trust.” Women are not permitted to exit Dar Al Reaya without the permission of their guardian, who often is their abuser, at the end of their sentence.

Some centers are even holding children, according to former detainees. One former detainee of a facility in Dammam, who did not wish to share her name for her safety, told me she and her two-year-old-daughter were held together after she reported abuse at home. “My daughter was not given proper meals; she ate only twice daily. She was hit by the staff for crying and made to watch when I received lashes,” the woman says. After more than two months, her abuser permitted her exit and she returned home to him.

Asma, whose name has also been changed for her protection, was sentenced to 20 months after she brought up the subject of inheritance with her male relatives. She remembers being stripped-searched upon arrival. She was given a loose fitting robe with Dar al Reaya stamped on the back. Her makeup and accessories were removed and her physical condition upon arrival was noted, as well as what kind of abaya she was wearing: Was it “decent” covering her head, or “not decent,” aka slung low across her shoulders? She was then handed a pack with two sanitary pads, a toothbrush, small towel, shampoo, and one change of clothes. The induction is conducted by female staff, but otherwise all of the guards and caretakers on the wards are male.

Each woman is put into solitary confinement upon arrival, ostensibly for a few days, but some are left there for up to two months. In solitary confinement “blood tests,” are taken, their purpose not explained to the women. The rooms each have a bed, a Quran, and a toilet—if they’re lucky. The women without toilets have to beg the male staff to let them out to use the restroom; some women report wetting themselves rather than facing the guards. The women are forbidden from speaking to each other or showing outward signs of happiness. They receive meals twice a day at 6am and 1pm. Both Farida and Asma told me the women are force fed strong sedatives with their breakfast to keep them compliant throughout the day.

When girls arrive at the centers they are told what their punishment will be—typically between 100 and 150 lashes. The lashes are spread out over their time at Dar Al Reaya, allowing women to heal before receiving the next. “Flogging happens at Dar Al Reaya every Thursday,” Asma says. “There are minors inside and pregnant women who are victims of rape and incest and they will receive lashes also.” Additional flogging or solitary confinement for at least 20 days is administered for breaking rules, or talking back to male staff or even asking questions about their charges, says Farida. Each lash is administered between the neck and the lower back, and is observed by an Islamic scholar, who ensures the “religiosity” of the violence.

Suicide and incidents of self harm in Dar Al Reaya are common, says Farida. Failed suicide attempts result in solitary confinement and flogging, “which undoubtably harms the girls’ mental health and might further increase suicidal thoughts,” Farida adds.

Another detention facility run by the Social Affairs Ministry called Dar Al Theyafa, or “the Home of Hospitality,” largely acts as a holding center for women whose guardian does not allow her freedom even after her “sentence” at Dar Al Reaya is complete. “Then, the prison has the option to marry her off or keep her imprisoned indefinitely,” Farida explains. “There are women who have been released to male suitors who they have never met before, told that their family have approved the match, and find themselves in an arranged marriage.”

“There is an overwhelming trend of violence, abuse, often from inside the family, manipulation of justice where men face little to no legal consequence—even for murder.” One former detainee of Dar Al Theyafa, who declined to give her name, says she knew a girl who tried to hang herself with her bra and was caught and punished. “After that, they banned us from wearing bras for a period of time because the law of Dar Al Theyafa is, one individual’s mistake is everybody’s. Some girls have tried to commit suicide by breaking the trash cans to get a sharp edge, so the caretakers took the trash cans away, too.”

Thirty-four year-old Bethany Alhaidari fled Saudi Arabia for the United States in 2019 to escape abuse from her husband at the time and, in January 2020, filed an emergency case asking the court in Washington state to give her custody of her now six-year-old daughter, which was temporarily granted. Alhaidari now works as the Saudi Officer at the Freedom Initiative, a DC based human rights non-profit organization that works to free political prisoners in the Middle East, and says that the

organization has received hundreds of requests to help women in Saudi Arabia, many of whom, she says, fear they will be sent to Dar Al Reaya. "These women are facing discrimination and violence in relation to marriage, divorce and child custody. There is an overwhelming trend of violence, abuse, often from inside the family, manipulation of justice where men face little to no legal consequence—even for murder," says Alhaidari, "such situations which are more widespread than people realize."

Saudi Arabia claims it's modernizing and improving women's rights. But, Alhaidari says, the reality is that there are no safe spaces for Saudi women to demand basic rights. "Saudi Arabia does not have legal aid for women to turn to when they are fleeing abuse or defending themselves from charges brought by their families or the state," she says, adding that no independent human rights or women's rights organizations are permitted to work in the country.

Furthermore, there is no penal code or clarity on what actions are criminal for women. Courts are entitled to their own interpretations of religion, resulting in inconsistencies in sentences. Alhaidari says that in Saudi courts, women's testimony is not considered equal to men and even when physical evidence of abuse is presented in court, men are often able to simply take an oath to discredit it. The system is set up to fail women, Alhaidari says. "Until the male guardianship system, which renders women as perpetual minors, is abolished, until we see that men who commit violent crimes against female family members are held accountable. Until a woman's word is considered equal to men's under the law and in courts, Saudi Arabia isn't safe for women." On International Women's Day last year, 161 European parliamentarians signed a joint statement calling on Saudi authorities to take swift and strong action to improve women's rights within the kingdom. "Women are still not able to leave detention centers or state-run shelters without having to seek and receive the consent of their male guardians, who may have previously abused them," the statement reads. "This can lead to situations of prolonged administrative detention if a male guardian refuses to sign a release form or collect a woman under his guardianship."

Since that statement was issued not a single Dar Al Reaya facility has been closed. Instead, Alhaidari says, new makeshift facilities are being built to house more detainees. And as long as Dar Al Reaya exists, there will always be a place where Saudi women can be disappeared.

Saudi court upholds death sentence for man convicted as minor (Middle East Eye)

June 14, 2022

A Saudi court has upheld a death sentence against teenager Abdullah al-Huwaiti, who was convicted for crimes reportedly committed when he was a minor.

Saudi Arabia's Court of Appeal decided on Monday to carry out the death sentence against Huwaiti, who was arrested in 2017 when he was only 14 and given the death penalty at 17 after being convicted of murder and armed robbery.

Reprieve, a UK-based legal NGO, said in a statement that the death sentence against Huwaiti, now 19, "defies United Nations experts' plea that his death sentence be reversed".

"Sentencing a child to death is an act of unbearable cruelty. Abdullah has spent his teenage years fearing he will be executed and each court ruling subjects him to more severe emotional trauma. He must be released immediately,"

Huwaiti's mother wrote on Twitter that her son was innocent of the charge that he killed a military man and that he had no criminal record. She replied to people on Twitter defending her son against the "injustice" and demanded that Saudi authorities arrest the real perpetrator of the crime.

She also called on King Salman and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman to intervene to save Huwaiti.

In May, United Nations legal experts urged Saudi Arabia to reverse the death sentence imposed on Huwaiti, a resident of the western region of Tabuk.

The experts called on the kingdom to "abolish the imposition of the death penalty for juveniles for all crimes, without exception" because it's "inherently cruel to execute children".

Huwaiti's original trial was marred by controversy, as the evidence used against him and how it was obtained was questioned by human rights organisations. He had an alibi putting him 200km away from the scene of the crime, according to Human Rights Watch.

After his arrest in May 2017, Huwaiti was held incommunicado for four months and denied access to a lawyer.

He was interrogated under torture, including being whipped with electrical wire and beaten to the point that he could not walk for days, according to Reprieve.

In addition to Huwaiti, there are at least five other child defendants at risk of death sentences for childhood crimes in Saudi

Arabia, Reprieve said.

Saudi Arabia's juvenile law only protects child defendants from the death penalty if sentenced under one category of offence.

Last April, King Salman issued a royal decree ending death sentences for crimes committed as a minor, instead making the maximum sentence 10 years in a juvenile detention facility.

However, rights groups have raised concerns about its implementation and previously warned that several youths still face the death penalty.

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ASIA

Afghanistan

Afghanistan: Taliban Torture Civilians in Panjshir (Human Rights Watch)

June 10, 2022

Taliban security forces in northern Afghanistan's Panjshir province have unlawfully detained and tortured residents accused of association with an opposition armed group, Human Rights Watch said today.

Since mid-May 2022, fighting has escalated in the province as National Resistance Front (NRF) forces have attacked Taliban units and checkpoints. The Taliban have responded by deploying to the province thousands of fighters, who have carried out search operations targeting communities they allege are supporting the NRF. During search operations in other provinces, Taliban forces have committed summary executions and enforced disappearances of captured fighters and other detainees, which are war crimes.

"Taliban forces in Panjshir province have quickly resorted to beating civilians in their response to fighting against the opposition National Resistance Front," said Patricia Gossman, associate Asia director at Human Rights Watch. "The Taliban's longstanding failure to punish those responsible for serious abuses in their ranks puts more civilians at risk."

A human rights advocate who has interviewed several former detainees and a source with direct information about Taliban detentions spoke to Human Rights Watch about the Panjshir situation. Former detainees in early June reported that Taliban security forces detained about 80 residents in Panjshir's Khenj district and beat them to compel them to provide information about the NRF. After several days, the Taliban released 70, but have continued to hold 10 people whose relatives they accuse of being members of the group, a form of collective punishment.

Former detainees said the district jail held nearly 100 others who have alleged links to the NRF. None had access to their families or lawyers. Others have been held in informal detention facilities.

International humanitarian law, or the laws of war, which is applicable in Afghanistan's armed conflicts, obligates all warring parties to treat everyone in their custody humanely. People taken into custody must be promptly charged with a criminal offense or released. The protections of international human rights law also apply. Denying detainees access to lawyers and family members is prohibited and increases the risk of torture and enforced disappearance. Collective punishment – the punishment of individuals for alleged actions of others – is a violation of the laws of war and a war crime.

Human rights groups and local and international media have reported that the whereabouts of some men taken into Taliban custody in Panjshir province have not been revealed, and that some with suspected links to the NRF have been killed. In some places the bodies of those killed have been displayed as an apparent warning to others.

The NRF, headed by Ahmad Massoud, is the principal armed opposition group in Panjshir and neighboring provinces. It

includes some fighters who had served in the former Afghan National Security Forces.

Taliban troops in Panjshir are under the command of the Taliban's defense minister, Mullah Mohammad Yaqoob, who stated on May 21 that the authorities would not allow anyone to "disrupt security" in the province. The Defense Ministry and the General Directorate of Intelligence have overseen operations in Panjshir.

After the Taliban took over Afghanistan in August 2021, their forces, including military and intelligence officers, have carried out many summary killings and enforced disappearances. There is no indication that they have held forces responsible for abuses accountable.

"Taliban forces in Panjshir have imposed collective punishment and disregarded protections to which detainees are entitled," Gossman said. "This is just the latest example of Taliban abuses during fighting in the region 10 months after the Taliban took power."

Iraqi Held by US at Guantanamo Pleads Guilty to War Crimes (Associated Press)

By Ben Fox

June 15, 2022

An Iraqi man who has been held at the Guantanamo Bay detention center for more than 15 years pleaded guilty Monday to war crimes charges for his role in al-Qaida attacks against U.S. and allied forces along with civilians in Afghanistan.

The pleas by the prisoner known as Abd al-Hadi al-Iraqi before a military commission at the U.S. base in Cuba amount to a legal milestone, aiding efforts to resolve the long-stalled Guantanamo tribunals and wind down operations at the detention center.

Prosecuting Hadi al-Iraqi has been delayed for years by some of the same legal and logistical challenges that have held up other Guantanamo cases as well as by his deteriorating spinal condition that has left him partially paralyzed.

Hadi al-Iraqi, who is about 60 and says his real name is Nashwan al-Tamir, was arraigned at Guantanamo in 2014 before the commission, which was set up to prosecute prisoners for war crimes in a high-security court that combines military and civilian law.

He pleaded guilty to four of five charges against him, including conspiracy and several violations of the international laws of war as an al-Qaida commander early in the conflict in Afghanistan that formally ended with the U.S. withdrawal in August.

He was facing up to life in prison but is expected to be eventually transferred out of Guantanamo and sent to a third country under the terms of his plea deal after he undergoes additional medical treatment at the base.

The U.S. said Hadi al-Iraqi was a senior figure in al-Qaida since the mid-1990s, leading a training camp for operatives in Afghanistan in the years before the organization carried out the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks.

According to military charge sheets, the prisoner also assisted the Taliban with the March 2001 destruction of the the giant, sixth century sandstone Buddha statues built into a cliff in Bamiyan province. The group deemed the famed structures offensive under their interpretation of Islam. After the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan in response to the attacks, Hadi al-Iraqi organized deadly al-Qaida attacks against American and allied forces along with civilians in the country and in neighboring Pakistan.

The prisoner, who has a long gray beard and wore a traditional skullcap, calmly answered "yes sir" or "yes, your honor" when questioned by the military judge, Air Force Lt. Col. Mark Rosenow, if he understood the charges in a lengthy hearing to determine if he was willingly entering into a plea agreement with the government. The Associated Press viewed the proceeding from a video feed at Fort Meade, Maryland.

This is the first plea agreement in a Guantanamo case since the election of President Joe Biden, whose administration has been working to gradually reduce the number of prisoners at Guantanamo and move at least closer to being able to close it.

Plea agreements are key to the closure effort because the tribunals have dragged on for years because of legal challenges and the logistical difficulty of holding proceedings at the isolated base at the southeastern edge of Cuba.

There are 37 men still held at Guantanamo, including 10 facing active military commission cases. The most prominent is the death penalty proceeding against five prisoners charged with aiding and planning the 9/11 attacks, which is the subject of ongoing plea negotiations.

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Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC)

Official Website of the Extraordinary Chambers [English]

Official Website of the United Nations Assistance to the Khmer Rouge Trials (UNAKRT)

Cambodia Tribunal Monitor

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Bangladesh International Crimes Tribunal

Crimes against humanity: Fugitive death row convict held (UNB)

June 3, 2022

A fugitive death row convict, who was sentenced by the International Crimes Tribunal for committing crimes against humanity in 1971, was arrested from the city's Mohammadpur area on Friday, said Rapid Action Battalion (Rab).

The convict was identified as Md Nazrul Islam, 69, of Naogaon.

ASP Imran Khan of Rab headquarters media wing said they nabbed Nazrul after a drive in the city's Mohammadpur area around 12:30 pm.

The International Crimes Tribunal sentenced Nazrul along with two others- Rezaul Karim and Shaheed Mandal- to death for their involvement in crimes against humanity during the 1971 Liberation War.

The three convicts were found guilty of murder, looting, arson, torture and kidnapping in 1971. Of them, Nazrul was tried in absentia, said the official.

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War Crimes Investigation in Myanmar

The World Must Do More to Save Myanmar (The Organization for World Peace)

By Pratha Purushottam

June 11, 2022

Over a year after Myanmar's military coup, the international community continues to ignore the crimes against humanity perpetrated by the Tatmadaw. In a briefing by the AAPP, more than 1500 civilians have been killed and over 10,000 have been arrested, with no end in sight to the violence: the chief of the military recently vowed to "annihilate the "terrorist" opposition forces" according to CNN. Multiple non-violence movements have arisen but unfortunately, none have been successful

in their attempts to both stop the junta and secure international aid. In the midst of the Ukraine crisis, questions have been raised about why the West supports a fellow European, white-dominated country, yet refuses to offer assistance to stop the military coup in Myanmar. Such refusal by nations such as the United States and Europe to intervene and help others, whether it be through monetary aid or military backing, has been a common response throughout history due to indifferent and realist perspectives.

The Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) that erupted a week after the coup is considered the longest-running CDM in the world. Students, doctors, teachers, laborers, and more have united to protest the military dictatorship. In addition, they specifically called upon the international community to uphold the principle of the Responsibility to Protect. R2P is an international norm endorsed by all member states of the UN in 2005, in response to an increase in atrocity crimes like the Rwandan genocide; as a result, the value of state sovereignty lost international popularity in favor of interventionism. It states that if countries fail to protect their citizens, the UN has a responsibility to intervene and can violate state sovereignty if needed. According to Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, R2P has been invoked in over 80 UN Security Council resolutions and has been instrumental in stopping violence in several cases like Kenya and Sierra Leone.

A delicate balance exists between respecting sovereignty and protecting human rights. However, in the case of Myanmar, it is clear that the time for the international community to respect Myanmar's sovereignty has passed and the time to act was yesterday. Political ties and a dependency on resources prevent major countries from intervening against the Myanmar military. Russia is a longtime friend to the country, providing weapons and training to the military. China-Myanmar relations are complicated; many interpret China as trying to establish a puppet government. Even so, China has always remained friendly with the junta and is one of the country's closest allies, also providing arms. The Washington Post reported that both Russia and China blocked a statement of condemnation a day after the coup.

Sanctions have played a key role in the Western response to the takeover. However, as the crisis worsens, it is clear that sanctions are simply not enough. Although the U.S believes there is not much more it can do, there is: along with the U.K, it can call upon Russia and China to fully denounce the military and not veto the UN condemnation. The threat of a veto by China and Russia has played too large an obstacle in presenting solutions for the Myanmar crisis. In the Syrian crisis, China and Russia vetoed 16 different UN resolutions, so there have been no resolutions presented for Myanmar. Issuing a joint statement is the first step for the UN to enforce sanctions through a resolution, which in turn enables a comprehensive global arms embargo on Myanmar. In addition, the Council should freeze the assets of the military chief, Min Aung Hlaing, and refer the situation in Myanmar to the International Criminal Court so the Court will have jurisdiction over all crimes committed against the Burmese people regardless of the location or group. Taking all these actions will actually place pressure on the junta and force them to respond by retreating or conducting an election.

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has also been inactive in responding to the Myanmar crisis. In April of 2021, the organization adopted a Five-Point Consensus on Myanmar, stating that there must be an end to the violence, constructive dialogue facilitated by ASEAN, the delivery of humanitarian assistance, and a visit by the envoy to Myanmar to speak with all parties involved. However, the implementation of this plan has been incredibly slow in proportion to the atrocities in Myanmar. In March, the Cambodian foreign minister and ASEAN Special Envoy visited Myanmar yet failed to meet with any major stakeholders outside of the military regime and secured no concessions from the military according to Aljazeera. It took 11 months for this meeting to occur and only on the basis that the condition of a meeting with Aung San Suu Kyi was dropped. Notably, ASEAN has been excluding the Myanmar military leaders from attending any summits or meetings since last October. Even though this is a relatively small step, for an organization that is known for its noninterference policy in domestic issues, the exclusion speaks volumes. It is vital that ASEAN maintains this pressure, makes no compromises, and accelerates the implementation of the Five-Point Consensus.

The world seems unmotivated to interfere in the urgent crisis unfolding in Myanmar. While the situation is a domestic issue, its escalation threatens democracy, so the global community must intervene. It also has implications for other countries as authoritarian leaders or militaries elsewhere may look to Myanmar as an example of a successful coup that bore no major international ramifications. What does this say about our world's commitment to democracy and equality? The people of Myanmar are suffering and even though their calls for help are going unheard, they continue to fight for their country. UN Member States, the West, and ASEAN need to combine their half-hearted efforts and introduce uniform solutions other than sanctions to counter the junta's destruction of what was once a thriving democracy. The future of Myanmar's democracy depends on it.

Myanmar Regime Committed Almost 2,800 War Crimes in Last Six Months: NUG (The Irrawaddy)
June 13, 2022

Myanmar's junta committed almost 2,800 war crimes across the country in the last six months, according to the parallel civilian National Unity Government (NUG).

The NUG's Ministry of Home Affairs and Immigration said that from December 1 to May 31, regime forces committed 2,778 war crimes including arbitrary killings, extrajudicial executions, the use of torture, using civilians as human shields, air and artillery strikes on civilian targets, the looting and burning of houses and the use of sexual violence.

Some 12,719 houses and religious building have been destroyed by junta forces, causing estimated losses of 241 million kyats (US\$6.9 million).

Last Friday, the ministry also said that the regime had conducted 910 arrests and carried out 479 arson attacks, 346 murders, 336 attacks, 226 robberies and 101 cases of torture in the same six month period.

Regime forces also committed 10 cases of sexual violence, as well as 27 instances of using civilian detainees as human shields to deter attacks by resistance groups.

Sagaing Region, a stronghold of the resistance movement, suffered the most recording a total of 1,178 war crimes, followed by Magwe Region with 537 cases and Mandalay with 234.

Junta arson attacks also targeted Sagaing the most, with some 8,933 houses being lost, followed by Magwe with 2,168 and Chin State with 1,332, according to the NUG's Ministry of Home Affairs and Immigration.

The ministry said it has collected evidence of the military regime's war crimes and that its priority is to hold those responsible accountable for their crimes.

People are being urged to report junta war crimes to police forces and People's Administration Groups operating under the NUG, which is working with local and international organizations to hold the regime responsible for its atrocities.

"Everyone who committed war crimes must be held to account whatever the situation," said the NUG.

In early June, authorities in Turkey initiated a preliminary investigation into members of the regime, including coup leader Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, concerning a criminal complaint filed by the Myanmar Accountability Project (MAP), a UK-based nongovernmental organization. In late March, MAP filed a criminal case with the public prosecutor's office in Istanbul, Turkey against junta leaders over the use of torture in the military interrogation center in Yangon. As of June 10, over 1,900 people have been killed by regime forces and more than 14,000 people, including democratically-elected lawmakers, have been arrested or detained since last year's coup, said the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners.

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AMERICAS

North & Central America

Women This Week: New Report Condemns Failed Efforts to Combat Sexual Violence in Canadian Military (Council on Foreign Relations)

By Haydn Welch

June 3, 2022

Seven Years On, "No Meaningful Improvement" on Sexual Violence in Canadian Military, Says Report

On Monday, the Canadian government released an independent report conducted by former Canadian Supreme Court Justice Louise Arbour assessing how the Canadian military has addressed sexual violence within its ranks. The report comes seven years after a 2015 landmark report that detailed the extent of sexual assault in Canada's military. Arbour's report unequivocally states that attempts to improve the military's handling of sexual violence have failed. One of the main

recommendations in Arbour's report is to permanently transfer jurisdiction of all investigations of sexual offenses to civilian authorities; the Canadian government has temporarily moved ongoing sexual offences investigations to civilian courts. Canadian Defense Minister Anita Anand said she agrees with all of Arbour's forty-eight recommendations, and that the military will implement seventeen in the near-term. Arbour's report was commissioned by Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau following a series of high-profile sexual harassment and assault allegations against high-ranking military officers.

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South America

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Venezuela

FBI: Ukraine Fighter and US Fugitive Craig Land Armed by Colombia to Overthrow Venezuela Gov't (Mint Press News)

By Alexander Rubenstein

June 14, 2022

Craig Lang, a US Army veteran accused by US authorities of carrying out murders on American soil as well as torture and other war crimes in Ukraine, allegedly joined a band of insurgents armed by the Colombian police to overthrow the Venezuelan government.

An FBI affidavit against Lang states that he was in Colombia with an Army pal when the country's national police provided him with weapons to attack Venezuela.

Lang's history tracks closely with that of Paul Gray, a fellow US military veteran and white nationalist also fighting in Ukraine. According to new revelations by a former compatriot of US-backed Venezuelan coup leader Juan Guaidó, Gray was also involved in a scheme to attack Venezuela from Colombian territory.

The startling disclosure by Guaidó's former associate was prompted by a May 31, 2022 report by The Grayzone which exposed Lang and Gray's exploits in Ukraine, and identified Lang as having participated in a failed mission to destabilize Venezuela's government from Colombian territory.

But before Lang arrived on the Colombian-Venezuelan border, at the site of a regime change operation managed by top-level US and Colombian officials, he helped execute a heinous robbery and murder in Florida to finance his trip.

Source: wanted murderer "able to obtain firearms from law enforcement in Bogota" for Venezuela regime change plot

Back in 2016, Lang met a fellow army veteran named Alex Zweiefelhofer who shared his hunger for combat and international adventurism. They were in Ukraine at the time, fighting in the ultra-nationalist Right Sector battalion, which was integrated into the Ukrainian military to do battle with pro-Russian separatists.

As the low-intensity war dragged on, Lang and Zweiefelhofer grew restless. In a search for action, they tried and failed to insert themselves into the US-backed Somalian army's fight against Al-Shabaab insurgents, but were deported upon arrival. It was then that they decided to head south in hopes of killing "communists" in Venezuela.

On April 9, 2018, according to the FBI affidavit, Zweiefelhofer said Lang murdered a couple in Florida and robbed them of

\$3000 to finance their trip to the Colombian border with Venezuela.

But Zweifelhofer was arrested before he could leave the US and indicted for murder, for which he pled not guilty. A year later, another associate of Lang - a former army buddy identified only as "M.S.M." in the FBI criminal complaint - came forward to law enforcement with details of their exploits together on the Colombian-Venezuelan border.

According to the FBI affidavit, "Lang told M.S.M. that Lang was going to join combat forces opposed to the Venezuelan government. M.S.M. advised that Lang was going to join a Venezuelan resistance group."

In his interview with the FBI, M.S.M. claimed he hesitated on the mission because he "did not want to kill people." He said Lang left alone to the border town of Cucuta, where he linked up with right-wing insurgents.

According to the FBI's timeline, which was informed by Homeland Security Investigations, Lang arrived in Bogota on September 25, 2018 and "thereafter departed from Colombia on November 23, 2018."

The affidavit pegged the Colombian government as a key supplier of the regime change mission against Venezuela:

"M.S.M. told detectives the resistance group Lang joined was able to obtain firearms from law enforcement in Bogota. M.S.M. advised that the resistance group had a safe house in the mountains of Cucuta, Colombia. The group planned to cross into Venezuela and fight the Venezuelan government."

Lang's alleged arming by Colombian authorities adds a new layer to Bogota's well-documented role in US-directed destabilization operations against the Venezuelan government. In fact, the foreign fighter's brief adventure in Colombia began one month after Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro survived an assassination attempt in which commercial drones were strapped with explosives and hovered over his head during a military parade.

Following the failed attack on Maduro, the Venezuelan president immediately blamed Colombian authorities, while US media regurgitated Colombia's denials. Then-National Security Advisor John Bolton suggested the whole televised incident was a false flag orchestrated by Maduro.

Several participants in the assassination plot were soon arrested, and some were later exchanged for prisoners held by Colombia. One of the ringleaders, Juan Requesens, a leader of the US-funded, Venezuelan Primero Justicia party, confessed to collaborating with a Colombian immigration official to kill Maduro.

In a CNN interview with a perpetrator of the attack "somewhere in Colombia," one of the attackers admitted to three meetings with American officials following the failed assassination plot. (CNN did not disclose the location where the interview was conducted or where the explosives were made).

In a stroke of absurdity, the FBI affidavit against Lang flatly states: "The United States is at peace with the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela."

Guadió defector claims Paul Gray was involved in Operation Gideon plot against Venezuela

One day after The Grayzone's report on the exploits of wanted murderer Craig Lang and white nationalist Paul Gray in Ukraine, an unnamed former associate of Venezuelan coup leader Juan Guaidó came forward with a major revelation.

In an interview with the Venezuelan public TV network TeleSUR, the former Guaidó associate stated that he recognized Paul Gray from planning meetings held for Operation Gideon, a disastrously failed invasion of Venezuela conducted by 60 anti-government insurgents led by US mercenaries.

The source told TeleSUR correspondent Madelein Garcia that like Craig Lang, Gray was in Cucuta as a member of a "group of around 10 or 12 American mercenaries" planning Operation Gideon in February 2019.

That same month, the United States Agency for International Development staged an invasion of Venezuelan territory under cover of a caravan of trucks filled with supposed aid. Complimented by a Live Aid concert organized by British billionaire Richard Branson in Cucuta, the stunt ended in ignominy, as hooligans associated with the US-backed Venezuelan opposition torched USAID's aid deliveries and attempted to blame their destruction on Maduro. USAID later admitted the entire operation was little more than a regime change ploy.

Like the drone attack and the supposed aid caravan, Operation Gideon was a disaster for everyone involved. According to one key member of the insurgent team, Yacsy Álvarez, the operation was backed by the US with a major assist from Colombian intelligence.

Some 60 Venezuelan insurgents and private mercenaries with the now-disgraced Silvercorp USA company attempted to enter

Venezuela by boat, overtake an airport, and eventually capture President Maduro. But government officials had embedded within the group and easily wrapped up what has since been dubbed "The Bay of Piglets."

The former Guaidó insider told Telesur that he first encountered Paul Gray, the US white nationalist, at a farm belonging to Don Pedro Barrigas, a Colombian businessman, accused paramilitary leader, and ally of Álvaro Uribe Vélez. Barrigas' brother also happens to be a senator.

According to the source, Gray went by the name "Snake" during the Gideon planning meetings.

"Paul Gray was sitting there, three seats from me," the Guaidó defector asserted.

The involvement of an infamous activist who has belonged to four US-based neo-Nazi groups, served in the Georgian National Legion in Ukraine, which is led by a US asset welcomed by members of Congress, and the new revelations of his alleged involvement in Operation Gideon raise serious questions about whether he and Lang are just ideologically-motivated war tourists or whether they are, in fact, imperial shock troops traversing a US intelligence ratline from one operation to the next.

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TOPICS

Truth and Reconciliation Commission

Liberia: Court Orders Ex-TRC Commissioner Washington to Pay US\$1.5M in Damages (Liberian Observer)

By Abednego Davis

June 2, 2022

The Civil Law Court 'B' has found Massa Washington, a former commissioner of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) guilty of libel and ordered to pay US\$1.5 million in damages.

The money is meant for Agnes Revees Taylor, ex-wife of former Liberian President Charles Taylor.

However, defendant Washington was not present for the judgment and had also been missing in action throughout the trial action since she resides in the US. As a result, Judge Scheaplor Dunbar found her guilty in absentia and ordered her to pay the plaintiff, Ms. Taylor, US\$500,000 for punitive damages and US\$1 million for general damages.

The money, according to the Court, is sufficient enough to restore the plaintiff's prestige and reputation and to compensate her for the injury she had sustained as a result of the defendant's libelous statement.

Judge Dunbar's decision came after he confirmed and affirmed the unanimous verdict of the petty jury, in April of this year.

"The defendant did not serve as evidenced by the sheriff's return, and so the court granted a request for the issuance of the writ of summons by publications and mailing, in keeping with sections 3.40, and 3.41 of the civil procedure law of Liberia," Judge Dunbar said.

Cllr. Massaquoi, based on the absence of Ms. Washington applied for judgment by default in keeping with sections 42.1 and 42.6 of the civil procedure law of Liberia, which the Judge accepted.

And after the application was filed, Judge Dunbar requested Ms. Taylor and the case witnesses to take the stand and testify. Justifying his decision, Judge Dunbar ruled, "after the four publications were completed, the plaintiff requested a clerk's certificate beyond the statutory period of ten days.

"The clerk of the court is hereby ordered to prepare a writ of execution to be placed in hands of the sheriff for service of the defendant to enforce the judgment and is hereby so declared," the judge ruled. "The clerk is also ordered to prepare a Bill of cost against the defendant to be taxed."

The case came as a result of an article Ms. Washington authored and published, which carried the headline "Attacks Against GJRP's Hassan Bility are Coordinated, Purposeful and Should Be Condensed".

In her article, she claimed that "Ms. Taylor orchestrated a smear campaign against Hassan Bility aimed at making him pay for being part of a process that saw her lose her opulent lifestyle in the UK as well as being incarcerated in a British prison for more than two years."

Ms. Taylor was arrested on June 2, 2017, in London by the Metropolitan Police and charged with torture on the grounds of her suspected involvement with the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) rebel group, which was led by her ex-husband, during the First Liberian Civil War,] from 1989 to 1996.

However, on December 6, 2019, the Central Criminal Court (The Old Bailey) in London decided to dismiss the charges against Ms. Taylor. The Court's decision came after the UK Supreme Court confirmed, in a historic judgment on November 13, 2019, that members of non-State armed groups may be prosecuted for crimes of torture under section 134(1) of the UK Criminal Justice Act 1988, thus legally paving the way for the case to proceed to trial.

The UK Supreme Court then sent the case back to the Central Criminal Court to consider further evidence from the prosecution's expert and apply the legal standard confirmed by the Supreme Court to the facts of the case.

In order for a member of a non-State armed group to be prosecuted for torture, the group must have been exercising "governmental functions." The Central Criminal Court ruled that the evidence presented by the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) failed to prove that the NPFL had the requisite authority over the relevant territory at the time the crimes in question were committed. Therefore, the Court dismissed the case.

However, the Court noted that "there is prima facie evidence that she held a high rank in the NPFL and (...) carried out, whether personally, or by giving orders, or by acquiescing in, the acts of torture (...) which took place in, or on the border of, Nimba County." Thus, Ms. Taylor was not found innocent.

Civitas Maxima and the Monrovia-based Global Justice and Research Project (GJRP) provided the initial information to the UK authorities which led the Metropolitan Police to conduct an investigation into Ms. Taylor for several years. UK law allows the CPS in these circumstances to return to court if further evidence of government-like control is gathered.

Months after the case had been dismissed, Ms. Taylor returned to Liberia. Although she had claimed asylum in the UK, her application to settle there permanently was refused under a Home Office rule that there were serious reasons to consider that she had, amongst other things, committed a crime against peace, a war crime, or a crime against humanity.

However, in Liberia, she stated in a press conference on July 27, 2020 that it was "one of the misconceptions that was out there" that she was "looking for asylum" in the UK, and claimed that she "got asylum in the UK in 2007.

In her written press statement she added "I have returned home to the land of my birth to also contribute to the building of our nation. I am a Liberian with a deep love for my country and people."

Meanwhile, Ms. Taylor in the lawsuit claimed that defendant Washington published fake information with sinister intent to injure her hard-earned reputation after the said information was broadcast and circulated on the internet and print media.

She further argued that defendant Washington was not satisfied with her diabolical campaign to besmear and defame her good reputation, with actual malice and diabolical schemes to ruin her good reputation.

Ms. Taylor added that due to the defendant's damaging publications, she endured reputation damage and "mental anguish and humiliation to the effect that people looked upon her as one who does not portray or possess the kind of moral rectitude to be an international public servant and to transact business with the public, for which damages must be paid because the publications are found wanting, contrary to the law.

Madam Taylor is the executive director of the Liberia Institute of Policy Studies and Research, since May 3, 2021.

She worked with the International Maritime Organization (IMO) as a permanent representative and minister plenipotentiary at Liberia Permanent Mission to the IMO, establishing a career in law and public policy with more than 20 years of work experience in both the public and private services in Liberia and abroad, with no record of criminal offense or conviction.

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Terrorism

DHS Warns of Heightened Terrorism Risk over the Summer (National Review)

By Arjun Singh

June 7, 2022

The Department of Homeland Security issued a bulletin notice on Tuesday stating that America faces a "heightened threat" of terrorism and mass-violence over the summer.

Published by the National Terrorism Advisory System, the notice states that potential targets include "public gatherings, faith-based institutions, schools, racial and religious minorities, government facilities and personnel, U.S. critical infrastructure, the media, and perceived ideological opponents." The primary source of the threat, it added, was "lone offenders and small groups motivated by a range of ideological beliefs and/or personal grievances," which could include foreign terrorists and domestic anti-government groups.

The bulletin stated that recent violent events may encourage these actors to conduct "copycat" attacks across the country. Specifically, it cited the shooting at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas - which killed 19 children and two teachers - as the subject of potential copycat attempts. DHS noted that online conspiracists have suggested that the shooting was a "government-staged event meant to advance gun control measures."

It also referred to the racially motivated shooting at Tops Friendly Market in Buffalo in May, which killed ten African Americans; the shooting of Taiwanese parishioners in Laguna Woods, Calif., that killed one; and the attack on the New York City subway in April as being "celebrated" by significant numbers of online users, who they may attempt to replicate the attacks.

The bulletin did not specify the probability of such an event occurring in any given part of the country. In 2018, the probability of death in a terrorist attack on the contiguous United States was 1 in 30.1 million. In 2019, the rate of mass shootings in the U.S. was 1 per 50 million people.

The bulletin comes as officials have warned that political violence across America is set to increase, owing to high profile controversies.

On May 13, a DHS intelligence briefing obtained by Axios revealed that threats to federal officials - especially, Supreme Court justices and Catholic Churches - is set to increase following the issuance of a decision in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health*. Leaked last month by Politico, the Court's draft opinion would overturn its precedent in *Roe v. Wade*, which has legalized abortion nationwide since 1973. This threat was re-iterated in Tuesday's bulletin, which also suggested that "minorities and law enforcement officials" may be the targets of violence along the U.S.-Mexico border by actors frustrated over the influx of illegal immigrants into the country.

In assessing the risk of foreign terrorism, the bulletin stated that al Qaeda and the Islamic State had called on supporters to engage in lone wolf attacks across the country. Specifically, it cited the *Wolves of Manhattan* magazine - published online by a pro-al Qaeda cyberwarfare group, the Malahem Cyber Army, which encouraged supporters to "travel to Ukraine to acquire training and weapons to use in attacks against the West." It is estimated that fewer than one thousand Americans have traveled to Ukraine to fight for its Territorial Legion and various militia groups against Russian forces, though their allegiances are unknown.

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Piracy

UN Security Council Calls for Renewed Focus on Gulf of Guinea Piracy (The Maritime Executive)

June 3, 2022

On Tuesday, the United Nations Security Council unanimously adopted a new security resolution on maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea. The resolution is meant to renew attention to the evolving piracy threat in the region, which remains an issue almost a decade after the UNSC's last resolution on the matter.

Under the resolution, UNSC stressed that it is the primary responsibility of the coastal states of the Gulf of Guinea to counter piracy and armed robbery at sea in the region, as well as address the underlying causes in cooperation with regional and international partners.

In addition, it called on member states in the region to criminalize piracy and armed robbery at sea under their domestic laws, filling a significant gap in the legal systems of some coastal states. States should also cooperate on hostage taking and prosecution of suspected pirates, and their transfer for trial in and out of the Gulf of Guinea.

The resolution was co-sponsored by Ghana and Norway. Ghana is currently serving a two-year stint at the UNSC, which began in January, and the security situation in the Gulf of Guinea is one of its primary priorities.

"Piracy constitutes one of the foremost security concerns on the African continent. It risks compounding multifaceted challenges facing the region, including a surge in terrorism, a return of the coup d'états and the worsening impact of the Covid-19 pandemic" said Harold Agyeman, Ghana's ambassador to the United Nations.

Although the overall maritime security picture in the Gulf of Guinea has improved in the last year, onshore factors that drive piracy remain unchanged. According to Dryad Global, piracy off West Africa declined almost by half in 2021 compared to the previous year.

"Incidents of actual and attempted attacks and vessels being fired upon dropped by more than 85 percent. The number of vessels boarded throughout the region fell by 54 percent while incidents of crews being kidnapped declined by 60 percent," Dryad said.

Over the past decade, the Gulf of Guinea has become the world's number-one piracy hotspot. A study released last year by Stable Seas estimated that pirates, specifically in the Niger Delta, earn \$5 million of direct income per year through theft and hostage taking.

However, Gulf of Guinea nations have to carry the significant costs of counter-piracy initiatives. Stable Seas calculated that government expenditure on maritime security totals \$272 million per year in naval spending and perhaps \$250 million more in non-naval spending.

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Gender-Based Violence

Sexual Violence 'Most Hidden Crime' Being Committed against Ukrainians, Civil Society Representative Tells Security Council (UN)

June 6, 2022

Allegations of sexual violence by Russian troops in Ukraine are mounting as the conflict passes its 100-day mark, a senior United Nations official told the Security Council today, voicing regret over a stark discrepancy between that painful reality and the global community's ambition to end the use of rape as a tactic of war.

Pramila Patten, the Secretary-General's Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict, recalled her recent visit to Ukraine and outlined the elements of a recently signed framework of cooperation on the prevention and response to conflict-related sexual violence, which seeks to strengthen accountability and combat those abhorrent crimes. "Too often have the needs of women and girls in conflict settings been side-lined and treated as an afterthought," she said, welcoming that the newly signed framework makes them an explicit priority.

Recalling the Council's many resolutions — backed up by international law — prohibiting the use of sexual violence as a tactic of war, she noted the gaping chasm between those commitments and the situation of many women around the world. "Painfully, my visit cast into stark relief the gap that still exists between the aspiration of prevention expressed by this Council

through the robust normative framework that has been established over the past decade and the reality on the ground for the most vulnerable,” she said. As of 3 June, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) had received reports of 124 alleged acts of conflict-related sexual across Ukraine — mostly against women and girls — and a national hotline had received reports of crimes ranging from gang rape to coercion to watch an act of sexual violence committed against a partner or a child.

Against that backdrop, she urged humanitarian actors to prioritize support for survivors of sexual and gender-based violence as a life-saving component of their work and warned against waiting to act. “We do not need hard data for a scaled-up humanitarian response, nor for all parties to put in place preventive measures,” she stressed, detailing the provisions of the recently signed framework — which seeks to strengthen cooperation between those working to combat and deter sexual violence in Ukraine and reduce the risk posed by human traffickers — and calling for the international community’s steadfast support.

Natalia Karbowska, Co-Founder and Director of Strategic Development for the Ukrainian Women’s Fund, recounted her organization’s efforts to provide food, medicine and other support to Ukrainian women whose lives were destroyed by the Russian Federation’s invasion. Describing sexual violence as “the most hidden crime”, she noted that for every girl or woman who is willing to tell her story, there are many others who will be silent for years. The Russian Federation is using sexual violence and rape as instruments of terror to control civilians, she said. Although the full scale of conflict-related sexual violence is not yet known, human rights activists and law enforcement agencies estimate that hundreds of cases have been committed not just against women and girls, but also men and boys and people of other gender identities, she said.

Also briefing the Council was Sherrie Rollins Westin, President of the non-profit organization Sesame Workshop, who said her group supports children and caregivers affected by conflicts and crises around the globe. Urging the international community to prioritize caregivers and young children in their humanitarian response, she said the latter have the most to lose, as their brains are developing faster than at any time in their lives. Exposure to traumatic events can have lasting impacts on their health, cognitive development and emotional stability. “Right now, children are experiencing the kind of exposure to trauma and stress that has the potential to derail their lives,” she warned. Against that backdrop, she urged the humanitarian community to build interventions to support young children into their work — including mental health services, quality early childhood education and help for caregivers — and pointed out that less than 3 per cent of humanitarian funding currently goes to such crucial programmes.

As Council members took the floor, many expressed support for the Special Representative of the Secretary-General’s framework of cooperation, and called for an urgent end to the use of rape and other sexual crimes as tactics of war — both in Ukraine and elsewhere in the world.

Brazil’s representative reiterated his country’s call for urgent, independent investigations of all reports of sexual violence being committed in Ukraine, emphasizing that perpetrators — be they agents of the State or not — must be held accountable. Also noting that human traffickers and criminal networks may be taking advantage of the conflict to exploit women and children, he said States have a duty to prevent predatory individuals and criminal organizations from profiting from the situation. “This Council has already failed in preventing the outbreak of the conflict and in ensuring the cessation of hostilities — it must not fail in repudiating sexual crimes and human trafficking,” he stressed.

The representative of the United Arab Emirates said that, even before the crisis in Ukraine, the world was already in the midst of the worst refugee crisis since the Second World War. Some 28.7 million women and girls around the world were in a condition of forced labour, debt bondage, forced marriage and slavery, with millions of displaced persons in the Middle East at the epicentre of the crisis. Commending the recently signed framework, she urged the Council to keep “top of mind” the conflict’s knock-on effects on global food security, and to pursue the only true path towards ending conflict-related sexual violence in Ukraine — namely, a diplomatic resolution of the conflict.

Charles Michel, President of the European Council, said sexual and gender-based violence remains a global threat faced by women across the world. In its own neighbourhood, the European Union stands committed to protecting all those seeking refuge from the fighting in Ukraine — largely women and children — and to providing them with education, health care and access to the labour market. He also described Moscow’s attempts to use food supplies as a “stealth missile against developing countries”, emphasizing that the Union has “zero” sanctions against the Russian Federation’s agricultural sector, and does not prevent it from transporting grain, food or fertilizers.

Meanwhile, Ukraine’s delegate voiced grave concern about the fate of some 1 million Ukrainians, including children, who have been forcibly removed to the Russian Federation and are being turned into Russian citizens. Calling on the international community to do more to protect them, he also cited numerous allegations of sexual crimes committed by Russian troops, with the bodies of those tortured or raped burned to hide evidence. Welcoming the Human Rights Council Commission of Inquiry’s visit to Ukraine to gather first-hand information, he went on to note that Kyiv is ready to resume food exports from Odessa to the rest of the world. However, efforts are needed to prevent the Russian Federation from exploiting those

operations, he said, also cautioning that any concessions advised by Ukraine's well-meaning partners would only lead to more war.

For his part, the representative of the Russian Federation criticized Ukraine and Western members of the Council for ratcheting up accusations — levelled without evidence — of sexual crimes committed by Russian troops. Unlike those baseless accusations, he provided numerous “concrete examples” of crimes by Ukrainian nationalists, including a threatened rape and shooting committed by a Ukrainian senior lieutenant against a couple in Mariupol. In recent years, Ukraine has risen to the top five countries in Europe with the most victims of human trafficking and sexual exploitation. On another matter, he noted the stated intention of the United States and the United Kingdom to supply long-range artillery and multiple launch rocket systems to Ukraine, describing promises that Kyiv will not use such weapons against targets in Russian territory as “unconvincing”.

Also speaking were representatives of France, Mexico, United States, China, Ghana, Norway, India, United Kingdom, Gabon, Kenya, Ireland, Albania, Italy, Latvia (on behalf of the Baltic States), Germany, Poland and Slovakia.

The meeting began at 10:02 a.m. and ended at 12:58 p.m.

Briefings

PRAMILA PATTEN, Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, briefing the Security Council via videoconference, recalled her visit to Ukraine in early May. “Painfully, my visit cast into stark relief the gap that still exists between the aspiration of prevention expressed by this Council through the robust normative framework that has been established over the past decade, and the reality on the ground for the most vulnerable,” she said. While the Council's commitment is unequivocal, and its resolutions make clear that even wars have limits, allegations of sexual violence are mounting as the conflict passes its 100-day mark.

Noting that she has issued three public statements since the war broke out in February — “to ensure that this issue is not shrouded in silence or normalized by impunity” — she said she has also urged all parties to the conflict to ensure the protection of civilians from sexual violence, including those displaced internally and across national borders. She also called for swift and rigorous investigations that ensure accountability as a central pillar of deterrence, prevention and non-repetition, “because the failure to acknowledge and investigate such crimes is the surest sign that violations will continue unabated”. At the same time, it is essential that humanitarian actors prioritize support for survivors of sexual and gender-based violence as a life-saving component of their work.

Stressing that victims are often unable or unwilling to report to law enforcement authorities, she also spotlighted the steep reduction in functioning service providers, such as maternity hospitals. As of 3 June, the Human Rights Monitoring Team of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) had received reports of 124 alleged acts of conflict-related sexual violence, occurring against women, girls, men and boys in various Ukrainian cities and regions. Women and girls constitute most of the alleged victims, while some reporting instances of sexual violence were also men and boys. Verification of cases is ongoing, and a national hotline on domestic violence, human trafficking and gender-based discrimination has been set up. To date, it has received reports of rape, gang rape, pregnancy following rape, attempted rape, threats of rape, coercion to watch an act of sexual violence committed against a partner or a child, and forced nudity.

Warning against waiting too long to act, she declared: “An active battleground is never conducive to accurate ‘book-keeping’ [...] if we wait for hard data and statistics, it will always be too late.” The international community must mobilize immediately on the basis of its common conviction that even one case of sexual violence is unacceptable. “We do not need hard data for a scaled-up humanitarian response, nor for all parties to put in place preventive measures,” she stressed, commending the leadership of the Ukrainian authorities in their agreement of a framework of cooperation with the United Nations on the Prevention and Response to Conflict Related Sexual Violence, which was signed by Deputy Prime Minister Olha Stefanishyna on 3 May. That framework will serve as the basis for a comprehensive and multifaceted preventive and service response, as well as the more effective coordination of all stakeholders, including United Nations agencies.

She went on to outline five critical areas of the framework. First, strengthening rule of law and accountability as a central aspect of deterrence and prevention of crimes of sexual violence. Second, strengthening the capacity of the security and defence sector to prevent sexual violence. Third, ensuring that survivors of sexual violence, as well as their children, have access to comprehensive services, including sexual and reproductive health, psychological, legal, socioeconomic services and reintegration support. Fourth, looking ahead to ongoing and future negotiations for cessation of hostilities, ensuring that sexual violence is addressed in the framework of any ceasefire agreement, and ensuring that amnesties for sexual violence crimes are explicitly prohibited. And fifth, addressing conflict-related trafficking in persons for the purposes of sexual exploitation or prostitution.

“Too often have the needs of women and girls in conflict settings [have] been side-lined and treated as an afterthought,” she

said, welcoming that the framework of cooperation makes them an explicit priority. Calling on the Council and the international donor community to stand in solidarity with Ukrainian authorities and the United Nations entities to support its implementation, she noted that she recently had the opportunity to debrief the Mission of the Russian Federation to the United Nations on her visit to Ukraine. At that meeting, she emphasized that her Office is at the disposal of all parties to the conflict to support the implementation of preventive measures that mitigate the acute risks of conflict-related sexual violence. “I look forward to further consultation with the Mission [...] on possible modalities for cooperation in this sphere, including the facilitation of access to areas not under Ukrainian Government control,” she said.

Drawing the Council’s attention to the trafficking dimension of the conflict in particular, she recalled her visits to reception centres at border crossing points in Poland and the Republic of Moldova and praised the outpouring of support for those fleeing Ukraine. However, the protection challenges facing the nearly 6.8 million people who have crossed that country’s borders are also unprecedented. From the outset of the conflict, heightened risks of trafficking in persons — including for purposes of sexual exploitation and prostitution — have been alarmingly evident. The lack of consistent vetting of accommodation offers and transportation arrangements is a serious concern, as well as the limited capacity of protection services to address the velocity and volume of displacement. There are also concerns regarding the multiplicity of volunteers, with limited vetting, and little or no training or experience.

She illustrated those challenges with several examples, emphasizing that it remains critical to ensure that effective protection systems are in place in all transit and destination countries, and at all border crossings. Strengthening the overall response to trafficking is a critical aspect of the framework, which will also require a coherent and coordinated response at the level of European institutions. That entails a concerted, integrated and holistic cross-border response by humanitarian partners, law enforcement agencies, border forces, immigration officials and political leaders. “A regional compact is urgently required,” she stressed, welcoming the presence of the President of the European Union, Charles Michel, in the Council Chamber. She also acknowledged that even as the Council focuses on Ukraine members must also ensure that victims in conflicts from Yemen to Myanmar to northern Ethiopia are not forgotten and resources are not drained or diverted.

NATALIA KARBOWSKA, Co-Founder and Director of Strategic Development, Ukrainian Women’s Fund, said her voice represents those of her organization which has been working on supporting women in Ukraine for 22 years, as well as those of hundreds of other women’s groups working around the clock supporting women, providing food and medicine, healing the trauma and giving them the strength to continue living. When the war started, she said that she was in a meeting discussing localization of a national action plan on implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000). The war showed that the women, peace and security agenda is more relevant today than ever before. It has a new meaning: security of each and every woman is security of the whole country. No one can feel safe when sexual violence and rape are taking place in their community. Women’s organizations are usually the first ones that women who experienced sexual violence approach. They provide psychological assistance and, together with law enforcement agencies, document the cases and support investigation processes.

“Sexual violence in this war is the most hidden crime,” she pointed out, noting that for every girl or woman who is willing to tell her story, there are many others who will be silent for years. “The Russian Federation is using sexual violence and rape as terror to control civilians at the temporary occupied territories,” she said. Although the full scale of conflict-related sexual violence is not yet known, human rights activists and law enforcement agencies estimate that hundreds of cases have been committed, not just against women and girls, but also men and boys and people of other gender identities, and of all ages. She asked why the Russian Federation still sits on the Security Council and why it participates in United Nations peacekeeping operations.

But as the war continues, Ukrainian women refugees need more permanent housing and work. The situation opens new risks for sexual and labour exploitation, she continued, recalling “stories of women and children who were forced to go to Russia by Russian troops — through the so-called filtration camps.” She said she met a 16-year-old boy from Mariupol whose mother was brutally taken to such a camp and that no one knew what happened to her. “There are hundreds of stories like this. How is this called? Trafficking? Slavery? Terror and crime,” she said, noting that the Russian Federation is “using war crimes as a weapon”. Resolution 1325 (2000) remains a powerful instrument, however there is a need to create new tools that will make it work properly at different levels, and most importantly, for women on the ground. She urged the Council to develop such instruments, keep pressure with sanctions, and continue providing military and humanitarian support.

SHERRIE ROLLINS WESTIN, President of the non-profit organization Sesame Workshop, said her group supports children and caregivers affected by conflicts and crises around the globe. “In Ukraine, the gender dimensions of the crisis are particularly pronounced,” she said, noting that most victims of atrocities in the current conflict are women and children. Urging the international community to prioritize caregivers and young children in their humanitarian response, she said the latter have the most to lose as their brains are developing faster than at any times in their lives. Any exposure to traumatic events can have lasting impacts on their health, cognitive development and emotional stability. “Right now, children are experiencing the kind of exposure to trauma and stress that has the potential to derail their lives,” she warned.

Thankfully, she said, the global community already has the tools to assist young children in Ukraine, which can be built directly into their responses. First, they should directly provide mental health and psychosocial support as a first-line humanitarian intervention. Second, they should invest in quality early childhood education and support, which have been proven to reduce the impacts of trauma and conflict-related stress. Outlining similar work that Sesame Workshop is already doing with refugee children in Jordan — and which does not impose additional cost burdens on humanitarian responses — she went on to stress that caregivers also must not be forgotten as they work to provide children in Ukraine with the urgent support they need. Currently, less than 3 per cent of humanitarian funding is allocated to such early childhood interventions, she said, calling for its rapid scaling up and emphasizing that any hope for a prosperous and peaceful future depends on support provided to children today.

Statements

NICOLAS DE RIVIÈRE (France) said that the sanctions adopted by the European Union have the sole objective of bringing Moscow to return to respecting the Charter of the United Nations. Expressing outrage at the many credible allegations of sexual violence, he urged all members to be “the guarantors of the resolutions of this Council on sexual violence”. France fully supports the action of the United Nations on the ground to discover the facts, and it provided Ukraine with expertise to collect evidence and establish accountability. Expressing support for the United Nations action to prevent the risk of trafficking and smuggling of human beings, he applauded the efforts of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) to provide services essential for victims of violence. “There can be no lasting peace without the full participation of women,” he stressed.

ALICIA GUADALUPE BUENROSTRO MASSIEU (Mexico) said that 90 per cent of people who have left the country are women and children, and 60 per cent of the internally displaced persons are also women. This makes it clear that this conflict has an inescapable gender component. Ms. Patten shared the reports about Ukrainian women who were raped and subsequently murdered. It is a priority to carry out the investigations of alleged war crimes, crimes against humanity and other violations of international humanitarian law. Her country follows closely the ongoing investigation by the International Criminal Court Prosecutor’s Office and by the Independent Commission of Inquiry by the Human Rights Council. Welcoming the signing of a cooperation framework between the United Nations and Ukraine on the prevention and response to sexual violence related to conflicts, she called for the continued collection of evidence and disaggregated data on sexual and gender-based violence.

LINDA THOMAS-GREENFIELD (United States) said the “mountain” of horrific reports of sexual violence committed by Russian soldiers in Ukraine is growing every day. Ukrainian authorities have reported rapes and the subsequent killings of Ukrainian women by Russian Federation troops, and imagery now confirms the presence of mass graves in the town of Bucha. There are also indications that individuals have been tortured and killed execution-style, and multiple reports by survivors show that such terrible acts were committed in front of children. “These are bone-chilling accounts,” she said, adding that women and girls are also particularly at risk of trafficking and other forms of sexual exploitation. “Council members, we cannot stay silent,” she stressed, calling for justice for victims. Responsibility starts first and foremost with the Russian Federation, which must ensure that its forces and proxy forces adhere to the terms of Council resolution 1820 (2008), which recognized that rape and other forms of sexual violence can constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity. Meanwhile, the rest of the international community should support the framework agreement signed by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and the Ukrainian authorities. The Commission of Inquiry launched by the Human Rights Council can also work “to ensure Russia does not get away with hiding atrocities”, she said, noting that all that support requires resources.

DAI BING (China) said the conflict has taken a heavy toll on Ukrainian women and children, and all the parties must take measures to protect civilians and ensure that hospitals and other critical civilian facilities are protected from attacks. Welcoming the framework agreement signed by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and the Ukrainian authorities in May, he said the use of sexual violence as a tool of war is a serious crime and any allegations should be investigated in an impartial manner that is based on facts. The growing numbers of cases of human trafficking and sexual exploitation and abuse are disturbing, and more international action must be taken to investigate, prevent and address them. Meanwhile, United Nations agencies should strengthen their monitoring and analysis to combat such crimes against refugees. Only through a ceasefire and the restoration of peace can the trauma facing Ukrainian women and children be fully avoided, he said, calling on the international community to do more to bring the parties back to the path of peace. In that vein, he voiced his hope that the upcoming meeting between the Russian Federation, Ukraine, the United Nations and Türkiye will pave the way for a ceasefire, and warned that sanctions and the further strengthening of military blocs will not help ease the crisis.

CAROLYN ABENA ANIMA OPPONG-NTIRI (Ghana) said that the international community must ensure that prevention, accountability and a survivor-centred approach, which are at the heart of resolution 2467 (2019), are not reduced to mere rhetoric but are translated into real and tangible action on the ground. Condemning all acts of sexual violence and human trafficking in Ukraine, including as a weapon of war, she expressed support for all ongoing accountability efforts, including investigations by the Ukraine authorities, civil society groups and the International Criminal Court. She voiced support for

global calls to designate such acts as war crimes and submit that conflict-related sexual violence and human trafficking should be treated as a basis for targeted sanctions against culpable actors.

TRINE HEIMERBACK (Norway) stressed that Moscow's war against Ukraine has a gendered impact, affecting women and men, girls and boys, and members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons (LGBTI) community. Attacks on health-care institutions and staff are denying people safe access to sexual and reproductive health services, she said, also pointing to the high number of survivor accounts of rape and other forms of sexual and gender-based violence as well as trafficking. Noting that her country has increased support to UNFPA (United Nations Population Fund) and other humanitarian actors, she underlined the importance of gender and age differentiated responses to civilian populations, including Ukrainian internally displaced persons and refugees, and stressed the need to ensure child protection services. First and foremost is to prevent sexual and gender-based violence, including trafficking, from happening, she said, noting that engaging and supporting women human rights defenders and civil society is key. Emphasizing a survivor-centred approach, she underlined the critical importance of strong and independent human rights institutions and accountability mechanisms in Ukraine.

RONALDO COSTA FILHO (Brazil) took note with great concern of reports of alleged cases of sexual violence directed against women and girls in the context of the conflict in Ukraine. Reiterating his calls for urgent independent investigations, he said the use of gender-based violence as a weapon of war, as well as a tool of intimidation and social control in conflict situations, is unacceptable. Perpetrators — be they agents of the State or not — must be held accountable. Also noting that human traffickers and criminal networks may be taking advantage of the conflict to exploit women and children, he said States have a duty to prevent predatory individuals and criminal organizations from profiting from the situation. The international community should employ effective strategies to reduce unsafe and irregular routes, and to promote the sustainable and safe legal pathways for those in need of protection, he said, noting that Brazil has introduced special humanitarian visas for Ukrainian nationals and stateless persons affected by the conflict in Ukraine. "This Council has already failed in preventing the outbreak of the conflict and in ensuring the cessation of hostilities — it must not fail in repudiating sexual crimes and human trafficking," he stressed.

RAVINDRA RAGUTTAHALLI (India), stressing that national Governments have the important responsibility for prosecuting and deterring crimes such as sexual violence in conflict situations, noted that the United Nations must assist with capabilities development to strengthen national legal frameworks and related structures to that end. Noting his country's support for effective cooperation and appropriate mechanisms to combat illegal migration and human trafficking, he also called for resumption of talks between Ukraine and the Russian Federation to end the conflict. He went on to note the broader regional and global implications of the conflict, pointing to the increasing oil prices and shortage of food grains and fertilizers. Noting that his country had announced some measures that allow for wheat exports based on approvals to those countries who are required to meet their food security demands, he highlighted the importance of equity, affordability and accessibility to food grains.

MICHEL XAVIER BIAN (Gabon) expressed worries about allegations of sexual violence against women and children, also recognizing various efforts of the United Nations — including Ms. Patten's office, UNFPA and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) — to support the victims and curb threats of human trafficking. All parties to conflict must abide by the obligation of protecting civilians. Sexual violence is a threat to security on its own right. Criminal networks must be cut off at the root. Noting that Africans fleeing Ukraine are being discriminated, he said ordeals suffered by them should not be forgotten. The most effective means to end sexual violence and human trafficking is to put an end to the conflict.

MARTIN KIMANI (Kenya) condemned the violations of international law "and the most basic human decency" ongoing against women and children in Ukraine. All military commanders must ensure that those responsible for such atrocities are held to account, and soldiers should be subject to severe discipline for abusing civilians or captured combatants. Political leaders should also be aware that ideological labelling against entire populations increases the risks that rank-and-file soldiers will commit atrocities. He urged United Nations agencies and partners to do their utmost to deliver medical and psychosocial support to the survivors of sexual violence and trafficking, adding that more should also be done to ensure humanitarian corridors and safety from military targeting for the millions in besieged areas. He joined others in commending the signing of the framework agreement with Ukrainian authorities and praised the role of women as fighters and agents of change in that country. However, he also reiterated the plight of Africans trapped in the war, citing reports of discrimination against people of African descent who are seeking to flee to other European cities, and raised the issue of food insecurity stemming from the war that is seriously disrupting supply chains and impacting people in the global South.

LANA ZAKI NUSSEIBEH (United Arab Emirates) said before the latest crisis in Ukraine, the world was already in the midst of the worst refugee crisis since the Second World War. Some 28.7 million women and girls around the world were in a condition of forced labour, debt bondage, forced marriage and slavery, with millions of displaced persons in the Middle East at the epicentre of the crisis. "The conflict in Ukraine is therefore making an already horrifying global crisis worse," she said. Commending the framework of cooperation signed recently, she also voiced support for the Special Representative's plan to

deploy an expert on trafficking to cooperate with authorities in Ukraine and in neighbouring countries and noted the call for a regional compact as well as the Council's support. Initiatives like the "Rapid Gender Analysis", carried out by the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and CARE International, can guide a better and more tailored response to the needs of Ukrainian women and girls. The Council must also keep the knock-on effects of global food insecurity at top of mind and pursue the only true way to end conflict-related sexual violence and trafficking in Ukraine — namely, a diplomatic resolution of the conflict.

GERALDINE BYRNE NASON (Ireland), recalling the fallout of the war against Ukraine, including conflict-related sexual violence and human trafficking, noted that over 15 million people have now fled their homes, the vast majority of them being women and children. "This speed and scale of displacement is unheard of in modern times," she said. Raising the alarm about human trafficking, she pointed out the increased vulnerability of marginalized groups, unaccompanied children and those with disabilities, calling for rigorous vetting and registration procedures in place to prevent exploitation and protection against trafficking. Ireland has sought to mitigate such risks in welcoming more than 30,000 Ukrainians to the country, she noted. Pointing to horrifying reports of sexual violence perpetrated by Russian Federation soldiers, she stressed that rape is not an inevitable by-product of war, but an act which may constitute a war crime. Calling on the international community to do more and ensure accountability, she stressed that survivors of sexual and gender-based violence and of trafficking deserve protection and assistance.

VASSILY A. NEBENZIA (Russian Federation) criticized Ukraine and Western members of the Council for ratcheting up accusations that his country's military service personnel were committing crimes of a sexual nature. It has become their favourite tactic since the start of his country's special military operation. Russian soldiers were accused of sexual violence without evidence. In Kherson, for example, the authorities reported that there is no evidence that the Russian army committed sexual violence against 11 female residents, as was reported by several dubious Internet platforms. "The new hero who was reported by media as having been raped and killed by the Russian army," he said, noting that she herself admitted that she was absolutely fine and said it was something to do with a strange photography session. While the opponents make baseless accusations, he said he will provide "concrete examples" of crimes by Ukrainian nationalists. Ukraine Senior Lieutenant Sergei Batynsky committed a monstrous crime. In Mariupol, Mr. Batynsky detained a civilian couple in the basement. Later, Mr. Batynsky, drunk, threatened to rape the wife in the presence of her husband. When the husband tried to stop it, Mr. Batynsky shot him in front of his wife. Mr. Batynsky personally confessed to this in a video interview, which is widely available. He went on listing several other examples.

He said that in recent years, Ukraine has been among the top five countries in terms of the number of victims of human trafficking and sexual exploitation in Europe. In Las Vegas, posters emerged, inviting Ukrainian strippers to a casting session. In Germany, fast food chain KFC in its advertising said that "we are happy to welcome all the chicks from Ukraine". Obviously, this is just the tip of the iceberg. These show how big the threat of sexual exploitation is for Ukrainian refugees in the West. He insisted that upholding the norms of humanitarian law is a top priority for the Russian army. Taking note of the intention of the United States and the United Kingdom to supply long-range artillery and multiple launch rocket systems to Ukraine, United States Secretary of State Antony Blinken's statement that Kyiv will not use American multiple launch rocket systems against targets in the territories of the Russian Federation does not sound convincing. The Russian Federation reserves the right to move the line of threat from neo-Nazi posts in the republics of Donbas to include the distance of a possible range of ammunition, but also to strike at the centres where decisions about the use of such weapons are made.

FERIT HOXHA (Albania), Council President for the month, speaking in his national capacity, cited reports that thousands of children had been deported to the Russian Federation and were being held in filtration camps. He called for full clarity and an independent investigation on this issue as international humanitarian law classifies the forced mass deportation of people during a conflict as a war crime. There have been multiple reports and accounts of Russian soldiers raping women after breaking down the doors of cellars and basements where they were sheltering with their families. Some of these despicable actions have taken place in front of their children. "What was discovered in Bucha and Irpin raises concerns for the safety of women and girls in other Russian occupied towns cut off from the outside world," he said, reiterating his call for a detailed investigation on what amounts to a systematic element in attacks on civilians committed by soldiers. Conflict-related sexual violence is a despicable act, it is a war crime. Reports are showing that there is a high risk of trafficking for sexual exploitation at borders, especially for children and young women often not accompanied by other family members. Greater collaboration is needed with border agencies and Government partners to strengthen prevention mechanisms. "Let's help Ukrainians, particularly women and girls, go from nightmares to normal lives, to dreams. Only Russian Federation tanks and soldiers stand in their way. This war should have never started. It must stop," he concluded.

SERGIY KYSLYTSYA (Ukraine) reiterated the urgent need to resolve the problem of the Russian Federation's continued "squatting" in the former permanent seat of the Soviet Union — "the sooner the better" — as Moscow's latest aggression threatens the very international peace and security the Council is meant to protect. The savage cruelty of Russian invaders has turned the lives of countless Ukrainians into a nightmare, with nearly 12 million people now internally displaced. Voicing concern about the fate of some 1 million Ukrainians, including children, who have been forcibly removed to the Russian

Federation, he said the decision to expedite their Russian citizenship defies international law and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Moscow refuses to provide any information on those forcibly transported to Russian territory, who are at real risk of trafficking or sexual exploitation and abuse. Calling on the international community to do more to protect them, he also drew attention to numerous allegations of crimes committed by the invaders — recorded in various Ukrainian cities and regions — with both minors and elderly persons falling victim to sexual crimes committed by Russian troops and the bodies of those tortured or raped burned to hide evidence.

Welcoming the Human Rights Council Commission of Inquiry's visit to several locations in Ukraine to meet with victims and witnesses and gather first-hand information, he went on to note that Ukraine is ready to resume food exports from the port of Odessa to the rest of the world. However, efforts must be taken to prevent the Russian Federation from exploiting those operations, he said, stressing that Moscow's promises not to attack trade routes are as credible as his assurances that it would not invade Ukraine in the first place. As a first step, the Russian Federation must withdraw its naval forces from maritime waters around Ukraine. Meanwhile, he cautioned that any concessions advised by Ukraine's well-meaning partners would only lead to more war, and noted that his country has been devastated multiple times by invasions and genocidal campaigns over the course of the last century. Millions of lives were lost in past wars for the world to realize that appeasement and concessions to the aggressor do not work. "[President Vladimir] Putin's Russia must be defeated for the sake of international peace and security," and for the sake of people throughout the world, he stressed.

CHARLES MICHEL, President of the European Council, said the Russian Federation's savagery today in Ukraine stands in sharp contrast to the heritage of its great artists and scholars. Citing reports of Russian forces wielding sexual violence as a weapon of war, he stressed that sexual violence is a war crime, a crime against humanity and a shameful act that must be prosecuted without impunity. The European Union stands committed to protecting all those that seek refuge outside Ukraine, who are largely women and children, and to providing them with education, health care and access to the labour market. Sadly, sexual and gender-based violence is a global threat faced by women across the world, in countries including Afghanistan, Ethiopia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Central African Republic, Myanmar, South Sudan and Yemen.

Noting his intention to host a second conference on Women in Conflict this week in Brussels alongside UN-Women, the Mukwege Foundation and Nadia's Initiative, he went on to warn against Moscow's attempts to use food supplies as a "stealth missile against developing countries", as the dramatic impacts of the war spill over across the globe. "Russia's war is solely responsible for this looming food crisis — Russia alone, despite the Kremlin's campaign of lies and disinformation", he said, emphasizing that the Union has "zero" sanctions on the Russian Federation's agricultural sector and does not prevent it from transporting grain, food or fertilizers. The bloc will continue to support Ukraine and pressure Moscow "with the truth", he said, noting that its aggression is also an attack on the core United Nations values of human dignity, tolerance, multilateral cooperation and international law.

MAURIZIO MASSARI (Italy) said displaced and refugee children are less safe and more exposed to violence and trafficking. These considerations prompted Italy to include the issue of trafficking of persons in conflict among the priorities of its last Security Council term in 2017. His country's efforts resulted in the unanimous adoption of resolution 2388 (2017) on combating trafficking of persons. That text emphasizes the urgency to strengthen protection and assistance for displaced persons falling prey to trafficking, especially women and children. Expressing support for the universal ratification and full implementation of the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and the related Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, adopted in Italy more than 20 years ago, he said: "We must confront the dire reality that it is still largely 'cost-free' to rape a woman in armed conflicts." When investigations and prosecutions by national or international courts are impossible or ineffective, the General Assembly should consider creating international fact-finding mechanisms to conduct gender-sensitive investigations and ensure the collection and preservation of evidence.

ANDREJS PILDEGOVIČS (Latvia), also speaking on behalf of Estonia and Lithuania, expressed deep concern about reports of sexual violence perpetrated by Russian armed forces in Ukraine and the increasing risk for trafficking in human beings in the region. He called on relevant United Nations entities to continue to closely monitor conflict-related sexual violence in Ukraine and at its borders. Commending the creation of the EUROPOL taskforce to protect vulnerable Ukrainian refugees from human trafficking networks, he stressed the need to approach the situation carefully to avoid instances where predators can exploit the chaos.

He went on to condemn in the strongest possible terms the unlawful deportation of Ukrainian residents, in particular forced deportation of unaccompanied children, to the Russian Federation, as well as the illegal adoption of Ukrainian children. Noting the importance of meaningful participation of women and girls, he reiterated the need for a survivor-centred approach in responding to sexual violence in conflict, including access to medical and psychosocial care. It is of utmost importance that the survivors of conflict-related sexual violence in Ukraine have the opportunity to report cases as soon as possible and to receive proper assistance and essential services, he stressed, highlighting steps taken by the Baltic States to ensure accountability for atrocities in Ukraine.

ANTJE LEENDERTSE (Germany) said a multitude of reports indicates that the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war is present in the Russian Federation's unjustified, unprovoked war of aggression against Ukraine. As reporting and monitoring are key to holding perpetrators accountable, Germany supports the Special Representative's demands to reinforce the staff of the human rights monitoring mission and the Prosecutor General in Ukraine with staff specializing in conflict-related sexual violence. She commended the framework of cooperation as a vital condition for the Special Representative's team to commence their work on-site and expressed Germany's commitment to continuing its funding for the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General. She also called for a survivor-centred approach as well as the strengthening of survivors' rights and access to justice and services, and for more support to efforts to fight trafficking in persons. To protect the Ukrainian women coming to Germany, the Government has enacted public awareness campaigns and put in place police presence at train stations, and its feminist foreign policy considers the repercussions of conflict on those most vulnerable members of society.

KRZYSZTOF MARIA SZCZERSKI (Poland) stressed that Ukrainian civilians, in particular women and children, have become targets of human trafficking and gender-based violence. Poland, as a neighbouring country and primary destination for Ukrainian refugees, is undertaking efforts to address the effects of conflict-related human trafficking and sexual abuse, including specialized and awareness-raising training for its officers, as well as information campaigns for existing and potential victims. On a 24/7 basis, any incident of possible human trafficking or sexual crime can be reported to police officers speaking Ukrainian and Russian. All reported incidents are subject to a prompt verification, he said. The Government also implemented new immigration measures for Ukrainians fleeing the war by adopting a special law in March, which stipulates that they can obtain a Polish ID number to work legally in the country and have free access to public services.

RÓBERT CHATRNÚCH (Slovakia) noted that "the international community already made a commitment to help Ukraine in its reconstruction and recovery as soon as this nightmare is over." Ukraine will undoubtedly flourish once again, but the "blood of victims of this senseless war will be forever dried on the palms of the hands of the Russian Federation". Since the beginning of the Russian aggression, about 490,000 refugees — most being women and children — have entered Slovakia. His country adopted numerous legislative and administrative measures to help women in need and it will continue to do so. In this vein, he praised civil society and the people of Slovakia who have expressed solidarity with and provided much needed assistance to those fleeing Ukraine. There must be an "immediate cessation of Russian military activities in Ukraine and an unconditional withdrawal" of all its troops from the whole territory of Ukraine, he concluded.

'Silenced for far too long': Decades on women reveal how rape, sexualised torture and genital mutilation was rife during Lebanon's civil war (The New Arab)

By Rosabel Crean

June 10, 2022

Gender-based crimes, including rape, gang rape and sexualised torture, were rife during Lebanon's civil war, according to a new report which sheds light on the plight of women and girls.

For the first time, the length and breadth of sexual crimes committed against women and girls at the hands of state actors, state and non-state aligned militias during the 1975-90 civil war, has been compiled in a lengthy report by Legal Action Worldwide (LAW), a human rights organisation.

"The investigators found grim accounts of violations including mass rape, sexualised torture, genital mutilation and forced nudity, as well as abductions and killings of women ... the youngest victim being 9" LAW spent 18 months interviewing survivors, victims and witnesses, with many speaking up for the first time since their ordeal, to compile a preliminary report based on testimonies and the applicable national and international legal framework.

The investigators found grim accounts of violations including mass rape, sexualised torture, genital mutilation and forced nudity, as well as abductions and killings of women and girls after rape, with the youngest victim being nine-years-old.

Lebanon's civil war saw various religious and ethnic groups pitted against each other, with the establishment of Christian, Muslim and Druze militias, alongside Syrian, Palestinian and Israeli groups.

Over 100,000 civilians died and around 17,000 people disappeared during the wars, while more than one million nationals emigrated.

Speaking at the launch of the report in Beirut on Thursday, LAW's executive director, Antonia Mulvey described the findings as "groundbreaking."

"The voices of women that you will hear today both in person and through this report have been silenced for far too long," Mulvey said. "The history of the civil war must not remain unchallenged; it is never too late to find the truth and to acknowledge what has happened, and to apologise to those that have suffered."

Lebanon's own position on the war is troubling. Collective amnesia, compounded by the establishment of the Amnesty Law in 1991 – which granted immunity for most crimes committed during the conflict, including those against civilians – has served to bury truths.

"The history of the civil war must not remain unchallenged; it is never too late to find the truth and to acknowledge what has happened, and to apologise to those that have suffered" One of the many "shocking" discoveries was the total neglect of the topic, and subsequent psychological needs of the women, Mulvey said. When asked why the women had not talked about it before, they replied "no one ever asked."

The use of rape and sexual violence during Lebanon's war breached international human rights and humanitarian law, and according to Mulvey, the crimes uncovered by the report would constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity.

The report documented that sexual violence was perpetrated at detention camps, checkpoints, and on the streets during sieges and massacres. It did not seek to establish the exact number of people impacted, nor include names, specific dates or locations, to protect testimonies.

However, the report noted that the crimes took place in a systematic way. Countless interviewees recalled witnessing similar types of horrific abuse, such as the use of glass bottles for rape, and the killing of pregnant women and babies.

One 56-year-old woman interviewed in the report described her ordeal at a detention camp: "Officers forced me to take off my hijab. They electrocuted my nipples. Female officers would torture me by forcing me to kneel on rocks for hours. Male officers threatened to rape me."

Nohad, a Palestinian refugee, speaking at the launch of the report, recalled how her father and sister were shot one night when armed men came knocking on the door of their home. "We were sleeping and they [the armed men] asked us to stand against the wall. I was holding my sister; she was one year and three months old."

Nohad also said she had been sexually assaulted by armed men at a checkpoint. The trauma of the war remains deep inside her. "Until this day, I cry every day."

For decades, the lack of accountability, along with the shame attached to sexual assault within some communities in Lebanon silenced women and girls' ability to not only speak out but also to pursue charges.

Among 142 individuals who took part in a survey pursuant to the report, only 9% said they reported their experience of gender-based violence to authorities. While 53% said they had no trust in the Lebanese justice system.

"Officers forced me to take off my hijab. They electrocuted my nipples. Female officers would torture me by forcing me to kneel on rocks for hours. Male officers threatened to rape me" With Lebanon in a fragile economic and political state, the investigators acknowledged that any state-level response was likely to be in the distant future.

The main aim of the report's publication is to seek official recognition of the crimes while shifting the stigma away from the victims to the perpetrators.

"Until now, there hasn't been a full acknowledgement of the scale and scope, and nature of the sex and gender-based violence," Mulvey told The New Arab. "We found from nearly every part of the Lebanese community that we've interacted with that they have welcomed this."

Mulvey added that once Lebanon's new government is formed, the team would try to present the report to officials. LAW hopes that its publication will spur others to address the violence inflicted upon women and girls during the war.

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Commentary and Perspectives

Putin's new war crime - Starving world's poor (News Tribune)

By Trudy Rubin

June 13, 2022

Moscow is blockading (or destroying) Ukraine's port cities on the Sea of Azov and the Black Sea and preventing them from exporting grain. This has created a global

food crisis.

With a level of cynicism that makes Machiavelli look angelic, Vladimir Putin is trying to turn a made-in-Moscow food disaster into a weapon. He is blackmailing the West to drop sanctions -- or concede Russian domination over all Ukrainian ports, including Odesa -- in return for Russia's ending its blockade.

Neither NATO members, nor the United Nations, should permit Putin to profit from starving the world's poor who depend on Ukrainian grain exports. The White House needs to focus on how to break Putin's blockade -- now.

On June 6, at a U.N. Security Council meeting, the European Council's president Charles Michel blamed Russia for using the blockade as "a stealth missile against developing countries." This week, Russian missiles deliberately destroyed Ukraine's second-biggest grain storage facility in the city of Mykolaiv, while Russian bombs and mines are preventing farmers from planting and harvesting.

"This is driving up food prices, pushing people into poverty, and destabilizing entire regions," Michel said. The fallout affects both Africa and the Middle East, which are heavily dependent on Ukrainian wheat. Efforts by U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres to mediate the crisis with Moscow have gone nowhere. It is not possible for Ukraine to export its grain by rail or road; trains and trucks can carry only a small percentage of what the bulk ships can transport.

"Russia is solely responsible for this looming food crisis," Michel said. When Moscow's U.N. ambassador walked out of the Security Council meeting, Michel tweeted: "Maybe it's easier not to listen to the truth, dear Ambassador (Vasily Nebenzia)."

So what is Putin's game in trying to starve much of the world?

For starters, Putin is trying to put the blame for the food crisis on Ukraine and on Western sanctions. Nonsense.

If Russia hadn't launched its unprovoked attack on Ukraine and closed off Ukraine's coast with its warships, Kyiv's exports would be flowing. Moreover, Russia's grain exports -- also critical to world supplies -- are not sanctioned, and can still exit from Russian ports on the Baltic Sea and on the Pacific.

The Kremlin is also using the blockade to try to blackmail the West into accepting its control over Ukraine's Black Sea coast.

Russia has already captured two Ukrainian ports on the Sea of Azov -- Mariupol, which it razed to the ground, and Berdyansk. The Kremlin's key strategic goal now -- so far unsuccessful -- is to seize Ukraine's largest port, Odesa, on the Black Sea.

Playing savior (from the crisis he created), Putin has proposed that Ukraine hand over its grain to the Russians, who will export it from occupied Mariupol. (Russian forces have already stolen 500,000 tons of Ukrainian wheat from territories they occupy and shipped it out of Russian-controlled Crimea.) Obviously, it is a nonstarter to reward the thief for marketing stolen goods.

Putin has made an even more outrageous proposal. If Ukraine demines its coast -- removing a key defense of its shoreline -- the Russian naval forces will permit grain exports to leave Odesa.

In other words, Putin said the world should recognize Russian control of the Black Sea, which grossly violates international law and threatens the economic survival of Ukraine.

"While Russian warships in the Black Sea are loaded with missiles, it is very dangerous to open Ukrainian waters for them," I was told by Ukraine's U.N. ambassador, Sergiy Kyslytsya. If Ukrainian mines are disabled, he said, "Russia could use this as an excuse even to land" on Ukrainian shores.

Kyslytsya said Ukraine would only demine its coast (after Russia removes its own mines) if Kyiv were given security guarantees "from someone powerful" that would escort incoming and outgoing merchant vessels to protect them from Russian attack. That powerful country would also need to guarantee that Russian warships would not make use of the demined channel to attack Odesa once commercial ships left.

And -- this is very important -- the U.S. and European allies would have to finally deliver the anti-ship missiles that Odesa needs to hold off any Russian attack. What country is in position right now to provide such naval escorts? Only Turkey.

A member of NATO, Turkey has reasonably good ties with both Russia and Ukraine. It also has a long Black Sea coast and international legal control over who can enter the Black Sea in wartime (via the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles straits).

Will Turkey take on the huge role of shipping escort and security guarantor for Odesa, with or without other NATO members? Will Russia try to block, or misuse, Turkish intervention?

Time is of the essence. "July is a red line in the south of the Odesa region," I was told by phone by Oleksiy Goncharenko, a Ukrainian parliament member from Odesa. "The harvest starts in July, and by the end of the month, there will be a big problem for grain storage. The farmers have grain but they can't sell it." Left unstored, grain will rot.

Putin must not be allowed to succeed in his latest war crime. The time to break the Russian blockade of grain shipments from Odesa is now.

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Aiding and Abetting

Saudi Arabia: Biden Visit Risks Fostering Repression (Human Rights Watch)

June 9, 2022

US President Joe Biden's expected visit to Saudi Arabia to meet with Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman risks encouraging new abuses and further entrenching impunity, 13 human rights groups, including Human Rights Watch, said today in a joint letter to President Biden.

The Biden administration should secure clear and concrete commitments on human rights with Saudi authorities prior to the visit, including on the government's relentless crackdown on freedoms of peaceful assembly, association, and speech. Before any visit, Biden should meet with Saudi human rights defenders outside the country, secure the release of detained dissidents, and the removal of arbitrary travel bans on human rights activists and others, including US citizens.

"President Biden should recognize that any meeting with a foreign official provides them instant credibility on a global stage, whether intended or not," said Lama Fakih, Middle East director at Human Rights Watch. "Meeting Mohammed bin Salman without human rights commitments would vindicate Saudi leaders who believe there are no consequences for egregious rights violations."

Media reports have described Biden's expected visit to Saudi Arabia sometime in July 2022 as motivated by the US government's desire to address high oil prices and reduce inflation. However, energy experts have expressed skepticism that the recent statements to increase oil production from the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), of which Saudi Arabia is a key member, would significantly reduce energy prices.

Human Rights Watch, other rights groups, activists, and journalists have extensively documented the serious escalation of human rights violations in Saudi Arabia after 2017, when Mohammed bin Salman became crown prince and the de facto day-to-day ruler of the country. He took full control of the country's security forces, which have been responsible for mass arrests, confiscating property without due process, and torture.

As part of his role as Saudi defense minister since 2015, he has also overseen unlawful attacks, including apparent war crimes, in neighboring Yemen that have killed scores of civilians. In March, Saudi authorities executed 81 men, the largest mass execution in years, despite recent promises to curtail its use of the death penalty.

Under the Biden administration, a US intelligence report released in February 2021 said that Mohammed bin Salman had approved the 2018 murder of the Washington Post journalist Jamal Khashoggi. Despite this, the US government has not imposed sanctions against him, available under the US Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act, for his direct involvement in "gross violation[s] of human rights" and there has been no meaningful accountability for Khashoggi's murder.

Biden said during his presidential campaign that his administration would seek to make Saudi Arabia "the pariah that they are" and indicated that "they have to be held accountable." Biden's campaign comments were followed by Saudi releases of several high-profile dissidents, including the prominent rights defender Loujain al-Hathloul in early 2021. But she and others remain subject to arbitrary travel bans and risk being returned to prison if they speak out.

In their letter, the human rights groups said that the Biden administration should avoid emboldening Saudi repression by ensuring that Saudi authorities make concrete commitments on human rights before a US presidential visit, including the following:

Immediately releasing all peaceful dissidents and activists named in the Saudi Arabia 2021 Country Report on Human Rights Practices;

Lifting arbitrary travel bans on human rights defenders and others, including those imposed on US citizens;

Ending illegal surveillance and state hostage-taking, and releasing all those detained under those practices;

Ending male guardianship over women, and removing all discriminatory laws and policies, ensuring that women's rights activists are able to comment on and monitor reforms;

Imposing a moratorium on executions; and

Making a public commitment to maintain the ceasefire in Yemen.

Regardless of the status of the bilateral relationship, the Biden administration should make use of targeted sanctions, including the Global Magnitsky Act, to hold Saudi officials who are responsible for serious human rights violations accountable, and undertake a review of all US weapons sales to Saudi Arabia that have contributed to apparent war crimes, Human Rights Watch said.

"Biden has met with very few foreign human rights defenders since becoming president," Fakhri said. "He should invite Saudi human rights defenders to the White House before his visit to their country and learn first-hand about the abuses committed by Mohammed bin Salman and other Saudi authorities."

List of Signatories: ALQST for Human Rights Democracy for the Arab World Now (DAWN) Freedom House The Freedom Initiative Freedom Now Gulf Centre for Human Rights (GCHR) Human Rights First Human Rights Foundation Human Rights Watch The James W. Foley Legacy Foundation MENA Rights Group PEN America Project on Middle East Democracy

Biden's Praise of Bolsonaro is Affront to Brazil's Forest Defenders (Human Rights Watch)

By Maria Laura Canineu and Luciana Téllez Chávez

June 10, 2022

When US President Joe Biden met Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro for the first time ever yesterday at the Summit of the Americas, Biden made the embarrassing choice of praising Bolsonaro's management of the Amazon, which is nothing less than an affront to Brazilians fighting to protect the rainforest.

Since Bolsonaro took office in 2019, tens of thousands of hectares of rainforest have been destroyed in the Amazon, including inside numerous Indigenous territories that are facing overwhelming invasions by illegal loggers and wildcat miners.

The Bolsonaro administration has sabotaged Brazil's environmental law enforcement agencies while sidelining civil society from policymaking. The president has falsely accused civil society organizations of environmental crimes. His government has maintained a hostile stance towards Indigenous peoples' rights, promoting the adoption of several legislative initiatives that would arbitrarily curtail their rights to their territories, which are among the best protected forests in the Amazon. It has not demarcated a single Indigenous territory since it took office, even though it is obligated to do so under Brazil's Constitution.

These actions have taken a dramatic toll on multiple fronts, leading to the highest annual deforestation of the Brazilian Amazon rainforest in the past 15 years, according to the government's own figures. The environmental destruction is accompanied by a 138 percent increase in cases of invasion of Indigenous lands and the highest number of land conflicts since 1985, according to national organizations Indigenous Missionary Council (CIMI) and the Pastoral Land Commission (CPT).

In addition to being divorced from reality, Biden's statement is remarkably tone deaf. Last Sunday, Brazilian Indigenous affairs expert Bruno Pereira and British journalist Dom Phillips were reported missing while they investigated invasions of the Javari Valley Indigenous Territory in Amazonas state. The Brazilian government's search and rescue efforts have been underwhelming. Local Indigenous people fear the two may have been victims of organized crime, underscoring the growing power of these mafias in the region as environmental law enforcement has retreated under Bolsonaro.

Biden has shamefully squandered the opportunity to leverage his meeting with Bolsonaro to support the courageous defenders of the Amazon. These defenders are putting their lives on the line to protect the world's largest rainforest and a vital bulwark against climate change. Biden should correct this mistake and press Bolsonaro to reverse his damaging policies, urging Bolsonaro to get Brazil back on track in fighting deforestation and protecting forest defenders from violence.

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WORTH READING

The Road to Ongwen: Consolidating Contradictory Child Soldiering Narratives in International Criminal Law

Jonathan Kwik

June 15, 2022

The trial of Dominic Ongwen, an ex-child soldier turned perpetrator, has attracted debate concerning the position of international criminal law (ICL) on perpetrators of war crimes with a complex background of childhood victimization. From some perspectives, such persons are accountable adults responsible for unspeakable crimes, while from others, the lack of regard for their oppressive and corrupting upbringing in a violent armed group does a disservice to their victim status. This article explores the development of the narrative in ICL on three key subjects related to the Ongwen discussion: (1) the traditional prosecutorial focus on adults vis-à-vis children; (2) to what extent children's agency is recognized; and (3) the long-term effects of child soldiering. Several potential inconsistencies are identified with respect to each subject. While it is found that most inconsistencies have formed as a result of positive intentions, they could nevertheless negatively impact future ex-child soldier perpetrator cases if left unaddressed. The article subsequently discusses the ramifications of each diverging narrative and whether they can be consolidated. It is demonstrated how most contradictions are theoretically reconcilable but that ICL must make deliberate efforts to do so, in order to guarantee the adoption of a consistent and congruent narrative moving forward.

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