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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 warcrimesswatch@pilpg.org and type "subscribe" in the subject line.

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More than 230 killed in South Sudan gun violence (Daily Monitor)

June 4, 2021

More than 230 people have died as a result of gun violence in South Sudan in the past two weeks, raising new concerns for disarmament in the country.

The latest incident occurred on Tuesday where seven people were killed in Pigi County of Jonglei State, in a cattle rustling attack. The attackers escaped, according to authorities.

Since late April, there have been various incidents of violence with each recording deaths. Based on official figures, at least 234 people had been killed by Tuesday.

Attacks

On May 26, at least 150 people were killed following a 10-day bloody attack in the Pibor Administrative Area, according to local authorities there. The attackers torched more than 600 houses and displaced thousands of residents.

On the same day, bandits suspected to be from Sudan attacked passengers travelling to Aweil West County, Northern Bahr-El-Ghazal State, and killed two civilians. Among those killed was a local government administrator.

On May 27, two construction workers were killed along Juba-Terekeka Road by unknown gunmen. The workers were constructing the Juba-Bhar-El-Ghazel Highway.

On the same day, an attack said to be a revenge raid left three people killed and six others wounded in Yirol West of Lakes State. Another rustling incident that day also left 10 people dead in Gogrial East County of Warrap State.

Two days later, in Ulang County of Upper Nile State, at least 41 people died in a revenge attack. Local authorities there attributed the fighting to the lack of a local government security forces in the area. This prompted President Salva Kiir to appoint Makal and Ulang commissioners, days after the attack.

Last week, a rustling attack in Apuk County of Warrap State left 15 people dead and 17 others wounded. The weekend also witnessed another attack in Lainya County of Central Equatoria State where four people were killed, including a priest.

Disarmament

The incidents have led to questions on whether South Sudan needs to improve on its disarmament programme.

Last year in July, President Kiir launched a disarmament campaign meant to end the cycle of violence. Kiir authorised his national army, the South Sudan's People Defense Forces, to immediately embark on the exercise.

The campaign targeted armed civilians in Lakes, Terekeka, Warrap and Jonglei areas, among other areas.

But a survey released recently by a national civil society organisation working to reduce and prevent gun violence across the country said some communities denied President Kiir's conflict resolution initiative, saying the approach leaves some communities vulnerable to others.

According to the South Sudan Action Network on Small Arms, the communities say it is not sensible for some communities to be disarmed while others still possess arms.

Gen Daniel Justin, the Spokesperson of the South Sudan National Police Service, said success in the security mop-up would take time.

"Gun crime rate can never be placed at zero," he told The EastAfrican on Wednesday.

“We are doing our best to make sure we stop the crimes. We have been arresting suspects behind those crimes, and [they] will be arraigned so that they are held accountable,” he said.

Peace deal

South Sudan has struggled to implement a peace deal which helped create a unity government last February. It behind schedule in completing training and merging of forces from various rebel groups that formed the power-sharing government. Unifying the forces will create a national army that could effectively guard the country and lead locals to hand in arms.

“The continuous killings show lack of commitment to chapter two of the peace agreement, especially the delayed transformation of the security sector,” Edmund Yakani, a South Sudanese activist and director of NGO Community Empowerment and Progress Organisation, told The EastAfrican.

Last month, reports emerged of bored soldiers whose pass-out has been delayed, fleeing their training camps.

“All this inter-communal violence is politically motivated. This occurrence means the country need to do an extra job beyond the peace agreement in terms of building trust and confidence among communities,” Yakani argued.

Embargo

Last week, the UN Security Council approved a resolution extending an arms embargo and sanctions against South Sudan for one year. South Sudan's unity government opposed the decision, arguing it would jeopardise the progress of the 2018 revitalised peace agreement [ARCSS] which helped form the unity government last year.

South Sudan has many guns in circulation, most held by civilians.

According to a Gun Policy report, the estimated total number of guns (both legal and illicit) held by civilians in South Sudan was 1.2 million in 2017 and 3 million in 2013. The Defence Forces of South Sudan is reported to have 351,500 firearms.

Juba, which is barred from purchasing weapons from the mainstream international market, unless with express permission from the UN Security Council, argues that the arms embargo makes it difficult to equip its forces.

Two Aid Workers Killed in an Ambush in South Sudan (The Defense Post)

June 8, 2021

The UN on Tuesday condemned the murder of two aid workers in South Sudan and called on authorities to bring their killers to justice following a spate of similar attacks.

The victims were ambushed Monday evening as their convoy returned from delivering food relief in a village some 64 kilometers (40 miles) from Rumbek, in the conflict-prone Lakes State.

They were working for the Italian charity Doctors with Africa CUAMM.

“I call on the government to strengthen law enforcement, investigate these crimes, and to bring the perpetrators swiftly to justice,” said Matthew Hollingworth, acting head of the United Nations humanitarian agency OCHA.

“Four aid workers have been killed in the last month alone. I fear that continued attacks on humanitarians and the consequent suspension of activities will have a serious impact on humanitarian operations in South Sudan.”

Jacob Akuochpiir Achuoth, health minister for Lakes State, expressed “great sorrow” at the aid workers’ deaths and vowed to work closely with investigators to find those responsible.

South Sudan is considered one of the most dangerous countries for aid workers.

The UN, which maintains a peacekeeping mission in the troubled country, says 128 humanitarian workers — most of them South Sudanese — have been killed on the job since 2013.

Last month a South Sudanese doctor was murdered in the northern, oil-rich Unity state, barely a month after a nurse was killed in Eastern Equatoria, a south-eastern state.

In January, another aid worker was shot dead near Bentiu, also in Unity state.

The nationality of the latest victims has not been released.

South Sudan achieved independence from Sudan in 2011 but descended into civil war two years later, costing 380,000 lives before a ceasefire was reached in 2018.

The oil-rich country relies on foreign aid and despite ending the war is plagued by armed violence, with clashes between rival ethnic groups claiming more than 1,000 lives in the second half of 2020 alone.

ICC prosecutor urges Sudan to hand over Darfur war crime suspects (Al Jazeera)

June 10, 2021

Fatou Bensouda has given her last briefing as chief prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC) to the UN Security Council on Wednesday, lamenting that the tribunal has not yet brought justice to victims of atrocities in Sudan's western Darfur region. But, she said, a new era in Sudan and the transfer of the first Darfur suspect to the court should give them hope.

Bensouda said Darfur victims she spoke to last week had one message: Sudan's transitional government should hand over three suspects sought by the court who are in its custody – former President Omar al-Bashir, who is accused of genocide; former defence minister Abdel Raheem Hussein, and former interior minister and governor Ahmad Harun.

Bensouda, whose mandate ends June 15, said she has focused on Darfur since crimes being committed there were referred to the the court by the Security Council in 2005, when she was deputy prosecutor. But her recent visit to Sudan and Darfur was a first – a memorable trip that she said was “a strong reminder that we should focus on achieving justice for the victims and finding lasting peace for the people of Darfur.”

Bensouda cautioned, however, that “the road ahead remains long and fraught with dangers,” saying that Sudan's transition following al-Bashir's overthrow in April 2019 after mass protests demanding civilian rule “is still in its infancy”.

Still, she said, after years of hostility and no cooperation, “the ICC and the government of Sudan have turned a new page in their relationship” and have been engaging in “constructive dialogue” and a “good spirit of cooperation.”

The vast Darfur region was gripped by bloodshed in 2003 when rebels from the territory's ethnic central and sub-Saharan African community launched an armed rebellion accusing the Arab-dominated government in Khartoum of discrimination and neglect.

The government, under al-Bashir, responded with a scorched-earth assault of aerial bombings and unleashed local nomadic Arab militias known as the Popular Defence Forces on the population, resulting in countless reports of mass killings and rapes. Up to 300,000 people were killed and 2.7 million were driven from their homes.

Legal obligation

Bensouda said she urged the handover of al-Bashir and the others at meetings with Sudanese government officials, including the head of the Sovereignty Council, General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, and Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok.

“Sudan is under a legal obligation to surrender the suspects” under the Security Council resolution that referred Darfur to the court, she said.

Harun, who faces 20 counts of crimes against humanity and 22 counts of war crimes, remains at large. His presence at the Hague-based court is required for the trial to begin.

Bensouda said Harun's transfer is urgent so he can be tried with Sudanese militia leader Ali Kushayb, who voluntarily surrendered a year ago to the court in The Hague, Netherlands. She appealed to the Security Council “to prevail upon Sudan to immediately honour Mr Harun's wish and facilitate his transfer to the ICC without delay.”

Adam Day, programme director at United Nations University's Center for Policy Research who was a political officer with the UN-African Union peacekeeping force in Darfur in 2008, said the question now is: “What incentives can the international community offer the new Sudanese government to turn over the suspects to the ICC? ... Will major international donors insist that their support be conditioned on the handover of al-Bashir” and the others?

“As a cash-strapped government in desperate need of support, that could tip the balance towards handover,” he told The Associated Press.

Eric Reeves, a retired Smith College professor who has worked on Sudan for 22 years and is a trustee of the Darfur Bar Association, said Bensouda has spent her entire time trying to get the Darfur cases prosecuted “and has not succeeded”.

“She knows as well as anyone if the court can’t bring convictions in the case of Darfur then the court has probably seen its relevance either diminished entirely or diminished to the point where it just can’t function,” he said. “If it fails it will be a major failure for international justice.”

The ICC was officially established on July 1, 2002, to hold accountable perpetrators of the world’s most serious crimes – genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity – in cases where adequate national judicial systems are not available.

It has 123 member nations, and Bensouda’s staff is currently investigating alleged crimes in 13 other places from Democratic Republic of Congo, Central African Republic and Libya to Bangladesh-Myanmar, Afghanistan and the occupied Palestinian territories. Darfur was the first referral to the court by the Security Council.

‘Without fear or favour’

Nine Security Council members that are parties to the court issued a statement after Wednesday’s meeting, calling for intensified efforts to surrender all suspects, commending Sudanese authorities and the UN for facilitating Bensouda’s visit, and expressing gratitude to the prosecutor for her persistence in fighting impunity and pursuing international justice “without fear or favour”.

Day from the United Nations University recalled that when Bensouda became prosecutor in 2011, the court faced criticism for being overly focused on African conflicts as well as the risk that some African countries might withdraw from the court.

“One of Bensouda’s biggest accomplishments was in fact saving the ICC from that negative trajectory, restoring the legitimacy of the international community,” he said.

“I think Bensouda has successfully kept Darfur on the Security Council’s agenda, and has made a consistent and well-reasoned point that peace in Darfur cannot be achieved without a meaningful reckoning with past human rights abuses,” Day said.

HRW’s Dicker referred to sanctions against Bensouda and another court official by US President Donald Trump in 2020 over the court’s investigations into alleged war crimes by the US in Afghanistan and by US ally Israel in the Palestinian territories. They were lifted by the Biden administration on April 2.

“Fatou Bensouda brought a staunch commitment to defending the independence of her office in the face of unprecedented pressure that was aimed at exacting a high personal cost,” Dicker said. “Yet, she did not flinch. This prosecutorial legacy is fundamental to the court’s legitimacy.”

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Democratic Republic of the Congo

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Italy investigates UN officer over death of diplomat in DR Congo (The Guardian) By Lorenzo Tondo

June 9, 2021

Italian prosecutors have placed a UN officer under investigation in relation to the murder of Italy’s ambassador to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, who was killed in February along with two other people in an attack in the restive east of the central African country.

Magistrates in Rome are investigating the role of a UN World Food Programme (WFP) officer in the DRC, whose name has not been disclosed, who is accused of allegedly omitting to take all the necessary security to ensure against a potential attack.

Prosecutors in Rome recently questioned five WFP officials about the attack, in which the Italian ambassador, Luca Attanasio, the Italian soldier Vittorio Iacovacci and a driver lost their lives after a gunfight between a group of assailants and Congolese park rangers broke out. The ambush took place at about 10.30am local time (0830 GMT), during an attempted kidnapping near the town of Kanyamahoro, about 10 miles north of the regional capital, Goma.

At the end of the questioning, one of them, an officer responsible for the security of the expedition, was placed under investigation.

According to the prosecutors, the company official did not take all necessary measures to ensure the protection of the convoy.

A few days after the attack, Italy's foreign ministry announced that a team from the carabinieri's special operations group had been sent to the DRC to gather evidence for the Rome prosecutors' investigation into the case.

In an interview with *Corriere della Sera*, Attanasio's widow, Zakia Seddiki, raised doubts about the security of the convoy. Attanasio had been invited that day by WFP to visit a humanitarian project at a nearby school.

"They did not do what they should have when crossing a high-risk area," Seddiki told *Corriere*.

Dozens of armed groups operate in and around Virunga, which lies along the DRC's borders with Rwanda and Uganda. Park rangers have been repeatedly attacked, as local security forces are underresourced, poorly trained and corrupt.

Attanasio joined the Italian diplomatic service in 2003 and had previously served in Switzerland, Morocco and Nigeria. He is the second European ambassador to have been killed while serving in the DRC.

10 killed, hospital torched in DR Congo fighting

June 9, 2021

Ten civilians were killed and a hospital burned down in troubled eastern DR Congo during fighting between government forces and an armed group, aid groups and local officials said on Tuesday.

The Kivu Security Tracker (KST) monitor said on Twitter that it had updated its death toll from the Monday attack on Boga village in Ituri province to 10 "after the discovery of five additional bodies".

"The hospital was set on fire and a tomb was desecrated in the cathedral," the group added, saying that two of the attackers were killed in fighting with Congolese armed forces and UN peacekeepers.

Doctors Without Borders (MSF) had earlier said that the general hospital it supports in Boga in Ituri province was "deliberately targeted in a brutal attack" on Monday. The hospital was "the last structure in the area which provided treatment to people," it said in a statement.

The pharmacy and medical store were looted, the intensive care unit burned down and other buildings were pillaged, it said.

MSF said it knew "little" about the attackers or why they targeted the hospital.

But the army blamed a notorious militia, the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), which on May 31 slaughtered 57 people in the area.

Nine children who were being treated in the paediatric service and two adult patients are awaiting transfer to another hospital, MSF said.

Kabimba Zitono, head of the Rubingo administrative area, said at least four civilians were killed, and that the church in Boga as well as the hospital had been burned.

The unidentified attackers are believed to have holed up in a neighbouring village, he told AFP.

The army said the ADF, which has been blamed for massacring hundreds of people this year, set the hospital ablaze while retreating from government troops.

A historically Ugandan Islamist group that the United States links with the so-called Islamic State, the ADF is the deadliest of scores of armed militias that roam the mineral-rich eastern Democratic Republic of Congo.

MSF said the attack on the hospital "showed blatant disregard for the neutrality of hospitals and medical spaces" and urged all combatants to respect medical infrastructure and personnel. DR Congo President Felix Tshisekedi on May 6 proclaimed a 30-day "state of siege" in Ituri and neighbouring North Kivu province to help stem the violence.

Governors and other senior officials have been replaced by army officers or police.

The measure was renewed for another 30 days by the National Assembly on Thursday.

U.N. finds no evidence of Islamic State control over Congo militia (Reuters)

June 16, 2021

United Nations experts said on Wednesday they had been unable to find evidence of direct support by Islamic State for an Islamist militia in eastern Congo, which was blacklisted in March by Washington as a terrorist group.

Experts on Central Africa have been debating whether the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), blamed for increasing violence over the past two years in eastern Congo, has genuine links with the Islamic State group based in the Middle East, sometimes known as ISIS or ISIL.

The ADF has publicly aligned itself with Islamic State, which in turn has claimed responsibility for some of its attacks. The United States referred to the ADF as “ISIS-DRC” when it added it to its terrorism blacklist.

In its latest report, the U.N. Group of Experts on the Congo said the ADF and Islamic State both benefited from making public statements that link them with each other. Such statements were “complementing and amplifying ADF local propaganda, and suggesting increased global reach for ISIL,” the report said.

But it added: “The Group did not however find conclusive evidence of ISIL command and control over ADF operations, nor of ISIL direct support to ADF, either financial, human or material.”

It found the ADF was getting better at making bombs using expertise from fighters recruited from East Africa, but that these bombs were used for “tactical, offensive, defensive and harassment purposes rather than as a terrorist tool”.

The ADF has committed a spate of brutal reprisal attacks on civilians since the army began operations against it in late 2019. The group killed around 850 people last year in Congo’s restive east, according to U.N. figures, and violence has persisted this year with almost weekly attacks.

The militia has strengthened its reach through recruitment, superior command over terrain and planting bombs that outstripped the capabilities of the Congolese army, the experts said.

They advised the Congolese government to improve the army’s intelligence and technical capabilities, while increasing efforts to negotiate with the group to disengage and disarm.

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WEST AFRICA

Côte d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast)

**Official Website of the International Criminal Court
ICC Public Documents - Situation in the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire**

Terrorism and violence in Côte d'Ivoire spark fears of home-grown extremism (Daily Maverick) By

William Assanvo

June 15, 2021

Several attacks in Côte d'Ivoire along the border with Burkina Faso claimed the lives of six Ivorian soldiers in the past three months. Five others were injured. These incidents have heightened fears of violent extremism spreading in the country.

Ivorian authorities attribute the assaults to a group linked to Katiba Macina, affiliated with the Jamâ'ah Nusrah al-Islâm wal-Muslimîn (Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims).

On the night of 7 June, armed fighters attacked the town of Tougbo (see map). A month earlier, Bolé was stormed, with attackers accusing residents of being informants for the Ivorian security forces. In March, armed forces in Kafolo and a gendarmerie post in Kolobougou were targeted.

On 1 April, a vehicle struck an improvised explosive device on the road between Nassian and Kafolo. This is the first time such an incident has been reported in the country. On 12 April, a liaison vehicle of the national gendarmerie was similarly attacked on the same road.

These incidents aren't exhaustive and probably reflect the worst manifestations of the threat. And although the number of attacks to date is relatively small, it shows extremist groups' intention and ability to target Côte d'Ivoire.

The country needs to prepare for sporadic attacks on its defence and security forces and reprisals against civilians suspected of collaborating with them. Communities who resist extremist groups' efforts to embed among the locals will likely also be targeted.

The threat of violent extremism to Côte d'Ivoire is perceived mainly as external. Attacks are believed to be perpetrated by individuals from Burkina Faso, who take advantage of the border's porosity. However, several incidents have occurred far from the border, suggesting that individuals linked to extremist groups are present in Ivorian territory.

Although people from neighbouring countries are suspected of providing the groups with information, logistics and financial resources, they are well integrated into the socio-economic fabric of Ivorian communities.

The government of Côte d'Ivoire should avoid the mistake made by other countries in the region of seeing the threat only as an external problem. Violent extremism is usually a result of both external and domestic dynamics. Extremists exploit vulnerabilities such as local conflicts, governance deficits, security gaps and illicit activities to become integrated into communities, recruit members and raise funds.

Northern Côte d'Ivoire is not exempt from such weaknesses. Extremists take advantage of recurring conflicts between herders and farmers over access to grazing land and water, and tensions over crop destruction by livestock. The resentment felt by ex-fighters who believe they never benefited from reintegration programmes is also exploited.

Extremists take advantage of the difficult conditions under which border communities live. They recruit with promises of financial and material reward, and promote illegal hunting or gold mining with the offer of protection services in return for support.

To stop extremists from deepening their roots in Côte d'Ivoire, cohesion within and between communities needs to be strengthened. Conflict resolution mechanisms should be reinforced, whether through local chiefs, the gendarmerie or the justice system. And relations between communities and government officials must improve.

Attacks shouldn't be the sole measure of the violent extremist threat. Côte d'Ivoire could, for example, become a supply source for extremists — in terms of financing, operations and members. Strategies would then be needed that disrupt the group's supply chain and deprive them of these resources.

Already illegal artisanal gold mining, cattle rustling, smuggling stolen motorcycles and rural banditry (highway robbery) in the country's north deserve special government attention. Success here would stifle extremist groups' ability to further their aims.

Ivorian authorities acknowledge the terror threat, and several measures have been taken over the past six years, particularly from a security perspective. More soldiers were deployed in the north after the first attack recorded in Kafolo in June 2020. In April, 'cross-border terrorism' was one of the priorities discussed as part of the government's 2021 work plan. It remains to be seen how this will translate in practice.

Côte d'Ivoire's ability to contain the spread of violent extremism will depend on Burkina Faso and Mali's actions in their respective border areas. Better cooperation on security and border management with these countries and with Ghana will be instrumental in containing the threat.

Ivorian authorities also need to earn the trust and respect of their border communities, many of whom feel neglected. People in these borderlands endure poor living conditions and lack health and education services, economic opportunities and security. Improving living conditions will reaffirm the state's relevance and authority.

Locals must also be involved in finding ways to contain the threat of violent extremism. The government needs to appreciate the risk communities face of being caught between the actions of security forces on the one hand and extremists on the other.

It is not inevitable that Côte d'Ivoire will follow the same trajectory as other countries in the region such as Burkina Faso, but the risk shouldn't be underestimated.

Former President of Côte d'Ivoire returns home 10 years after his arrest (Illinois News Live) By Robby Mcpartlin

June 16, 2021

Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire (AP) — Koudou Gbagbo's refusal to accept the defeat of Côte d'Ivoire in the 2010 presidential election caused months of violence, killing at least 3,000 people and putting the country at risk of civil war. I was on the verge of death.

More than a decade after being arrested in an underground bunker in the presidential residence, many were spent waiting in The Hague for crimes against humanity.

The scheduled return to Côte d'Ivoire on Thursday, after acquittal was upheld on all charges, has energized his supporters, who long felt his indictment was a political motive. Gbagbo also appears to have been cautiously welcomed by his political rival Asane Uataru, who ultimately won the election and has been president since then.

Some observers say Gbagbo's victorious return plan will further test the country's political stability less than a year after his incumbent controversy over his term.

"For certain communities of victims, Laurent Gbagbo is like a wolf who has been expelled from a shepherd and is now returning," said CVCI, chairman of a political violence victim advocacy group. Issiaka Diaby says.

"Victims of Côte d'Ivoire are thirsty for justice, thirst for truth, thirst for repentance, and thirst for compensation through the actions of the criminal justice system," he said. "This is an element that Côte d'Ivoire has always lacked to achieve a settlement."

Gbagbo was arrested in 2011 and sent to The Hague six months later to be tried for war crimes in the International Criminal Court. In 2019, the judge said the prosecutor failed to make their claim, even before the defense counsel presented their side.

The former president was released from detention two years ago, but lives in Belgium until the result of an appeal by an ICC prosecutor. He will take a commercial flight from Brussels and arrive at Felix Ufeloigno International Airport in Abidjan on Thursday afternoon.

It is likely that he will be greeted by his wife Simone, who has not left Côte d'Ivoire for the past decade, as she still has her ICC arrest warrant due to the post-election conflict.

Gbagbo's supporters are already preparing to welcome the celebration with a sign on a part of Abidjan with a photo of the former president. On weekends, a delightful celebration is held at her hometown mom, and her mother's grave is scheduled to be visited.

Wataru, the current president, seems to be striving for a smooth return of his former rivals. A week after Gbagbo's acquittal was upheld, Mr Wataru said the state would cover the travel expenses of the former president and his family.

However, it remains unclear what will happen to other pending criminal charges against the former president.

Gbagbo and his three former ministers were sentenced to 20 years in prison for breaking into the Abidjan branch of the Central Bank of West African States to obtain cash during the post-election crisis in January 2011. It was.

Ousmane Zina, a political scientist at the University of Bouake, said the Côte d'Ivoire authorities are unlikely to imprison the former president.

"Ultimately, I don't think the Côte d'Ivoire authorities will make this mistake, which will seriously hurt the settlement process and the stability of the country," he said.

However, Wataru is likely to condition Gbagbo's return to avoid a relapse of past tensions, he added.

"Before giving an amnesty or amnesty, he will want to get a guarantee that the country will remain peaceful," Gina said.

Gbagbo officially won nearly 46% of the votes in 2010, maintaining a strong foundation of supporters claiming to have been left out of the reconciliation process for years since his expulsion. They claim that most of the charges related to post-election violence targeted Gbagbo's allies, but those loyal to Uataru faced trial.

Gbagbo's return also comes seven months after Wataru wins the controversial third term after claiming that the term limit does not apply to him. Gbagbo has been disqualified from the election and his future political ambitions remain uncertain.

Yao Edmond Kouashi, a political researcher at the University of Alasane Uataru in Bouake, said Côte d'Ivoire is in the process of reconciliation.

“But the opposition camp must understand that with Mr. Gbagbo’s arrival, it makes more sense for them to live together,” he said.

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Lake Chad Region – Chad, Nigeria, Niger, and Cameroon

Lake Chad Basin: Humanitarian Snapshot (as of 31 May 2021) (Relief Web)

June 11, 2021

Across the Lake Chad Basin, 10.2 million people need humanitarian assistance. After 12 years of violence, basic social services and already limited natural resources are severely strained. 5.1 million people are struggling with hunger – the worst increase for the first time in four years – and 4,000 children are severely malnourished. Violence continues to spread, and access constraints are posing additional challenges to deliver assistance. Since April, three consecutive attacks on Damasak town, also directly targeting the humanitarian community, have resulted in an unprecedented level of destruction, and put thousands of families in dire need. To adequately address the most acute humanitarian needs, response plans in the region require US\$2.5 billion. Yet, halfway through the year, only 13 per cent of the funds have been received.

Ghana intends to use her UN Security Membership to tackle terrorism threats (Modern Ghana)

June 6, 2021

The Minister of Foreign Affairs and Regional Integration, Shirley Ayorkor Botchwey, has disclosed that Ghana intends to use her membership at the United Nations (UN) Security Council to among other things deal with terrorism in West Africa.

She made this known in an address to an ECOWAS group in New York, US.

According to her, “Given that 70% of the Security Council’s agenda is centered on Africa, Ghana intends to use her membership of the Council to advocate for and build support for effective responses that enable us to deal with terrorism, protracted conflicts, cyber threats, maritime piracy, food insecurity as well as climate change.”

She added that “Ghana also intends to pursue a number of priorities including conflict prevention, post-conflict reconstruction and strengthening of governance, leveraging on our previous and current experience as Chair of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) as well as our active membership of the African Union (AU).”

The minister observed that addressing security threats in the West African sub-region was one of the key challenges confronting ECOWAS in raising the living standards of all its peoples.

“This is why our meeting this afternoon is so important.

A few days from now, member States of our United Nations will be casting a crucial ballot for the election of non-permanent members to the Security Council. As you are aware, Ghana is the official, uncontested candidate of ECOWAS and one of the two endorsed candidates of the African Union for the term 2022-2023.”

“Ghana is committed to cooperating with all Member States and the entire UN body in “Enhancing Global Peace and Security for Sustainable and Inclusive Development”, which is the theme for our tenure on the Council when elected. The security concerns of our region will therefore be very much at the centre of our focus. This will include focusing attention on the situation in the Sahel and Lake Chad Basin Area. We need to mobilize the international community, through the leadership of the Council, to reverse the deteriorating security situation in that part of our continent and foster the conditions for economic progress.”

“The evidence shows that global challenges, including insecurity, can be better managed when placed within their specific regional contexts. In this regard, we will encourage the further deepening of cooperation between the UN and continental and

regional organisations to help achieve effective results. We support the ongoing partnerships between the UN and other regional arrangements such as the AU and ECOWAS in tackling security challenges. We will call for more of such complementarity,” she said.

“The recent upsurge in maritime piracy in the West Africa region as well as the situation in Mali and Chad are of immediate concern and goes to show that more concerted effort is required to stabilise governance systems in our countries.”

“As co-chair of the Eminent Group of Advocates for UN SDGs, the President of Ghana, H.E Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo intends to use Ghana's tenure on the Security Council to re-emphasize the urgency in accelerating progress towards the attainment of the SDGs. Consequently, the continuous support for initiatives that empower women and youth in particular, and the creation of the right opportunities for their meaningful participation in development will help in the realization of Resolution 1325 on Women Peace and Security (WPS) as well as Resolution...on Youth, Peace and Security.”

“Furthermore, if elected to the Council, we are committed to highlighting the effects of climate change on the economic, human and security situation in many parts of the continent, including the Sahel and Lake Chad.”

U.S. laments govt's inaction on religious extremism, considers special envoy (Guardian)

June 6, 2021

The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) has warned of a genocide in the country if the Federal Government fails to arrest the growing extremism, particularly in the North.

Speaking yesterday during a virtual hearing on the escalation of violence by non-state actors in Nigeria and its potential to exacerbate deteriorating religious freedom conditions, USCIRF said it will push for a special envoy to be sent to engage the current administration on the ongoing killings in the North East and the Lake Chad region.

The body noted that insecurity was spreading in the country, with violent attacks against civilians and security forces occurring daily.

“Among the complex web of armed actors and motivations, extremists in various parts of the country target individuals and communities based on their religious identity. Christian and Muslim communities fear for their lives, risking death, mutilation and abduction when they worship in public and celebrate significant religious ceremonies.

“Amidst this shocking scale of violence, government's inaction is pervasive. Impunity for extremists, who target religious communities and houses of worship, is systemic across much of the country. The Federal Government's approach has failed to curb the violence and protect its citizens' rights to freedom of religion or belief. As a body, we will encourage the U.S. government to support Nigeria in addressing impunity for extremist violence,” Anurima Bhargava, USCIRF chair, stated yesterday.

Panelists at the virtual hearing included U.S. ex-Representative member, Frank Wolf; Vice President, Global Affairs and Partnerships, Search for Common Ground, Mike Jobbins; founder, Choice for Peace, Gender, and Development, Hafsat Maina Muhammed; Catholic Priest; Head of Department, Religious Studies, Federal University, Wukari, Taraba State, Anthony Bature; and analyst in African Affairs, Congressional Research Service, Tomás Husted.

The panelists said they were disturbed that the rest of the world was closing its eyes to the worsening insecurity in Nigeria.

Wolf said: “Nigeria is failing and there is little attention by the West to the crisis. History is repeating itself as it happened in Rwanda. If what is happening in Nigeria is happening in the West, the world would have been enraged but there is silence and inaction, which could prove fatal to the West Africa region and rest of the world.”

In April, USCIRF in its report recommended that the U.S. Department of State designate Nigeria as a Country of Particular Concern (CPC) for its severe violations of religious freedom. USCIRF made the same recommendation in last year's report, which State did follow in a December 2, 2020 announcement that condemned Nigeria for “having engaged in or tolerated particularly severe violations of religious freedom.”

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Liberia

Ex-warlord “General Butt Naked” Wants Sen. Prince Johnson, Others, Tell Their Stories at War Crimes Court (Front Page Africa) By Obediah Johnson

June 3, 2021

A former notorious Liberian rebel general turned Evangelist Joshua Milton Blahyi, has called on former warlords, including Nimba County Senator Prince Y. Johnson to face a war crimes court in Liberia to account for their individual roles played and the actions of their respective troops which committed atrocities and war crimes during the Liberian civil conflicts.

Evangelist Blahyi who was notoriously known as “General Butt Naked” was a fierce and fearless warlord during the civil unrest in Liberia which claimed the lives of an estimated 250,000 Liberians. He is Krahn by tribe.

According to him, germane testimonies must be provided by key actors of the Liberian civil conflict at a war crimes tribunal in Liberia to serve as deterrence to those wanting to follow similar path and prevent what transpired in the past.

Speaking when he appeared as guest on Spoon Talk on Tuesday, June 1, Evangelist Blahyi emphasized that the act of telling the truth at the court will accord people the opportunity to think and discourage people from killing their fellow compatriots for no reasons.

He further maintained that his consistent habit of embracing the establishment of the war crimes court in Liberia is intended to stop or limit reoccurrence of actions meted against citizens and others during the brutal 14-years civil conflict in Liberia.

He noted that the growing wave of lawlessness in Liberia will continue to increase if people, including perpetrators of war crimes are not held accountable for their actions.

“I live on perpetual regrets especially with the type of kids the Lord had blessed me with. They are very intelligent and every time-I have done everything to keep them very humble because, I personally feel that I don’t deserve the happiness of kids or being a father. I live in regrets almost every time not just because of the people who I made childless, but children who I deprived of their parents”.

Evangelist Blahyi is married and his union is blessed with four children.

He noted that jungle justice will be on the increase in post conflict Liberia these war perpetrators continue to remain unremorseful of their actions.

“The act of telling the truth gives people the opportunity to think. When I am coming and talking this truth, I am hoping that people will hear these truths to create an environment for the future to stop or limit reoccurrence of my actions. If all of the fighters or perpetrators who bear greater responsibilities would have done this, the TRC would have had the chance to craft a policy to give it to other thinkers to advance that policy to stop reoccurrence”.

“This is only opportunity that this nation can have to fight the culture of impunity. That’s why it hurts me when politicians are politicizing this great opportunity that this country has”.

He observed that most perpetrators of war crimes in Liberia did not use the opportunity accorded them by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) process in Liberia to tell the truth of their involvement in the Liberian civil conflict.

Evangelist Blahyi maintained that though he regrets his action, he remains motivated to providing the necessary opportunities for young Liberians who do not have the opportunity as a result of the loss of their parents or guardians during the civil wars, noting that, “I could be responsible for their conditions directly or indirectly”.

Evangelist Blahyi has been on record for consistently calling for the establishment of a war crimes court in Liberia.

On numerous occasions, he has encouraged former warlords including Nimba County Senator Prince Johnson and Grand Gedeh County Representative George Boley of the former notorious Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia (INPFL) and Liberia Peace Council (LPC) to “embrace” the establishment of the court to give account of their actions.

“I support the establishment of a war crimes court in Liberia 100%. The same way I went to the TRC and appeal to be one of the first perpetrators-is the same way I am going to appear and voluntarily turn myself over to the war crimes court”.

When quizzed whether Senator Johnson and others who have been unremorseful should face the war crimes court, Evangelist Blahyi stated: “I think everyone of us should face the war crimes court especially key players who commanded troops”.

Evangelist Blahyi described himself as a war criminal that remains willing and committed to provide intelligence to safeguard Liberia’s future by explaining what he did about 20 years ago when he was a rebel general.

He indicated that though he remains steadfast and willing to appear before the court, he will not convict or crucify anyone who is not convicted of their actions or support towards the Liberian civil conflict.

He added that there has been series of opportunities accorded him to engage into civil wars, including the recent war which forced the departure of former Liberian President Charles Ghankay Taylor, but he cannot return to fighting or engaging into violence.

Evangelist Blahyi wondered while politicians who previously endorsed the establishment of the war crimes court in Liberia have switched pendulum and are currently playing a lukewarm attitude towards ensuring the actualization of the court in the country.

Conviction

“I got convicted on the frontline and since then I have to follow the Lord Jesus Christ. I thought it was an unusual favor and I always felt that I did not deserve the amount of grace towards me. I learn from scripture that I will enjoy your personal freedom as I speak the truth and exercise pure remorse and so 1999 a friend of mine took me to Ghana and I started pursuing Liberians asking for forgiveness. And so we have a Ministry called the End Time Train Evangelistic Ministry where we decided reaching Liberians in the diaspora”.

He noted that his decision taken at the time to meet with Liberians in the diaspora was not only to ask for forgiveness, but to also speak and tell them the truth. He emphasized that the move was also intended to discourage others from engaging into atrocities and other crimes.

Evangelist Blahyi pointed out that though some of his kinsmen were not happy about his decision on grounds that he was betraying them by exposing the “powers” he and them operated with at the time, he mustered the courage to continue the campaign.

TRC

The establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in Liberia was enacted in May 2005.

The Commission worked throughout the first mandate of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf after her election as President of Liberia in November 2005.

The Liberian TRC came to a conclusion in 2010, filing a final report and recommending relevant actions by national authorities to ensure responsibility and reparations.

Dressed in white suit, ex-General “Butt Naked” took responsibility for about 20,000 citizens who lost their lives during the Liberian civil conflict at a TRC hearing held on January 15, 2008.

“If I were to calculate; if you’re talking about April 6th or throughout the war or every evil I have done-it should not be less than 20, 000. I want to say sorry to this nation. I want to thank the TRC for giving me the opportunity to openly come and say I am sorry” he responded to an inquiry from one of the commissioners.

Evangelist Blahyi told Spoon Talk that his decision taken to testify at the TRC, despite numerous condemnations from his kinsmen was intended to speak the truth and help ensure that what happened during the warring days in Liberia do not reoccur.

“I went to the TRC because the TRC was like a healing process. I went to the TRC with the spirit of seeking my personal freedom and I was going to have the chance of talking to many Liberians. When I went to the TRC, I was not afraid of going to jail because, if I went to jail, the jail will just be a limited space to stay but, my freedom matter”.

He maintained that he freed his conscience by appearing before the TRC to tell his story to Liberians and others.

He further bears the responsibility for the deaths caused by others as a result of his decision to give arms to minors during the civil war.

“There is no way that people will keep track of everyone they killed on the frontline. I requested for an open air trial at the TRC. And a question of how many people I think I was responsible for was asked. And I said I was responsible for the deaths of not less than 20,000 people. And the reason the answer was given is because I could even say I am responsible for the 250,000 people that died”.

“The reason is-If I give an innocent child arm, allow the child at the age of nine or ten to first-every person that child killed, I am responsible for that. But beside that, I came to Monrovia as a priest. I was a spiritual priest and I came to help my tribe”.

Evangelist Blahyi recalled that as a priest, he was engaged into preparing “bulletproofs” for children who were fighting on the frontline.

He stated that though he did not keep track of those he killed on the frontline, he personally killed “many people” and he takes full responsibility for his action. He noted that though he was one of those recommended for amnesty by the TRC, he feels strongly obligated to Liberia and its citizens, and as such, he has returned to the country from exile to provide assistance to needy Liberians through his project.

Journey Against Violence (JAV)

The former notorious rebel general is fighting the war against drugs in Liberia through his Journey Against Violence (JAV) project under his ministry. The specific mission of JAV is to help decrease drug trafficking and abuse among the youths and provide them with drug treatment, housing and job training, among others.

Evangelist Blahyi pointed out that the project is intended to empower ex-combatants who are suffering from trauma, rejection, among others as a result of their involvement in the senseless Liberian civil wars.

He claimed that these ex-combatants have been neglected by both their parents and the society in general.

“I thought we should give back to the society by helping those kids. That’s how I started the project. We have to go by taking these young children from the streets; giving them skills; introducing them to Jesus; encouraging them to feed themselves. We reconnect with their families and the communities telling them sorry and the wrong they have done”.

About “Butt Naked”

Joshua Milton Blahyi alias General Butt Naked, is a father of four children and the former commander of forces under the wider control of Liberian warlord Roosevelt Johnson.

He was known for his violence and atrocities during the First Liberian Civil War in the early 1990s. Once described as “the most evil man in the world”, Blahyi claimed to have also carried out regular human sacrifice and cannibalism of children.

He led his troops naked except for shoes and a gun and believed that his nakedness was a source of protection from bullets.

During the First Liberian Civil War he led a mercenary unit, many of whom were child soldiers, which was known as the Butt Naked Brigade.

They were funded by Roosevelt Johnson and fought alongside the ULIMO militia against militias led by Charles Taylor and Prince Yormie Johnson. ULIMO was loyal to Samuel Doe, who was captured and executed—personally—by Prince Johnson. Taylor eventually took control of the country. Blahyi’s rampage ended in 1996, when the civil war in Liberia was coming to an end.

He stated that his conversion was bolstered by a church in Liberia where Bishop Kun Kun is a pastor.

He is now the President of the End Time Train Evangelistic Ministries Inc., with headquarters in Liberia.

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EAST AFRICA

Uganda

**Official Website of the International Criminal Court
ICC Public Documents - Situation in Uganda**

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Kenya

**Official Website of the International Criminal Court
ICC Public Documents - Situation in the Republic of Kenya**

ICC: New chief prosecutor divides opinions in Africa (DW Akademie) By Chrispin Mwakideu
June 15, 2021

Karim Khan, the new chief prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, is a controversial figure. Some in Africa loathe him for defending war criminals. Others view him as a hero for representing oppressed victims.

Kenyans remember Khan for representing former Cabinet Secretary Francis Muthaura and current Deputy President William Ruto in 2011 at the International Criminal Court. Luis Moreno Ocampo, then the ICC's chief prosecutor had built a case charging that Ruto committed crimes against humanity during Kenya's 2007-2008 postelection violence.

Khan, 51, successfully proved to the ICC judges that the evidence against Ruto was too weak and therefore inadmissible. On April 5, 2016, Ruto was declared innocent and the case dropped.

"It has to be an absolute priority for the incoming prosecutor to do everything he can to improve the track record of the ICC prosecution when cases are in court," Elizabeth Evenson, associate director of the International Justice Program at Human Rights Watch, told DW.

"He has a really difficult job to get better success in the courtroom," Evenson said. Khan would need to strengthen investigations and prosecutions, "while also living up to these high ambitions of a court that signals no one is above the law," said Evenson, whose research and advocacy centers on the ICC.

On the streets of Kenya's capital, Nairobi, there are high expectations for the third chief prosecutor in the ICC's history.

"He has good experience, having been on the side of the dock," Erastus Wangwa, a community health volunteer in Nairobi, told DW. "I think he's going to do a good job, having represented a high-profile case."

"We believed in Bensouda, but he is going to be even better because he'll have to act more than what Bensouda has been doing," said Richard Owino, a Nairobi businessman.

The Charles Taylor 'baggage'

During the 1991-2002 civil war in Sierra Leone, Liberian President Charles Taylor backed one of the most brutal rebellions in recent history. Taylor gave military and financial support to the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebels, whose fighters were known for mutilating their victims. Captured civilians were forced to choose between "short sleeve" — shoulder amputation — and "long sleeve": elbow amputation.

Despite Khan's defense of Taylor, the UN-backed Special Court for Sierra Leone in The Hague convicted the former warlord of

crimes against humanity on April 26, 2012, and sentenced him to 50 years in prison.

"I don't feel good because this man defended Charles Taylor, who did many bad things to humanity and even caused the war in Sierra Leone," Monica Ghaliwa, a Sierra Leonean journalist, told DW.

"I think it's a slap in the face of Sierra Leoneans and even the ECOMOG that helped fight the war," Ghaliwa said, referring to the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group, an armed force.

Voice for the voiceless?

In his early days as legal counsel, Khan was involved in the first trials after the Rwandan genocide. At the time, he represented victims of war crimes, crimes against humanity, and other atrocities in Kenya, Sierra Leone, and Cameroon.

"He came to the Kenyan people's defense concerning colonialism. He made sure that they were well compensated," Owino said, adding that Khan showed that "he loves our people and that he has compassion and is a good person in general."

On April 27, 2017, Khan appeared at Cameroon's Military Tribunal in Yaounde as part of a team of lawyers defending Nkomgho Felix Agbor Bala, a Cameroonian human rights lawyer.

Agbor Bala was the head of a group of Anglophone lawyers and teachers seeking to ensure the rights of Cameroon's Anglophone minority. Yaounde charged him with terrorism offenses and agitating for secession. Again, Khan's intervention helped secure a victory and Cameroon's authorities released Agbor Bala on August 30, 2017.

'Hot chair' to sit on

The incoming prosecutor is taking up his mandate at a critical moment for the ICC. In the 18 years of its existence, former prosecutors Luis Moreno Ocampo and Fatou Bensouda have managed to secure just five significant convictions.

"We've seen under the term of the outgoing prosecutor, Fatou Bensouda, an office of the prosecutor that was willing to push forward with difficult decisions, even in the face of intense pressure," Evenson said.

"That's a legacy that we will be looking to the new prosecutor to build on, as he takes up this position to safeguard that independence," Evenson said. "It's only by demonstrating that independence that the International Criminal Court can attract the legitimacy, the credibility and the support it needs."

Tough task ahead

For the next nine years, with a staff of about 400 people, Khan will be tasked with reforming an institution plagued by setbacks and financial problems.

"The fact that the incoming prosecutor has experience at the ICC from the defense table should be an advantage," Evenson said, declining to speculate about whether there would be specific conflicts of interest that could arise from Khan's prior work.

"But I would expect that he would resolve any conflicts of interest in a way that upholds the highest standards of a fair process," she said.

Khan has been quoted as saying that it is not unusual to appear for both sides in a legal career. Such flexibility, he argued, helps to stay grounded, while preventing the defense counsel from being seen as the devil's spawn or the prosecution as a divine task.

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Rwanda (International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda)

Official Website of the ICTR

Rwanda implores UN to back arrest of Genocide fugitives (The New Times) By Nasra Bishumba
June 9, 2019

The Permanent Representative to the UN, Valentine Rugwabiza has expressed Rwanda's disappointment over lack of effective cooperation from UN member states to bring Genocide fugitives to justice for the last 27 years.

She was addressing the UN Security Council on Tuesday, June 8, alongside the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals (IRMCT) President and Prosecutor who were presenting their 18th progress report. The mechanism took over the work of the now-dissolved International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda. Rugwabiza called for the Council's urgent attention to the lack of cooperation calling it the single most important impediment to the completion of the mandate given to IRMCT. "Let us recall that Rwanda sent out more than 1,000 indictments to countries around the world requesting their cooperation to arrest and prosecution of genocide fugitives or their transfer to Rwanda. Few countries have responded to these indictments," she said.

Currently, there are 1,145 indictments and international arrest warrants for individuals living in 33 countries worldwide. Besides these fugitives, there are five others who were referred to Rwanda by the UN court under its completion strategy but they have remained fugitives ten years later.

France, US commended

Rugwabiza commended the few countries that have extended cooperation to the Office of the Prosecutor at the Mechanism and to the Rwandan Prosecution over the years.

In particular, she said that the government welcomes the commitment made by French President Emmanuel Macron to bring to justice alleged perpetrators living on French territory.

Rugwabiza also commended the French government's cooperation in the arrest of Genocide mastermind Felicien Kabuga on their territory.

She welcomed the more recent decision by the French judiciary for setting May 2022 as the trial date for Genocide mastermind Laurent Bucyabaruta who resides in France.

"We wish to call for an expedited trial so that the justice that has been delayed for more than two decades can finally be delivered," she said. She also extended Rwanda's gratitude to the US government for their recent repatriation of genocide fugitive Beatrice Munyenyezi last April.

"These developments are a clear demonstration that justice can be rendered where there is political will to extend judicial cooperation to bring to justice those responsible for crimes against humanity," she said.

Call on AU

Rugwabiza pointed out that a big number of genocide fugitives live in African countries.

She reminded of the African Union Peace and Security decision of April 12, 2021 which calls on all member states to investigate, arrest, prosecute or extradite the genocide fugitives currently residing on their territories.

"Failure to comply with the UN and AU resolutions and decisions to cooperate and bring to justice genocide fugitives has a negative impact on the maintenance of peace and security, which should be obvious to this Council," she said.

Genocide denial

She reminded of the Mechanism Prosecutor's regular reports on genocide denial adding that Rwanda and many other countries have grave concern in this regard.

"The government of Rwanda welcomes the prosecution of those who interfere with witnesses with an aim to revise established facts. We agree with the Prosecutor that such contempt of court is a form of genocide denial and those found guilty of it must face the force of the law," she said.

Just matters

The IRMCT Prosecutor Serge Brammertz said his office has viable leads on all remaining six fugitives and with continued efforts, there could be results soon.

However, he also said that these efforts continue to be frustrated by lack of cooperation from countries hosting the fugitives.

"Our primary challenge is our lack of full and effective cooperation from member states. Simply put, a number of countries are

not adhering to the international obligations and are preventing my office from securing arrests," he said.

He reminded the Council that one of the fugitives; Fulgence Kayishema remains at large because South Africa refuses to provide cooperation.

"Unfortunately, the situation remains unchanged and there has been no meaningful improvement. Effectively, South Africa is sending a clear message that their country is a safe haven for genocide fugitives," he said. Kayishema is one of the suspects who were referred to Rwanda by the UN court.

The 'inconvenient' Mrs Habyarimana straining France-Rwanda ties (Bangkok Post) June 11, 2021

The fate of an elderly Rwandan widow, who has spent decades trying to avoid a trial for genocide while living in France, is one of the key sticking points in the delicate process of reconciliation undertaken by Paris and Kigali in recent months.

Rwandan former first lady Agathe Habyarimana is the widow of Hutu president Juvenal Habyarimana, whose plane was shot down in April 1994, an event that acted as a trigger of the 1994 genocide.

The two countries turned the page on a quarter century of tensions over the Rwandan genocide on May 27 when President Emmanuel Macron recognised France's responsibilities over the slaughter of some 800,000 mostly Tutsi Rwandans.

During a visit to Kigali, Macron admitted that France, which under Francois Mitterrand backed the Hutu regime ahead of the genocide, had "for too long favoured silence over the examination of truth" and asked Rwandans for forgiveness.

He also promised to ensure that no genocide suspects would "be able to avoid justice" in France, where dozens of suspected Hutu extremists fled after the killings.

For Rwandan President Paul Kagame, who led the Tutsi rebellion that ended the massacres in July 1994, Agathe Habyarimana is "top of the list" of suspects he wants brought to justice.

- 'Waiting for her to die'? -

Days after her husband's death, Rwanda's first lady was airlifted to safety in the Central African Republic with a dozen family members on the orders of Mitterrand.

Genocide survivors accuse her of being one of the leaders of a group of extremists within her husband's inner circle, known as the "akazu" (little house), that masterminded the killings -- allegations she denies.

After a first stay in France in 1994, the woman who was widely regarded as the power behind the throne in Rwanda, returned in 1998 to take up residence in a small town on the southern outskirts of Paris.

For the past 13 years she has been under investigation over the bloodshed that caused her to flee her homeland.

Habyarimana, 78, has demanded that the case against her be thrown out -- a request she renewed this week at the Paris Court of Appeal after her first bid to have the case dismissed was rejected last year.

The appeal court's decision is expected on August 30.

Jean-Luc Habyarimana, one of her sons, accused the French judiciary of "hounding" his mother.

"Are they waiting for our mother to die in order to say they have nothing on her?" he asked AFP in a rare interview.

- 'Symbol of inaction' -

But French investigators say they have failed to assemble enough proof against her to bring charges.

The years-long probe has frustrated activist Alain Gauthier, who has spent two decades building cases against genocide suspects, together with his Rwandan-born wife Dafroza.

It was the Gauthiers who filed the complaint against Habyarimana in 2007 that triggered an investigation for complicity in genocide and crimes against humanity.

"Agathe Kanziga (her maiden name) has become a sort of symbol of the inaction of the justice system" on the Rwandan genocide, Alain Gauthier told AFP.

The Collective of Civil Plaintiffs for Rwanda (CCPR), founded by the Gauthiers, accuses Habyarimana of being a key financial backer of Rwanda's infamous Radio des Mille Collines station, which incited the slaughter of Tutsi "cockroaches" in vitriolic broadcasts.

It also accuses her of helping draft a hit list of influential Tutsis and moderate Hutus, of ordering the killings of seven employees of an orphanage that she founded and of approving a wave of assassinations conducted by the presidential guard after her husband's death.

A group of historians commissioned by Macron to examine France's role in the genocide described her in a landmark report in March as an "extremist character".

Speaking to France Culture radio at the time, the president of the commission, Vincent Duclert, claimed that she ran the "Zero Network" -- another name for the "akazu", so-called because the purported goal of Habyarimana's entourage was a Rwanda with zero Tutsis.

- 'Inconvenient person' -

But French investigators, who have visited Rwanda six times, have failed to come up with compelling evidence against her, according to their reports on the case, which AFP has seen.

The Habyarimana family has cast doubt on the reliability of Rwandan witness statements and accused France of keeping the case open out of "political considerations", to appease Kagame.

Jean-Luc Habyarimana noted that his mother had never been prosecuted by the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda and that her brother, Protais Zigiranyirazo, accused of being one of the leaders of the genocide, had been acquitted by the court.

For years after the Rwandan genocide, France was accused of shielding fugitives but in recent years, as relations with Rwanda improved, it has sped up prosecutions.

Since 2014, a former Rwandan spy chief and two former mayors have been jailed over their roles in the massacres and several other suspects have been charged.

In the case of Habyarimana, however, the authorities appear unsure what to do.

France's highest court has refused to extradite her and dozens of other suspects to Rwanda on the grounds that the crime of genocide was not on the Rwandan statute books at the time of the massacres.

But French authorities have also refused to grant her asylum, leaving her in legal limbo.

Habyarimana's lawyer Philippe Meilhac is convinced that France is letting the case drag on "because Mrs Habyarimana is an inconvenient person for diplomatic relations" between France and Rwanda.

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Somalia

Kenyan air strike in Somalia allegedly kills woman and her child (Reuters) By Elias Biryabarema
June 7, 2021

A Somali mother and her child were killed and four others injured when a Kenyan warplane bombed two towns in southern Somalia, the woman's husband said on Monday.

The bombing by the Kenyan plane occurred last Thursday night in two towns in the Gedo area in Somalia's semi-autonomous state of Jubbaland.

The Somali government on Friday condemned what it called "indiscriminate air strikes" in El Ade and Hisa-u-Gur towns

carried out by Kenyan forces.

A contingent of the Kenyan military is part of the African Union-mandated peacekeeping force AMISOM stationed in Somalia to help defend the government from the al Qaeda-linked insurgent group al Shabaab.

Ali Ahmed Sheikh, the woman's husband, told Reuters on Monday he had been out of the house when the warplane struck his family home in El Ade and that of a neighbour on Thursday night.

"I found my house destroyed, my wife Sahra Aden and the baby she suckled dead," Sheikh told Reuters from Erdogan Hospital in the Somali capital Mogadishu.

He was there attending to his children - two boys and two girls - who were injured in the attack.

He said that in the raid, the Kenyan planes had also bombed other villages and destroyed telecommunications masts of Hormud Telecom, a Somali telecoms firm.

A Somali government statement said the air strikes had resulted in death and injury of civilians including women and children, but it gave no specific details about the victims.

Zipporah Kioko, spokesperson for the Kenyan military, referred Reuters back to AMISOM for comment on the incident.

In a statement on Saturday, AMISOM said it was gathering information on the reported incident.

Al Shabaab is seeking to topple the government and establish its own rule in Somalia based on its own strict interpretation of Islamic sharia law.

Senior al-Shabaab leader arrested in Somalia (Anadolu Agency) By Mohammed Dhaysane
June 9, 2021

Somalia announced on Wednesday that its armed forces arrested a senior leader of the al-Qaeda-affiliated al-Shabaab terrorist group in an operation in the country's Middle Shabelle region, according to an official statement.

"Somali National Army and Hirshabelle police arrested a senior Alshabaab local leader after a joint operation in War Isse and Aqab Duco villages near Jowhar," Somali government spokesman Mohamed Ibrahim Moalimuu said on Twitter.

Jowhar is the administrative capital of Hirshabelle and a strategic agricultural town located approximately 90 kilometers (55 miles) from the Somali capital Mogadishu.

The Somali Army is conducting a two-week operation against al-Shabaab in the region, so far killing 130 terrorists and liberating six villages, according to reports.

"The SNA (Somali National Army) operations in Hirshabelle have left 130 terrorists dead," Somali state television reported on Wednesday.

Late on Monday, at least 60 al-Shabaab terrorists, including foreign nationals, senior commanders and bomb experts, were killed after a house used for bomb making exploded in the Lower Shabelle region, according to the military.

The offensive was launched in line with efforts to improve security as the Horn of Africa country prepares for parliamentary and presidential elections in the coming months.

Updated Sanctions List Can Help Somalia in Its fight against Al-Shabaab, Chair of Committee Pursuant to Resolution 751 (1992) Tells Security Council (United Nations) June 14, 2021

Three members of the Al-Shabaab armed group have been listed for sanctions during the reporting period to further help the federal Government of Somalia fight the insurgents, the Chair of the Security Council's sanctions regime for the country said today.

"While it is too early to see the impact of these listings, an updated sanctions list can be a significant tool in supporting the Federal Government of Somalia in its fight against Al-Shabaab," said Geraldine Byrne Nason (Ireland), Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolution 751 (1992) concerning Somalia, during a briefing on the subsidiary organ's work from 26 February to 14 June. She added that those three individuals hold various positions in the armed group.

She also noted that the Committee received the comprehensive midterm update of the Panel of Experts on Somalia on 14 May and discussed the content at a second informal virtual meeting on 4 June. During that meeting, she said, the acting Coordinator of the Panel, who was appointed following the resignation of the Coordinator on 27 April 2021, highlighted four key areas of the Panel's midterm update — the continued threat posed by Al-Shabaab, including the use of improvised explosive devices; violations of international humanitarian law; ongoing investigations into the group's finances; the management of weapons and ammunition by the federal Government; and the ban on the export of charcoal from the country.

She said Committee members welcomed the Panel's work on Al-Shabaab's finances, expressed concern over the reported violations of international humanitarian and human rights law, and noted that effective weapons and ammunition management procedures instituted by the Federal Government were key to preventing military equipment from falling into the hands of Al-Shabaab and a faction of Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant.

The Committee is currently considering the six recommendations contained in the Panel's midterm update, including the idea of a consultative process with the Federal Government on the requirements of the arms embargo regime, she reported.

Following the briefing, Abukar Dahir Osman (Somalia) said that the arms embargo against his country is the longest and widest regime, stressing that sanctions are a tool, not an end in itself. Requesting the establishment of practical and achievable benchmarks for lifting the measures, he welcomed recent steps towards evidence-based reporting and more institutionalized process. Turning to action by Kenya's air forces in 2019, he said they systematically destruct Somali property. Their use of cluster munitions, which is prohibited under the relevant Convention, was confirmed by the Panel of Experts. More recently, their air raids killed sleeping Somali families, including innocent children. These systematic attacks constitute war crimes and should be referred to the International Criminal Court, he said, questioning the peacekeeping role of Kenya.

Michael Kapkiai Kiboino (Kenya) rejected false allegations levelled against his country by the previous speaker, reemphasizing his nation's commitment to the peace process in Somalia as a good neighbour. For many years, a peaceful and stable Somalia is in Kenya's interest and Al-Shabaab is a common enemy.

Speaking again, Somalia's delegate asked his Kenyan counterpart if the widespread air bombing and systematic destruction of property in Somalia are considered peacekeeping. "Arsonists cannot be firefighters," he warned, urging Kenya to correct misguided action in Somalia.

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EUROPE

The Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina, War Crimes Chamber

Official Court Website [English translation]

Bosnian Serb Ex-Police Testify About Prisoner Disappearances (Balkan Transitional Justice) By

Milica Stojanovic

June 3, 2021

Former employees from the Ripac police station near Bihac testified at the trial of Bosnian Serb Army ex-soldier Dragan Dopudja at Belgrade Higher Court on Wednesday that around 150 Bosnian civilians were detained at an old tractor repair shop in the village of Ripac in June 1992.

Half of them were freed under prisoner exchanges and the rest were taken away and never came back, former police administrative worker Milan Matijevic told the court.

"The military police came and took them away, in groups... As a person, I was interested in where they were going, and they

said that ‘they are going on an exchange’ or ‘they are going on a work detail,’ Matijevic testified.

“Did they come back?” asked prosecutor Gordana Jekic Bradajic. Matijevic replied: “No.”

The indictment alleges that Dopudja was a member of Bosnian Serb Army’s 15th Bihac Brigade, and that between June 24 and the first half of July 1992, he and other members of his unit entered the detention facility, picked out ten prisoners, tied them up and transported them by truck to Hrgar, where they were killed.

Dopudja is accused of personally killing four of them.

Bosnian Serb soldiers threw the dead bodies into the Bezdana pit in Hrgar, where they were discovered in 1997, together with 73 other people.

Matijevic’s story was corroborated at Wednesday’s hearing by two of his former police colleagues from Ripac, who also said that a couple of times a week, prisoners were taken away and did not come back.

Two witnesses said they didn’t know the defendant and could not say if he was among the people who took the prisoners away.

Another said he knew Dopudja but that he did not see him when the prisoners were taken.

Dopudja denies the charges.

He has confirmed that prisoners were being held at the former tractor repair shop, but claimed that he never entered the detention facility.

The Bosnian prosecution initially charged Dopudja in 2014, together with former Bosnian Serb military policeman Zeljko Stanarevic. In 2017, Stanarevic was sentenced to 13 years in prison in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The case against Dopudja was transferred to Serbia, where he lives.

Another former Bosnian Serb Army soldier, Sasa Curguz, was also convicted in Bosnia and Herzegovina of involvement in the crime in Hrgar and sentenced to 14 years in prison in 2017.

The trial continues.

Bosnian Soldiers Jailed for War Crimes Against Serbs (International The News) June 12, 2021

SARAJEVO: Two former members of Bosnian forces were sentenced to prison on Friday for war crimes, including murder and rape, committed against Serb civilians who remained in Sarajevo during the 1990s siege.

Crimes against Serbs in the Bosnian capital during the bloody siege from 1992 to 1995 have rarely resulted in convictions. With more than 11,000 dead, including 1,600 children killed by bombs or snipers, the Sarajevo siege remains a symbol of crimes committed by Bosnian Serb forces during the inter-communal war that followed the collapse of former Yugoslavia.

But some of the Serbs who lived in multi-ethnic Sarajevo before the conflict were also victims of rogue defenders of the city. Senad Džananović, who ran several detention facilities set up in the Alipasino Polje neighborhood, was given 11 years in prison, while Edin Gadžo, one of his subordinates, received five years, the Bosnian State Court said in a statement.

The two men were part an initially paramilitary special unit, founded by Jusuf "Juka" Prazina, one of the warlords in the Sarajevo siege, and killed in Belgium in December 1993. They were found guilty of "participating in the illegal incarceration of Serb civilians (...) in detention facilities set up in the basements of buildings (...) where they were killed, raped, tortured and forced to work."

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UN court confirms Ratko Mladić convictions and life sentence (JURIST) By Muskan Yadav
June 9, 2021

The Appeals Chamber of the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals (IRMCT) on Tuesday confirmed Ratko Mladić's convictions and life imprisonment sentence by a Trial Chamber of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY).

Mladić, commander of the Main Staff of the Bosnian Serb Army from May 12, 1992, until at least November 8, 1996, was convicted of 10 counts of genocide, crimes against humanity, and violations of the laws and customs of war by ICTY's Trial Chamber I in 2017. The ICTY sentenced a total of 90 individuals during its mandate, which ended in 2017, and the IRMCT has since been carrying out its remaining work. Mladić, as well as the prosecution, appealed in 2018. The appeals were dismissed in their entirety, with Presiding Judge Prisca Matimba Nyambe dissenting on both the convictions and sentence.

The Appeals Chamber, with the exception of Nyambe, confirmed the Trial Chamber's ruling, finding Mladić guilty of commanding "violent ethnic cleansing campaigns" across the country and sniping and shelling attacks against the civilian population of Sarajevo between May 1992 and November 1995, committing genocide against an estimated 8,000 Bosnian Muslim men and boys in Srebrenica between July and at least October 1995 using the forces under his command, and using UN peacekeepers as human shields after taking them hostage from May to June 1995. The Trial Chamber had convicted Mladić for his "leading and grave role" in the commission of these crimes. The IRMCT's press release mentions that the Appeals Chamber "affirmed his convictions pursuant to Article 7(1) the ICTY Statute for genocide, for persecution, extermination, murder, deportation, and other inhumane acts (forcible transfer) as crimes against humanity, as well as for murder, terror, unlawful attacks on civilians, and hostage-taking as violations of the laws or customs of war under Counts 2 to 11 of the Indictment." His acquittal of the charge of genocide against Bosnian Muslims and Bosnian Croats in six municipalities in 1992, which was appealed by the prosecution, was also confirmed by the Appeals Chamber, with two judges dissenting. Arguments related to his right to a fair trial were dismissed, with Nyambe dissenting. An estimated 100,000 people, of which Bosnian Muslims comprise 80 percent, were killed and millions displaced by the end of the Bosnian War that took place between 1992 and 1995. Others were subjected to rape and torture; between 20,000 and 50,000 women were raped. Bosnian Serbs were primarily responsible for the commission of these crimes.

Stéphane Dujarric, Spokesperson for UN Secretary-General António Guterres, said:

The final judgment in the case against Mr. Ratko Mladić, who is one of the highest-ranking officials to be tried by the International Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia and by the Residual Mechanism, is a reflection of the international community's commitment to international criminal justice and the fight against impunity.

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet and Special Adviser of the Secretary-General on Prevention of Genocide Alice Wairimu Nderitu welcomed the verdict, and the latter said, "It ... sends a hugely important message throughout the Western Balkans where we see genocide denial and the glorification of convicted criminals such as Mladić not only persisting but increasing."

Mladić will remain in custody of the IRMCT until transferred to another country to serve his sentence.

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Domestic Prosecutions In The Former Yugoslavia

Serbia Tries Bosnian Serb for Murdering Married Couple (Balkan Transitional Justice) By Milica Stojanovic
June 3, 2021

The trial of Danko Vladicic, a Bosnian Serb who is accused of the murders of Bosniak civilians Ramo and Tima Vranjaca at their home near Foca on August 18, 1992,

opened at Belgrade Higher Court on Thursday.

According to the indictment, which was read out at the hearing, Vladicic entered the Vranjaca family's apartment in Brod na Drini, near Foca, "armed with a military rifle and with black cream smeared on his face" and shot the married couple dead. Their bodies have never been found.

Vladicic denied the accusations.

"I was not there and I don't know what this is about," he told the court.

The indictment did not specify if he was member of any police or military unit, and Vladicic said he was not involved in any armed groups during the war.

He said he knew the Vranjaca family, that he was very close to their son Sefik and that "Tima was like a mother to me".

He claimed that everyone in his neighbourhood got along well, even when the war broke out.

"[There were] no tensions, some Muslims left [Brod na Drini], and we hung out with those who stayed," he said.

However, Remzija Zdraljevic, one of Ramo and Tima Vranjaca's daughters, described the atmosphere differently.

"My parents were the only Muslims left in Brod," Zdraljevic told the court.

She said she was living in Montenegro when she heard that her parents might not be safe in Brod na Drini any more.

"Indirectly, I was told to take my parents away because they would be killed, but my father was ill and weak [to move], and they thought that no one would touch them because they did not harm anyone," Zdraljevic said.

During the investigation in 2014, Zdraljevic said that Vladicic was "problematic", that "everyone was afraid of him" and that he was "prone to committing crimes".

"It's that in general, he liked to fight, there were petty thefts, scams – I didn't see that, but those are the comments that he attracted," she told the court.

She also said she had heard various stories about what happened to her parents, and that according, one of them Vladicic and their other neighbour, Miodrag Djaic, alias 'Puso', committed the crime, and that Djajic later committed suicide because he "could not cope with it".

Asked if she wants compensations from Vladicic, Zdraljevic said she is only asking for information about what happened to her parents.

"I only want to find out from Danko where they are, to bury them with dignity... To tell me where they are buried, because as far as I hear, they have not even been buried, but thrown in a dump, and no one deserves that," she said.

District Public Prosecutor's Office in Trebinje in Bosnia indicted Vladicic for the crime in February 2019 and the Serbian Prosecutor's Office for War Crimes then took over the case and indicted him in February 2021.

The trial continues in September.

Croatia Charges Unnamed Former Serb Fighter With War Crimes (Balkan Transitional Justice) By Anja Vladislavljevic
June 11, 2021

Croatian police on Friday said they have charged an unnamed 49-year-old Croatian citizen, a former fighter in the rebel Serb-run Army of the Republic of Serbian Krajina, RSK, with committing war crimes in today's Split-Dalmatia County in February 1993.

It said the crime took place during the armed conflict between the Yugoslav People's Army, JNA, and Croatian Serb paramilitaries on the one side and the Croatian army on the other, in the Dalmatian hinterland.

Police said the criminal investigation had established that the suspect, "together with several other unknown persons, came to the village of Citluk and its hamlet of Vucici... and killed, stabbing with a knife, five Croatian civilians – three men and two women".

The victims were all elderly citizens, born between 1911 and 1914.

“A criminal charge was filed with the County State’s Attorney’s Office in Split against the suspect, who is not available to the judicial authorities of the Republic of Croatia,” the statement added.

Serbia Sentences Bosnian Serb Soldiers for Killing 11 Prisoners (Balkan Transitional Justice) By Milica Stojanovic
June 14, 2021

Belgrade’s Higher Court on Monday sentenced Joja Plavanjac to 15 years in prison and Zdravko Narancic to 7 years in a retrial for their roles in the killings of 11 civilian detainees at a prison in Bosanska Krupa in Bosnia on August 3, 1992.

Plavanjac was convicted of killing the prisoners and Narancic of helping him.

Plavanjac and Narancic were sentenced for the same crime in November 2019, but in September 2020 the Appeal Court in Belgrade overturned the verdict and ordered a retrial.

During the retrial, seven defence witnesses appeared in court, some of them with family ties to Plavanjac, claiming that Plavanjac’s father, Lazo Plavanjac, had committed the killings and that he told them so.

But Judge Mirjana Ilic said that their testimonies did not change the court’s mind.

“The court did not accept the testimonies of [these] witnesses, considering them illogical, unconvincing and contradictory and aimed at helping Joja Plavanjac avoid guilt for this crime,” Ilic said.

According to the indictment, the civilians were detained at a military prison set up in the Petar Kocic elementary school in Bosanska Krupa.

Narancic, a member of the Bosnian Serb Army’s Eleventh Krupa Light Infantry Brigade, was a guard at the prison and let fellow soldier Joja Plavanjac into the school armed with a machine gun.

Plavanjac was initially looking for a Serb called Predrag Prastalo who had allegedly killed his mother, but as Prastalo had already been taken into custody in Banja Luka, Plavanjac killed 11 Bosniak civilians who were being detained at the school.

That evening, Narancic assisted with the removal of the bodies from the school. Their bodies were exhumed in 2006 from a mass grave in Zvecka in Sanski Most municipality.

Plavanjac and Narancic claimed that Plavanjac’s father, Lazo, had killed the prisoners. They said that on the day of the killings, Plavanjac and his father came to the school and Lazo Plavanjac had insisted on seeing the man who killed his wife. Narancic let them in, but told them that Predrag Prastalo had already been transferred to Banja Luka.

Joja Plavanjac and Narancic went to an office to confirm this. While they were doing this, they heard shooting, ran out and saw that Lazo Plavanjac had shot the prisoners, they claimed.

Lazo Plavanjac died in 1999.

The case against the two defendants was transferred to Serbia from Bosnia and Herzegovina and the indictment was issued in Serbia in December 2017.

Croatia Indicts Serb Ex-Paramilitary for War Crime in Vukovar (Balkan Transitional Justice) By Anja Vladislavljevic
June 16, 2021

The State Attorney’s Office in the city of Osijek announced on Tuesday that it has indicted an unnamed 50-year-old former Serbian paramilitary fighter for committing a war crime in a settlement near Vukovar in eastern Croatia, two months before the fall of the besieged town.

It said that the man, a member of the Petrova Gora paramilitary unit, is accused of “acting contrary to the rules of customary international law of war and humanitarian law on the protection of civilians”.

The incident occurred during an armed attack by the joint forces of the Yugoslav People’s Army and Serbian paramilitary units on the settlement of Sajmiste.

The State Attorney's Office claims that on September 14, 1991, the defendant and his fellow paramilitaries found a group of civilians, including women and children, in the basement of a house, threatened them with explosives and then took them out into the yard.

"They are charged with ordering [seven] men to lie facing the ground and abusing them... in front of women and children, kicking them and hitting them on the head and body with fists and rifle butts," it said.

One victim, a man born in 1958, was grabbed by a soldier, who pulled his hair and hit his head on the concrete floor. When the eight-year-old daughter of the injured man became frightened by what she saw and began to cry loudly, the defendant "approached the child and pointed a rifle barrel at her head, threatening her".

The men were then taken to another location where "on the same day, unknown members of Serb paramilitaries killed them with gunshots".

One man initially survived but was then killed by unknown members of the Serbian paramilitary forces in the days that followed.

The State Attorney's Office called for the indictee, who is a Croatian citizen, to be remanded in custody due to the risk that he could abscond and reoffend.

The Yugoslav People's Army and Serbian paramilitaries besieged and shelled Vukovar intensively between late August and mid-November 1991.

The defenders of Vukovar surrendered on November 18, 1991, after which all the non-Serb population was expelled from the town, and a number of prisoners of war and civilians were deported to prisons and detention camps in Serbia.

The town was finally reintegrated into Croatia in January 1998.

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Turkey

Turkish opposition party seeks probe into paramilitary contractor (Arab News) June 5, 2021

Turkey's main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) is seeking a parliamentary inquiry into a paramilitary contractor, following allegations it was training militants in Syria.

Fugitive mob boss Sedat Peker claimed that SADAT, which has close ties with the government and President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, was training Al-Nusra Front fighters and arming the group by diverting Peker's aid convoy heading to Syrian Turkmen.

SADAT International Defense Consultancy was formed in 2012 by Adnan Tanriverdi, a retired general and former military adviser to Erdogan.

Its stated mission is to establish "defense collaboration and defense industry cooperation among Islamic countries to help the Islamic world by providing strategic consultancy, defense and security training, and supply services to armed forces and internal security forces of Islamic countries."

It offers courses on conventional and unconventional warfare tactics, armored vehicle hunting, sharpshooting, mortar forward surveillance and other areas.

Unal Cevikoz, Istanbul deputy of the CHP and a former ambassador, filed a request for a parliamentary inquiry about SADAT.

He reiterated allegations that SADAT had violated UN Security Council rulings with its activities in war-torn countries, especially in Syria and Libya, by providing military training to civilians, establishing alternative armies, dispatching mercenaries and sending illegal weapons.

"These claims will deeply undermine our country's international prestige and will result in challenging consequences for Turkey," he said. "These allegations about SADAT concern countries where the Turkish Armed Forces remain active. Therefore, they carry risks for the reputation of not only Turkey but also its army. They will also push people to challenge the

legitimacy of the Turkish Armed Forces' presence in those territories.”

SADAT employs between 50 and 200 retired officers from different specialties, with many of them dismissed from the army due to their Islamic allegiance.

The CHP said the claims about SADAT should not only be viewed through a military and security dimension, but also their potential consequences for Turkey's relations with countries that it has military agreements with.

The SADAT allegations have sparked debate about whether there is control over different armed units and if each segment has begun establishing its own paramilitary group in semi-official or informal ways.

Tanriverdi was a chief adviser to Erdogan between 2016 and 2018, attending a critical summit before the 2018 operation Afrin in Syria, along with Turkey's National Intelligence Service head Hakan Fidan. He is also known as someone who carries weight in presidential policy choices.

“All previous parliamentary questions about SADAT remained unanswered,” Cevikoz said. “Therefore, it is now an obligation for all of us to set up an investigation commission about this company's activities abroad.”

Neither the government nor the defense minister has so far responded to parliamentary questions from the opposition about the contractor, and no investigation has been launched into allegations about SADAT for years.

The CHP wants the public to be informed about SADAT and for all its international military activities be investigated, whether it provided military training in countries like Syria, Libya and Somalia, and whether it dispatched illegal weapons in violation of UN Security Council rulings.

In 2018, Turkish opposition politician Meral Aksener alleged that SADAT set up armed training camps in the Konya and Tokat provinces. But her request to open an investigation about these activities was met with silence.

SADAT was put on the domestic agenda following claims that its members contributed to the popular mobilization during the 2016 failed coup attempt, leading many people to label it a “shadow army.”

Peker has been a prominent mafia figure since the 1990s and fled the country last year to avoid a criminal investigation.

He has leveled accusations of corruption, mismanagement and connections to organized crime against Erdogan's ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP).

He claimed to have arranged to send military equipment to Syrian Turkmen and shared the plan with an AKP lawmaker in order to receive permission to dispatch the trucks in 2015.

He also claimed to have opposed sending aid to Al-Nusra Front because the group was fighting Turkmen minorities in Syria. He said the trucks were diverted and sent to Al-Nusra fighters instead by a group within SADAT.

“They diverted aid trucks for Turkmen to Al-Nusra under my name, but I didn't send them — SADAT did. I was informed about it by one of our Turkmen friends,” Peker said in a video.

War of water is Turkish weapon that threatens Syria and Iraq (Hawar News Agency) By Yahya Al Habib
June 9, 2021

The Turkish occupation state continues to practice water war against northern and eastern Syria by cutting off waters of the Euphrates River for several months, which portends a humanitarian and environmental catastrophe.

Turkey began blocking the Euphrates River since January 27, by pumping a quantity of no more than 200 cubic meters per second of water into Syrian territory, which is much less than the amount agreed upon between the Syrian and Turkish government in 1987.

The agreement stipulates that Turkey must allow the flow of water in a quantity of no less than 500 cubic meters per second into Syrian territory, while Iraq receives about 60 percent of this amount.

The Turkish breach of the agreement led to a significant decline in the river level inside Syrian territory, which led to repercussions on agriculture and electricity.

'Multiple Turkish war on AANES

In this context, the director of the Center for Kurds without Borders, Kadar Beri, says: "Turkey fought the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria with everything. It fought it politically, economically and militarily and imposed a siege on it and pressured the neighbors to besiege this region with the aim of starving them, including the recent agreements with Russia and, of course, with Damascus. In order to impose siege and starvation on this region."

Beri pointed out that Turkey cut off the water of the Allouk station, which provides drinking water to about one million people in Hasaka and its countryside, and said: "With regard to the issue of Allouk station, this in itself is a war crime that against the region."

Beri pointed out that cutting off the water is "imposing another siege on northern and eastern Syria, meaning a siege on a new siege of that region."

Beri warned of the dangers of this, saying: "The most important danger points is on the economic situation in northern and eastern Syria, as it hits the infrastructure in this area because it depends mainly on agriculture."

He considered that Turkey's exploitation of the lack of rain in order to cut off the Euphrates waters is a siege of another kind on the region.

He added, "one of the dangerous consequences of Turkey's cutting off the Euphrates waters is to show the Autonomous Administration that it is unworthy administration, in addition to showing Turkey that it is capable of everything and the keys to the solution are in its hands."

'Turkey. Displaces thousands of Kurds and threatens Iraq with thirst'

The Turkish water war is not new. It has been using it against Iraq and the Kurds for years, as the Iraqis suffer as a result of Turkish policies.

The Iraqis' crisis worsened after their northern neighbor Turkey began operating the Ilisu Dam in 2018, which it built in 2006 in the village of Ilisu in Northern (Bakur) Kurdistan, with a height of 140 meters and a length of 1800 meters. This caused great harm to Iraq and to the Kurds who live on their lands in early Kurdistan.

The dam project has sparked international outrage for several reasons, the most important of which is the low level of water flowing into Syria, Iran and Iraq, as well as the impact of more than 50,000 residents of the areas surrounding the dam area in Bakur Kurdistan, especially in Elisu and other surrounding villages that will be completely submerged under the waters of the dam. Turkey justified the construction of the dam as it would provide electric power and job opportunities.

Since 2017, water shortages in Iraq have led to measures such as banning rice cultivation and prompting farmers to abandon their lands, and Basra has seen months of protests over the lack of potable water.

Beri said about this: "What is new about the issue of water war is that Turkey in the past used to cut off water or reduce the flow of water through certain dams in the past, but in the current form, Turkey is on the issue of the Euphrates water war in particular, as it is said to "catch two birds with one stone." First, it fills the dams it has built in Northern Kurdistan, and thus also destroys large and comprehensive archaeological areas in order to obliterate the heritage of the Kurds there and in order to hide everything that is a Kurdish trace. The other point is to cut off the water from North and East Syria and West Kurdistan.

'Shameful international attitudes'

Concerning international positions on this, Beri said: "The countries of the world, particularly the Syrian government, must act. The countries of the world that oversee this region but unfortunately their positions are shameful towards the Turkish state, and this is unfortunate because of their mutual interests with Turkey."

He explained that "America, for example, has bargained over the relationship with (Turkey) and Russia, its departure from NATO or its accession to the new Russian alliance. The European countries and neighboring ones also deal with Turkey according to their interests. Unfortunately, what happened or what should have been positions from the government. So far, there is no serious stance on what Turkey is doing, and we find it doing whatever it wants without any deterrent."

He stressed that "the Syrian state is in agreement with Turkey, and here I do not say it is powerless, but rather is in agreement with it through Turkish-Russian agreements. In sum, this means the Syrian regime's agreement with them."

Beri concluded his speech by emphasizing that "Iraq is also affected by the cutting off of the Euphrates and Tigris rivers, but unfortunately the Iraqi government is powerless and is concerned with small internal problems. Some parties' control of the government in Baghdad and the issue of the dominant militias made the situation in Baghdad weak and unable to confront

Turkey."

International Peace Delegation calls on world to unite in 'moral clarity' and prevent a Kurdish genocide (Morning Star) By Steve Sweeney

June 15, 2021

MORE than 100 politicians and trade unionists from across Europe and Latin America called on the world today to unite "in moral clarity" and prevent Turkish forces committing genocide in Iraq's semi-autonomous Kurdistan region.

They gathered in Erbil, the regional capital, to condemn the ongoing illegal invasion by Turkish forces, whose almost two-month bombardment of the Metina, Zap and Avashin regions of Duhok province has produced hardly any reaction from the international community.

"Heavy battles continue in these regions, with the Kurdish guerilla forces fiercely resisting this illegal invasion. These large-scale attacks target not only the Kurdish guerilla forces but also the achievements of the Kurdish people, with the aim of occupying south Kurdistan.

"To date, the response to these attacks on the international level has unfortunately been muted," said a statement by the Progressive International group released on Monday.

Security forces were present outside the hotel where the press conference took place and the peace delegation was banned from reading its statement at the United Nations offices in the city. Germany has been accused of colluding with Turkey after it prevented 17 members of the delegation from leaving Duesseldorf last Saturday, citing potential damage to Berlin's foreign relations. Another group was detained at Erbil international airport and deported.

Footage sent to the Morning Star appeared to show peshmerga forces of the ruling Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) deployed to the Metina region with German-supplied weapons, which Kurdish officials say are being used in operations against the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK).

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan was among the world leaders gathered at Monday's Nato summit in Brussels. He held "extensive talks" with his US counterpart Joe Biden that he described as "fruitful and sincere."

It is not clear whether Turkey's involvement in conflicts in Iraq, Libya, Nagorno-Karabakh and Syria — all arenas in which it is accused of war crimes — were discussed.

Ankara's bombing of the UN-administered Makhmour refugee camp last week, which killed three people, also appears to have been brushed under the carpet, adding weight to accusations that global powers are complicit in Turkish aggression.

The camp, located in an area contested between the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and the Iraq's federal administration, is home to about 12,000 people.

Most fled Turkey in the 1990s as more than 3,000 Kurdish villages were burnt to the ground during forced assimilation operations that killed thousands of people.

One Makhmour resident told the Morning Star that the situation in the camp was desperate, with Nato, Turkey and the KDP working together in a war on the Kurdish people.

"The bombing of the camp which caused three people to be martyred is a war crime. Erdogan wants to kill us all," the resident said, before asking: "Why are we being ignored?"

The peace delegation called for world powers to be "driven by morality not geostrategy" and for an end to Mr Erdogan's "neo-Ottoman expansionist project throughout the Middle East and eastern Mediterranean."

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Kosovo Specialist Chambers

From liberation hero to war crimes suspect, Hashim Thaci's rise and fall (euronews) By Aleksandar

Brezar

June 6, 2021

The indictment of former Kosovo President Hashim Thaçi for war crimes committed in the 1998-1999 conflict, while rumoured for years, stunned both Kosovo and the wider European public when it was finally announced last September.

For decades, he was front and centre at negotiations with Western leaders over the establishment of Kosovo's independence.

Now, his reputation – and the country's – could be tarnished by allegations that he either participated in or bolstered the torture, kidnapping and murder of civilians when he was the political leader of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA), an ethnic Albanian guerilla force active during the Kosovo War.

Professor of political and cultural sociology Eric Gordy says that Thaçi's departure from politics represents a sea change for the country.

"I think the main thing is that it marks a generational change – the exit from power of the war veterans, after only 13 years [since its declaration of independence]," says Gordy.

The Balkan region is still largely ruled by politicians who rose to power or maintain the legacy of Yugoslavia's bloody dissolution after the fall of communism three decades ago.

"This is important for the whole region, where, in most of the post-conflict states the monopoly is still in the hands of people whose legitimacy is tied to the national projects of the 1990s," says Gordy.

Gordy believes that the citizens of Kosovo felt a collective sense of relief when Thaçi resigned, even if it was to face war crimes charges.

"The impression I get in conversations with people from Kosovo is that a lot of people are just happy to see just anything that gets rid of his monopoly if that's what it takes," he stated.

It also shows others that no one – no matter how popular in the West – can avoid being investigated for war crimes, added Gordy.

"I've heard people using this as a warning, saying you may think that the West will protect you, but they don't protect anyone," Gordy said.

Thaçi resigned in November of last year to face charges for war crimes and crimes against humanity at a special court based in The Hague.

While the Specialist Chambers held five status conferences in Thaçi's case by May, the actual trial is not expected to start before 2022, according to his attorneys.

The indictment, announced in June 2020, features 10 counts including kidnapping, torture, and the murder of civilians. Thaçi and five other former KLA members are being charged with joint criminal enterprise, a legal concept used to prosecute members of a group for the actions of the entire group within a common plan or purpose.

Thaçi will likely be the last top political figure from the region to face war crimes charges after coming to power in the 1990s. It is widely understood that he will not make a return to politics regardless of the trial's outcome.

Thaçi was a young history graduate in the 1990s when he joined ethnic Albanian dissident groups in forming guerilla cells to fight back the police and military crackdown in Kosovo.

As the Yugoslav socialist federation fell apart, and wars broke out in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia's southern province sought to break away and shape its own path towards independence.

Yet Thaçi was a nobody at the time. Few would have predicted his rise to power when he was plucked from relative obscurity in 1999 and selected to lead the Kosovo delegation of the talks held in Rambouillet between Serbian representatives and those representing the ethnic Albanian majority in Kosovo.

"It was not clear even to those covering the Kosovo conflict up close how Thaçi was selected as the leading figure of the negotiations in 1999," said Ismet Hajdari, a veteran journalist who covered Thaçi since his time reporting on the armed conflict in Kosovo in the 1990s.

"The Kosovo Liberation Army was scattered at the time. The Americans wanted someone who had some legitimacy among the masses, who could help implement any agreement that was achieved. This would also be an easy way to place the KLA under

their control," explains Hajdari.

Thaci versus Ibrahim Rugova

The choice of Thaçi over Ibrahim Rugova, a writer and Kosovo's most prominent political leader at the time who advocated for the country's independence through peaceful means, baffled even the negotiators at the talks.

"Rugova had the democratic mandate to lead negotiations for Kosovo Albanians since the majority elected him president. Yet Rugova couldn't guarantee that what was agreed on would be implemented, while the KLA could."

Hajdari believes that the main goal of the West at the time was to find a way to control the entire KLA from within, instead of attempting to build bridges between the guerilla fighters on the ground and Rugova.

The disagreements between Rugova's Democratic League of Kosovo – the first political party formed in Kosovo after the fall of socialism – and Thaçi's KLA ran deep.

Rugova had participated in several failed talks with Slobodan Milošević, the president of Serbia, who was responsible for withdrawing significant political rights for Albanians within Yugoslavia before it fell apart.

The Yugoslav constitution of 1974 had given the province almost the same status as the six republics within the Yugoslav federation. Yet when Milošević came to power, independent voices were jailed or persecuted. Protests erupted that were violently quashed by the federal military forces.

Resentment grew as Kosovo's Albanians increasingly rejected the idea of Belgrade's firm rule amid growing backsliding on Albanian language and political rights, including the curbing of Albanian-language media, education, and free elections.

Rugova believed it was foolhardy to set up armed resistance against Serbia, considering that it had inherited much of Yugoslavia's significant military capacities.

He also knew that Serbia would use any form of armed resistance by the Albanians to depict them as rabble-rousers who could not be trusted with power.

Rambouillet talks

Western powers grew frustrated with the promises Milošević made – and subsequently violated – in agreements reached with Rugova. In Thaçi, they saw someone who could be used as a vehicle to speed up the process of wrapping up the Kosovo issue.

"The first time we really saw Thaçi was at the Rambouillet talks," says Hajdari. "It's not like we were impressed, but the US presented him as a great leader and an unavoidable factor in achieving a settlement for Kosovo."

The West needed the Rambouillet talks to work because they wanted to present Milošević with an ultimatum as a means to getting him to stick to the agreements they facilitated.

Should the talks fail or an agreement be disrespected, NATO would respond with airstrikes – which was a deeply unpopular move among certain alliance members.

But Rambouillet turned out to be the peace talks that weren't. With the Milošević government refusing to allow NATO peacekeepers on its soil to implement the agreement, NATO moved swiftly to outright military action as ethnic Albanians left Kosovo in hundreds of thousands, expecting a further escalation of atrocities directed from Belgrade.

From Marx to menswear

Thaçi used the NATO intervention and the subsequent withdrawal of Belgrade-controlled forces to solidify his newfound status as the darling of the West, exchanging his camouflage uniform for tailor-made suits.

He also went from a Marxist-Leninist dissident to a western-style politician overnight, discarding his ideological motivations and embracing the mantra that would follow him for the rest of his career – to maintain power at any cost.

"His political rhetoric was never clearly or concisely articulated," says Hajdari. "Even later, after he fully matured as a politician. His main ideology was power and the continued generation of said power."

This spelt trouble for the most well-known UN protectorate, which Kosovo was from 1999 until it declared independence in 2008. While Thaçi would meet with western leaders and promise to adhere to agreements, his tendency to place himself at the centre of political events disrupted even the best-laid plans.

"The first head of the UN Mission in Kosovo, Bernard Kouchner, famously said that "everything Thaçi built during the day, Thaçi destroyed at night". But the international community needed Thaçi because he could give them what they wanted: security, safety, and order and peace in Kosovo," explains Hajdari.

Former minister-counsellor at the US Department of State Daniel Serwer, who played a significant role in peacebuilding work in the region, thinks that Thaçi was the only one who could successfully manage the transition, because his role in the KLA during the 1998-1999 conflict was strictly political.

"In my view, he did what we wanted him to do. He went from bullets to ballots. And I think it was relatively easy for him because I don't think he was really a fighter," says Serwer.

"With Hashim Thaçi, I don't think there's any real history of active fighting. I think he was a political spokesman like the IRA's Gerry Adams and the de facto civilian leader of the organization," Serwer further explained.

Since then, Thaçi was busy solidifying his image in the West, with frequent trips to Washington DC to help him learn English and constant dinners with those influential in the diplomatic circles. Op-eds in the New York Times were followed by a full-length biography, "New State, Modern Statesman," in which he gets compared to internationally renowned freedom fighters such as Nelson Mandela.

The impression is that his biography was written with one purpose: to give Thaçi legitimacy post factum - that is, to fill in the blanks prior to the Rambouillet talks. Some of the narrative might be true, while some reads as pure fiction.

Thaçi never shied away from hiring PR companies to do his bidding, either. When he embraced the idea of a territory exchange between Kosovo and Serbia at the height of the EU-moderated Belgrade-Pristina dialogue, intended by the international community as a path to the solution of what they saw as the biggest dispute in modern-day Europe, Thaçi hired a Paris-based company, Majorelle PR & Events, to find anyone from journalists to academics who would be willing to endorse the deal.

Serwer, self-described as one of many Americans Thaçi saw as useful, claims that he was also quick to ghost anyone who would oppose his latest political play. "One time in fairly recent years we sat down. I was actually concerned about the land swap proposal. I became a very strong opponent of the land swap idea, and he dropped me like a hot potato," states Serwer.

The proposed land swap, which would have seen the Preševo Valley in southern Serbia -- with its majority ethnic Albanian population -- join Kosovo, while Serbia would regain control over the land north of the River Ibar, never took place.

In addition to the critics of the proposed deal pointing out that redrawing borders further solidifies the mono-ethnic communities the West has tried to prevent in the Balkans, it also exacerbated fears that any territorial exchange might justify similar deals in other countries in the region, such as Bosnia.

Back on track

For Thaçi, who was already aware that the Kosovo Specialized Chambers were looking into his possible involvement in war crimes, the land swap seemed like a way out of his own troubles. "He was even prepared to enter a deal on the division of his own country with Serbia, solely to legitimize himself in the West as so unavoidable, that he should not be bothered with any indictments from the Hague," explains Hajdari.

But Thaçi's last ploy failed, so he now awaits what is poised to be a very lengthy trial. His departure from the political scene could be the opportunity the country needed to get back on track to becoming the region's most vibrant democracy.

"I think that the alignment of the stars at the moment when Kosovo declared its independence wasn't so lucky for the country in terms of the person who'd lead it," Hajdari says.

"Thaçi left the country at the top of the list of Europe's most under-developed countries, leading in poverty, joblessness, unemployment, corruption, organized crime, and gender discrimination. "During his reign, we failed to create a great story about Kosovo that we could proudly present to the world as a major justification of its independence," he concludes.

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Azerbaijan

Armenian Caucasus demands US sanctions on Turkey and Azerbaijan ahead of Biden-Erdogan

meeting (Armenian Weekly) June 12, 2021

Congressional Armenian Caucus leaders have called on President Biden to confront Turkey's President Erdogan during their upcoming June 14th meeting, pressing him to tell the Turkish leader that the US will "withhold security aid and implement targeted economic sanctions unless Azerbaijani forces are removed from Armenian territory and all remaining Armenian detainees and prisoners of war are released from Azerbaijani custody," reported the Armenian National Committee of America (ANCA).

In a June 11th letter, Congressional Armenian Caucus leaders Frank Pallone (D-NJ), Gus Bilirakis (R-FL), Jackie Speier (D-CA), David Valadao (R-CA) and Adam Schiff (D-CA) wrote "precedent shows that Erdogan and Aliyev will not halt their destabilizing actions and violations of international law until the United States takes significant action to hold them accountable."

The letter continues, "Erdogan's assistance during the war proved decisive as Azerbaijani forces were able to make rapid advances with the aid of Turkish-backed foreign mercenaries, many alleged to have ties with internationally recognized terrorist groups, Bayraktar TB2 strike drones that utilize American components and technology, and heavy weaponry, including the potentially illegal use of cluster and white phosphorus munitions."

The Congressional Armenian Caucus letter concludes, "Without strong American leadership, Turkey and Azerbaijan will continue to violate human rights and undermine democracy while destabilizing the region. The United States must make clear that there are consequences for these hostile activities."

Earlier this week, the ANCA joined with In Defense of Christians (IDC) and the Hellenic American Leadership Council (HALC) in urging President Biden to press President Erdogan to stop arming Azerbaijan and end all US military assistance to the Aliyev regime.

"President Biden will be tested on his support for Christian Armenians in his meeting next week with Turkish President Erdogan," the ANCA, IDC, and HALC wrote in a joint statement. "This past April President Biden pivoted from honestly recognizing the Armenian Genocide to recklessly green-lighting US military aid to a Turkish ally – oil-rich Azerbaijan – that's hell-bent on completing this crime. Next week, President Biden needs to talk-the-talk by publicly calling on Erdogan to stop arming Azerbaijan, and walk-the-walk by cutting off his own Administration's military aid to the Azerbaijani armed forces."

The Biden-Erdogan meeting comes as Turkey continues to support Azerbaijan's ongoing aggression against Armenia, as up to 1,000 Azerbaijani soldiers continue to occupy border areas in Armenia's southern Gegharkunik and Syunik provinces. Seven months after the November 9th ceasefire, Azerbaijan also continues to illegally hold and torture over 200 Armenian prisoners of war. Congressional Armenian Caucus leaders have introduced legislation – H.Res.240 – condemning Azerbaijan and calling for the immediate release of Armenian POWs. Advocates are urged to call on their US Representatives to support passage of the measure.

The Armenian Legal Center for Justice and Human Rights (ALC) has partnered with the International & Comparative Law Center (ICLaw) based in Yerevan, Armenia, to file cases and advocate before the European Court of Human Rights on behalf of Armenian POWs taken captive by Azerbaijan. Last month, ALC and ICLaw published a list of 19 Armenian POWs who were alive in captivity and subsequently tortured, abused and murdered by Azerbaijan. The list of 19 murdered Armenian POWs includes seven elderly, three disabled and 13 civilians.

June 11, 2021

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden, Jr. President of the United States 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W. Washington, DC 20501

Cc: Secretary of State Antony Blinken National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan

Dear President Biden:

We strongly urge you to use your upcoming meeting with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan to address his regime's direct military and economic support of Azerbaijani aggressions against Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh) and Armenia. A clear statement must be sent to Erdogan and his ally, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev, that the United States is imminently prepared to withhold security aid and implement targeted economic sanctions unless Azerbaijani forces are removed from Armenian territory and all remaining Armenian detainees and prisoners of war are released from Azerbaijani custody.

Precedent shows that Erdogan and Aliyev will not halt their destabilizing actions and violations of international law until the United States takes significant action to hold them accountable. This was demonstrated when Azerbaijan launched an

offensive attack against Artsakh last September with significant military assistance from Erdogan. The assault led to six weeks of devastating fighting with an estimated 5,000 people killed and over 100,000 ethnic Armenians forced to flee their homes in the region.

Erdogan's assistance during the war proved decisive as Azerbaijani forces were able to make rapid advances with the aid of Turkish-backed foreign mercenaries, many alleged to have ties with internationally recognized terrorist groups, Bayraktar TB2 strike drones that utilize American components and technology, and heavy weaponry, including the potentially illegal use of cluster and white phosphorus munitions. The United States' continued failure to appropriately pressure these aggressors enough to halt their deadly campaign only helped Aliyev's goals and led to more violence and significant human rights abuses in the region.

Unfortunately, global inaction continues to embolden Erdogan and Aliyev. Azerbaijan continues to hold an estimated 200 Armenian detainees and prisoners of war linked to the war, using them as bargaining chips for territorial negotiations in contravention of international human rights law. Azerbaijani forces have illegally crossed international borders, including in the last month, threatening the territorial sovereignty of Armenia along with the lives and livelihoods of civilians in those regions. Aliyev also refuses to negotiate in good faith with the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs toward an equitable, lasting solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. These moves are all made with the full-throated support of Erdogan and are calculated to test international willingness to use our economic and diplomatic influence to restrain regional aggressors.

We appreciate the statements your Administration has issued in recent weeks regarding Azerbaijan's illegal intrusion into Armenian territory, but we need to see those words turned into direct diplomatic action that will push back against the expansionist goals of these countries. We urge you to use your upcoming meeting with President Erdogan as an opportunity to demonstrate the United States' commitment to fostering democracies throughout the world and our willingness to stand up for human rights, especially in Armenia and Artsakh. Without strong American leadership, Turkey and Azerbaijan will continue to violate human rights and undermine democracy while destabilizing the region. The United States must make clear that there are consequences for these hostile activities.

Thank you for your attention to these concerns.

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MIDDLE-EAST

Iraq

Grotian Moment: The International War Crimes Trial Blog

Turkish air strike kills at least three in refugee camp in Iraq (Rueters)

June 5, 2021

A Turkish air strike killed at least three people on Saturday at a camp for displaced people in northern Iraq, said Rashad Kelali, a Patriotic Union of Kurdistan party official.

The strike on the camp housing thousands of Kurdish refugees from Turkey took place three days after Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan warned Iraq that Turkey would "clean up" a refugee camp which it says provides a haven for Kurdish militants.

An Iraqi security official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, confirmed an air strike had killed and injured people in the camp but did not give any details. Turkish forces have stepped up attacks on bases of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) inside northern Iraq over the last year, focusing their firepower and incursions mainly on a strip of territory up to 30 km (19 miles) inside Iraq.

Erdogan said on Thursday that Makhmour, a camp 180 km south of the Turkish border which has hosted thousands of Turkish refugees for more than two decades, was an "incubator" for militants and must be tackled.

The camp was established in the 1990s when thousands of Kurds from Turkey crossed the border in a movement Ankara says was deliberately provoked by the PKK.

The PKK, designated a terrorist organisation by the United States and European Union, has fought an insurgency against the state in mainly Kurdish southeast Turkey since 1984. More than 40,000 people have been killed in the conflict.

Makhmour was targeted by Turkish air strikes a year ago, although there were no reports of casualties at the time, but a senior Turkish official said it was now a priority for Ankara.

Waving the Kurdish flag and chanting "our voices are voices of freedom against occupation", dozens marched in Iraq's Kurdish province of Sulaimaniya later on Saturday to denounce the Turkish incursion.

"They are killing innocent women and children ... Turkey wants to occupy Kurdistan, but we, the Kurds here along with the PKK, will fight until the last moment of our lives," said protester Omid Saleh.

Turkey has taken its decades-old conflict with Kurdish militants deep into northern Iraq, establishing military bases and deploying armed military drones against the fighters in their mountain strongholds.

In a separate incident on Saturday, five Iraqi Kurdish Peshmerga fighters were killed and seven wounded in an ambush by the PKK in northern Iraq, the ministry of Peshmerga said in a statement on Saturday.

The Peshmerga convoy was attacked by PKK on Matin mountain, near the border of the Amedi town, with both light and heavy weaponry, while conducting a routine security check in the area, the statement said. The PKK did not immediately comment.

"The Ministry of Peshmerga is demanding immediate action from the Iraqi Federal Government to put an end to ongoing Turkish military operations in the Kurdistan Region," the statement added.

And demands the PKK to "take their fight somewhere else, away from Kurdish homes and the Kurdistan Region."

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Syria

Eight Killed in Israeli Strike in Syria, Reports Say (Rueters) By Jack Khoury and Reuters
June 8, 2021

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported Wednesday that eight people were killed in an alleged Israeli missile strike over Damascus.

Earlier, Syrian air defenses intercepted an Israeli missile strike over Damascus, the Syrian capital, Syrian state media reported, while military defectors said the missiles may have targeted Iranian-backed militias.

"Syrian air defenses intercepted an Israeli aggression coming from Lebanese airspace," state media said. Earlier, state media said large explosions were heard.

The incident came nearly a month after Syrian state TV reported that an Israeli helicopter had opened fire on a home in the Syrian Golan Heights, days after it also reported a similar attack by an Israeli helicopter in Quneitra. Also early last month, Syrian state media reported that Israel had fired missiles at towns near Latakia, a regime stronghold and the site of a Russian air base, killing one person and wounding six.

In late April, Syria attributed an attack near Damascus to Israel, and that same night an anti-aircraft missile launched by Syria toward an Israeli jet exploded near Dimona in southern Israel. Israel's military said the missile, which set off air raid sirens near the country's top-secret nuclear reactor, was the result of a misfire and not a deliberate attack. Earlier in April, the Syrian

Observatory for Human Rights war monitor said Israel had carried out a missile attack near Damascus that killed at least three pro-Iranian fighters.

Western intelligence sources said Israel's stepped-up strikes on Syria since last year are part of a shadow war approved by the United States. The strikes are also part of an anti-Iran policy that in the last two years has undermined Iran's extensive military power without triggering a major increase in hostilities.

The intelligence sources said that Israel has over the past year expanded its targets across Syria, where thousands of Iranian-backed militias have been involved in regaining much of the territory lost by Syrian President Bashar Assad to insurgents in a nearly decade-old civil war.

Air Raids in Rebel-Held Syria Said to Kill at Least 10 (Reuters)

June 10, 2021

At least 10 people were killed in Syrian army artillery attacks and Russian air raids this week in a spike in bombardments in the last major area of the country still in rebel hands, witnesses and civil defence officials said.

They said seven civilians including a woman and a child were killed when their home in the village of Ibleen in the mountainous Jabal al-Zawya region in southern Idlib came under fire from Syrian army outposts.

At least four other rebels were killed when their convoy was hit by a Russian jet when they approached the village to rescue survivors, two civil defence workers told Reuters.

Syria's northwest corner is the scene of sporadic violence but has not seen a resumption of widespread bombing since a deal last year ended a Russian-backed air campaign that displaced over a million people.

Mohammed Rasheed, a former rebel official and a volunteer aircraft spotter, said their network which covers the Russian air base in the coastal province of Latakia observed at least six Russian raids on villages in Jabal al Zawya.

"There has been an escalation in the last few days of artillery rockets and long-range missiles," Rasheed added.

There was no immediate comment from Moscow or the Syrian army, which have accused militant groups in the region of wrecking the ceasefire deal and attacking army-held areas.

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Yemen

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Special Tribunal for Lebanon

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

Lebanon asks U.N. to explore ways to fund special tribunal (Reuters) By Maha El Dahan
June 4, 2021

Lebanon's caretaker prime minister, Hassan Diab, asked the U.N. secretary general in a letter on Friday to urgently explore ways of financing the Special Tribunal for Lebanon (STL) in light of funding difficulties.

"The Government of Lebanon would be grateful to Your Excellency for urgently exploring different and alternative means of financing the Tribunal with the Security Council and Member States," he said in the letter.

An exclusive report by Reuters last week revealed that the U.N. tribunal, set up to prosecute those behind the 2005 assassination of Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri had run out of funding amid Lebanon's economic and political crisis, threatening plans for future trials. [read more](#)

The tribunal, which is 51% funded by voluntary contributions and 49% by the Lebanese government, could close after July if the funding shortage is not resolved.

On Thursday, judges at the tribunal scrapped a new trial against the man convicted of the 2005 Hariri assassination because of the expectations of a shut down. [read more](#)

Lebanon is in the throes of a deep financial crisis that is threatening its stability.

The crisis, which erupted in late 2019, has wiped out jobs, put more than half of the population under the poverty line and eroded about 90% of the value of the currency.

"While we reaffirm our unwavering commitment to the STL, we firmly believe that these financial difficulties should not hinder the completion of its work to the end," Diab said.

Why Lebanon's Rafik Hariri tribunal must be funded until it completes its mandate (Arab News) By Nadim Shehadiolga Kavran
June 6, 2021

With the Special Tribunal for Lebanon (STL) facing a severe financial crisis and the threat of imminent shutdown, it is imperative to highlight the significance of its recent judgment and the critical importance of permitting the tribunal to complete its mandate.

Shutting down the STL now, on the eve of its second major trial, would send a wrong and dangerous message with implications for international criminal justice as a whole and especially for Lebanon.

Amid the continuing assassinations in Lebanon and the region, the STL is a unique demonstration of how a rules-based international order can act through multilateral initiatives as a force for justice.

Such an institution would be difficult to create today, with tit-for-tat vetoes paralyzing decisions at the UN Security Council. Shutting the STL down, therefore, would be an irreversible decision, and the resulting damage would be unthinkable.

A new generation in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Palestine and around the region is calling for justice and accountability from its leadership and the international community. Backing the tribunal and the completion of its mandate supports these aspirations for a better future.

The STL is needed more than ever and we should be discussing its expansion rather than its closure. It is the first tribunal of its kind to consider terrorism as an international crime. Trillions have been spent to battle terrorism; the international community cannot balk at a few million for the only instrument it has to fight terror legally.

The STL issued its judgment on Aug. 18, 2020, more than 15 years after former prime minister Rafik Hariri's assassination and just two weeks after the deadly Aug. 4 port blast. The judgment convicted Salim Ayyash, but stopped short of blaming Hezbollah or the Syrian government.

While the verdict was found lacking and largely ignored in Lebanon, there have been continuous calls for international support to achieve justice and accountability for the many unaddressed crimes committed in the country, including the port explosion.

The STL judgment takes Lebanon down the path of accountability, and needs to be properly interpreted and seen in the context of the tribunal's creation by the UN Security Council. A clear understanding of the process of international criminal justice, its limits as well as the specific restrictions placed on the STL, are essential in evaluating the importance of the judgment.

Disappointment with the verdict is based on a combination of unrealistic expectations, a lack of understanding of its rigorous procedures, as well as legitimate concerns about the narrowness of its mandate and the length of time it took to reach the judgment.

There is also confusion between the three separate objectives of truth, justice and accountability. The STL can only partially achieve these within the constraints of its mandate, rules and the rigour of its procedures. But that does not diminish the significance of its findings and the power of its verdict.

Fifteen years after the Hariri assassination, justice delayed was viewed as justice denied; truth was partial as only one individual was convicted; and accountability as well as justice without his arrest is unachievable.

These criticisms of the outcome also reflect the challenges that the STL has faced from the time of its formation to the issuing of the judgment. The result was seen as a failure to measure up to the sacrifices the Lebanese made to obtain it.

The multifaceted and severe crisis that the country is going through — an upheaval dramatically exacerbated by the Beirut blast — has also overshadowed the significance of the STL judgment, but ignoring the verdict will have serious negative repercussions and it is imperative to grasp the opportunity it provides.

The creation of the STL was achieved against all odds. There was domestic, regional and international opposition to the tribunal from the start.

In view of the scale of suffering during the Lebanese civil war for which no one has ever been held accountable and the dozens of political assassinations throughout the country's history, it was indeed difficult to argue that the assassination of one man warranted such an expensive and complex legal instrument.

Among the challenges were also those of defining terrorism under international law and justifying trials in absentia with the knowledge that there was little chance of arresting the perpetrators even if convicted. There was also grave concern that the STL would create far more instability and with fewer tangible results than other similar tribunals.

With hindsight and given the current climate in international relations, the STL was an immense achievement and a sophisticated contribution to the field of international criminal justice.

Lebanese protesters demanded “the truth” in 2005 after the Hariri assassination. In simpler and less controversial terms, they wanted to know who did it.

The STL provided the answer — the terrorist attack that killed 22 people, badly injured more than 200 and devastated a significant part of Beirut was carried out by a well-organized and disciplined group of individuals. The next case will also examine the connections between this and other assassinations.

The judgment, which is publicly available on the tribunal's website, consists of 2,641 pages of important and judicially tested facts about Lebanon's recent past. This is much more than any historian, investigative journalist or political analyst usually has at their disposal to form an opinion.

Like the findings of the Yugoslav tribunal, the STL judgment is incredibly important for Lebanon because it is a treasure trove of information about what happened not only on Feb. 14, 2005, but also in the months and years during the period referred to as Pax Syriana.

The tribunal's rigorous process also means that every fact mentioned in the report is undeniable and established “beyond reasonable doubt.”

This makes the report far more important politically than the judgment itself and, in parallel, can deliver significant political results, ultimately leading to the establishment of accountability as a principle for the first time in the region.

The truth can be hard to deal with, and every society has its own way of working with difficult memories and episodes in its history. Lebanon has a culture of “moving on,” a deeply ingrained idea that what is past is past.

But the truth obtained through a process such as the STL cannot be brushed under the carpet or denied, and dealing with it is bound to make society stronger.

What happens in Lebanon never stays in Lebanon but has repercussions around an entire region suffering from similar assassinations and terrorist crimes.

Letter from Lead Legal Representative of Victims to Security Council to ensure continuity of STL proceedings in Georges Hawi's assassination case (MTV)

June 10, 2021

On 10 June 2021, the Lead Legal Representative of the participating victims in Case STL-18-10 (attack against Mr. Georges Hawi) Dr. Antonios Abou Kasm sent a letter to the President of the Security Council in which he requested his support in ensuring that the Tribunal is sufficiently financed so the proceedings are able to resume expeditiously in order to bring justice to the victims through a judgment that will be as a moral reparation for them.

The Legal Representative of the Victims submitted that the termination of proceedings at the Special Tribunal for Lebanon is a violation not only on the rights of the victims who have been denied justice for more than fifteen years, but such termination would also convey the message that the international community is unwilling to stand against terrorism and to support the international criminal justice to end impunity which creates a situation that is likely endangering the international peace and security.

Furthermore, the Lead Counsel stated that the termination of proceedings will deprive the victims of their access to justice, knowing that the transfer of the case file to the Lebanese authorities seems practically impossible due to the nature of the case especially that it holds a large number of sensitive information and documents and evidence materials that are difficult to store and protect, in addition to the incapacity of the Lebanese judicial to undertake trials for such a terrorist attack in the current Lebanese political, economic and judicial context.

Therefore, the Legal Representative of Victims requested the President of the Security Council to take immediate action and:

1. Include the issue of the funding of the Tribunal in the Security Council agenda.
2. Urge the Members of the Security Council and the Secretary-General to seek alternate means of financing the Tribunal, pursuant to Article 5(2) of the Agreement.
3. Decide that the funding of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon shall be financed in total or in part by the budget of the General Assembly or United Nations.
4. Urge and call for the international community to provide financial support to the Tribunal.
5. Absolve, exceptionally, the Lebanese Republic to fulfil its financial obligations according to Article 5(1)(b) of the Agreement.

In this letter, the Lead Counsel request was based on the Charter of the United Nations, the Provisional Rules of Procedure of the Security Council, the Repertoire of the Practice of the Security Council, the appropriate Resolutions of the Security Council, international criminal case law, and the means of financing that was adopted by the UN to fund other international criminal courts or internationalized criminal tribunals.

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Israel and Palestine

Israel-Palestine: How Germany's remembrance culture ignores today's war crimes (Middle East Eye) By Matt Unicomb

June 14, 2021

On 15 May, around 3,000 students, activists and local Arabs gathered in Berlin's Neukolln neighbourhood for a rally in support of Palestine liberation. The atmosphere was overwhelmingly peaceful for most of the afternoon, as couples wearing keffiyehs manoeuvred small children between teenagers wrapped in Palestinian flags.

Demonstrators waved signs in English, German and Arabic as they made their way down Sonnenallee, the beating heart of Berlin's Arab quarter, where there's a family-owned cafe, shisha bar or falafel joint on almost every block.

By the time police violently dispersed the rally, citing a lack of social distancing, newsrooms throughout Germany had already decided on the narrative they would push. It was "antisemitic agitation", declared RBB, Berlin's state-funded broadcaster. An article on the website of Tagesschau, Germany's most-watched evening news programme, referred to "antisemitic protests", while the right-wing Bild announced: "Police injured at hate demo."

In Germany, harnessing racism in the name of fighting antisemitism is fair game. Any pro-Palestine position, especially from immigrants or leftwing activists, is dangerous

It was impossible to find interviews with demonstrators during, or in the days after, this protest. Instead, there were soundbites from police and senior politicians condemning those who attended, especially those with Arab backgrounds.

“Anyone who wants to live here permanently must commit to freedom and democracy,” Berlin State Minister of the Interior Andreas Geisel told Radio Eins. Before long, conservative politician Alexander Dobrindt had said that asylum seekers who attended pro-Palestine rallies should be deported.

Even Die Linke, the most left-wing of Germany’s six major parties, joined in. “If we’re being honest we must admit it: we have imported antisemitism,” read a post from the party’s Osnabruck Land district office. Other members distanced themselves from the post.

Statements like these come despite figures that show around 95 percent of antisemitic attacks in 2020 in Germany were by right-wing extremists - not immigrants.

Empowering racism In Germany, harnessing racism in the name of fighting antisemitism is fair game. Any pro-Palestine position, especially from immigrants or leftwing activists, is dangerous. This is the view championed by journalists who are unable, or unwilling, to differentiate between antisemitism, anti-Zionism and support for Palestine. The result is a degraded discourse that empowers racism. Its other victims are logic and balanced reporting.

The strongest language around Israel’s actions against Palestinians comes from politicians and journalists who obsess about antisemitism at home, reflected in statements that single out asylum seekers for bringing antisemitism to the country that, just 80 years ago, murdered more than six million Jews.

But as the German-Jewish journalist Fabian Wolff recently told me, charges of antisemitism have been weaponised in Germany for years, used as a shield by Germans against political opponents - even if those opponents are Jewish. Israeli peace activist Shahaf Weisbein learned this several years ago, when six Germans from the left-wing Antideutsche movement stormed her film screening at a vegan cafe in Leipzig.

“In Germany, it’s not the Jewish community fighting antisemites. It’s about Germans pretending to be on the side of Jews, so they can fight with people they disagree with politically, and then pretending it’s for the protection of the Jewish community,” Wolff said.

Blaming immigrants for antisemitism is all too easy for a political system and media described as “blind in its right eye” - oblivious towards the far-right and vicious towards the left. This is despite its self-described remembrance culture, in which the German national character strives to atone for the Holocaust. That includes unshakable support for Israel, even when it guns down Palestinian children with German-made weapons. Those who question that support, even Palestinians themselves, are labelled as antisemitic.

Forget about Stephan Balliet, the neo-Nazi who killed two people while attacking a synagogue in Halle in eastern Germany during Yom Kippur in 2019. The most dangerous proponents of antisemitism are the brown faces waving Palestinian flags, easy targets for politicians looking for scapegoats.

'Journalistic standards' More pro-Palestinian demonstrations took place in Berlin in the days and weeks after the Neukolln protest. All were peaceful, but that didn’t stop Bild from reporting on “Israel hate” at a youth demonstration in central Berlin’s Potsdamer Platz, where teenagers laid still on the ground to symbolise the Palestinian children killed by Israeli air strikes.

RBB, meanwhile, took down and apologised for a live TV report describing the atmosphere at one Alexanderplatz demonstration as “very good”. Intense criticism from left and right, including from the right-wing paper Welt, forced RBB to remove the video from its website and apologise for a report that didn’t meet its “journalistic standards”.

Sheikh Jarrah: Clashes, scuffles, conflict - western media's euphemisms for Israel's violence [Read More](#) » Palestinian-American journalist and activist Ali Abunimah found out what happens to voices that contradict the dominant narrative when he told a Deutsche Welle anchor that Palestinian children were “sick of paying the price for guilty German consciences”.

In the days following Abunimah’s interview, Deutsche Welle, Germany’s multilingual, international-facing public broadcaster, apologised for its “antisemitic” content and sent a memo to staff reminding them to not use terms like “colonisation” and “apartheid” when mentioning Israel. “This mistake should not have happened,” Deutsche Welle said. Sound familiar?

One-sided reporting Reporting on the actual violence across Israel and Palestine was similarly one-sided. “More than 1,000 rockets fired at Israel,” announced the Frankfurter Allgemeine on 12 May. “Terror against Israel,” reported the Tagesspiegel, while Deutsche Welle celebrated with headlines such as: “Israel’s Iron Dome proves successful against Gaza rockets” and “Germany stands by Israel”.

It was almost impossible to find stories drawing attention to the more than 200 civilians killed by Israeli strikes. Even the New York Times, which days earlier ran a full-page ad condemning pro-Palestinian celebrities, mourned the conflict's child victims with a front-page cover.

In Germany, we had outrageous examples to the contrary. "These are the victims of Hamas's terror," said Bild.

The media's role should be to question the government's narratives - not to parrot attacks from politicians who scapegoat some of society's most vulnerable

Two Deutsche Welle journalists attempted some investigative journalism by fact-checking the authenticity of the so-called "viral" posts of dead Arab children shared on social media. They asked whether images of dead kids and bombed-out buildings were, in fact, recently taken in Gaza - or were they from an earlier Israeli bombing campaign?

German elites have a responsibility to the world's Jews, but that responsibility shouldn't include inaccurate reporting and unquestionable support for war crimes. Politicians and journalists who willingly conflate antisemitism with the pro-Palestine movement are denying basic truths to German citizens, millions of whom have no connection to the country's past crimes.

The world is full of grandstanding politicians, and Germany is no exception. But here, more than anywhere else in Europe or North America, they are emboldened by a media landscape that lacks the nuance to properly report on one of the most crucial moral issues of our time. As in any democracy, the media's role should be to question the government's narratives - not to parrot attacks from politicians who scapegoat some of society's most vulnerable.

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Gulf Region

Relatives of Turkish prisoner in UAE submit 'crimes against humanity' complaint, targeting Emirates, US Consulate General (The New Arab)

June 10, 2021

It is claimed Mehmet, who was handed life in jail, suffered torture during his detention.

A new formal accusation of "crimes against humanity" has been submitted by relatives of a Turkish prisoner held in the UAE.

Mehmet Ali Ozturk's relatives' complaint concerned the UAE, plus the US Consulate General in Istanbul.

Ozturk's family and their attorneys submitted the complaint to the Istanbul Prosecutor General's Office on Wednesday, Anadolu Agency reported.

His son, Abdullah Ozturk, wife, Emine Ozturk, and two lawyers gave a statement outside the Istanbul Justice Palace.

Mehmet's legal representatives say he and Emine were detained in Dubai in February 2018.

Although his wife was returned to Turkey a day later, Mehmet's location has reportedly been undisclosed for three months.

It is also claimed Mehmet, an aid worker, has suffered torture and according to a legal representative was handed life in jail, accused of backing terror.

Mehmet has now spent three years at Al-Wathba Prison in Abu Dhabi.

His legal team said he is health is constantly deteriorating.

His attorneys accuse Washington's involvement in the case with the US Consulate General in Istanbul allegedly handing the UAE information on Mehmet.

The New Arab cannot independently verify these claims.

A previous complaint last December saw the office start a probe and request the UAE begin legal action.

This fresh submission calls for figures at the US Consulate General in Istanbul to be held to account for their alleged conduct.

The UAE has recently faced other allegations of torture.

Late last month, a British football fan started civil action against six figures in the Emirates over claims he was tortured in the country in 2019.

Ali Issa Ahmed appears to have set up a legal fundraiser on CrowdJustice in 2019, explaining: "I was tortured in the UAE for wearing a Qatar football shirt at an Asian Cup [m]atch."

The New Arab has approached the US State Department and UAE embassy in Turkey for comment but did not receive a response at time of publication.

Human rights group files 'torture' complaint in France against UAE official (Middle East Eye)

June 11, 2021

A Lebanon-based human rights group has filed a complaint in France against a senior UAE official who it alleges is responsible for the torture of a well-known imprisoned Emirati activist.

The Gulf Centre for Human Rights (GCHR) filed the complaint against Major General Ahmed Nasser al-Raisi, inspector general at the UAE interior ministry, at a Paris court on Monday.

The complaint alleges that Raisi, who is also a member of Interpol's executive committee, was responsible for "torture and barbaric acts" against UAE dissident Ahmed Mansoor, the group's lawyer, William Bourdon, told the AFP news agency on Friday.

Mansoor was taken from his home in 2017 by men in black balaclavas, with his family being told nothing of his arrest. He was brought to court nearly a year later and sentenced to 10 years in jail and a fine of one million dirhams (\$272,300) after being convicted under anti-terror laws of criticising UAE authorities and tarnishing the image of the country on social media. In December 2018, his final appeal was rejected.

Amnesty International describes Mansoor as a prisoner of conscience.

Now held at the notorious al-Sadr prison, GCHR alleges that he is being imprisoned under "mediaeval conditions" while being kept in solitary confinement in a tiny cell "without access to a doctor, hygiene, [or] water and sanitary facilities".

Raisi to lead Interpol?

GCHR has alleged that Raisi, who is a contender for the next president of the France-based Interpol agency, has played a large role in Mansoor's treatment and should be censured, not promoted.

Human Rights Watch (HRW) and the GCHR, in a statement last month, warned that putting Raisi into a position of authority at Interpol "may jeopardise the global police organisation's commitment to its human rights obligations".

Mansoor "has been detained in inhumane conditions since 2017, more than four years", Bourdon, GCHR's lawyer, told AFP on Friday.

"What can only be qualified as acts of torture must today be firmly denounced and condemned by the courts."

He said an "imminent visit" of Raisi to France as "part of his [Interpol] campaign" could make prosecution in France possible on the basis of universal jurisdiction.

In theory, French judicial authorities can judge crimes against humanity, war crimes and torture under universal jurisdiction if suspects are on French territory, regardless of where the crimes took place.

According to the complaint, Raisi's role in the alleged torture of Mansoor is "established" due to his position which puts him in control of the UAE security forces.

An Interpol spokesman told AFP that candidacies for president would only be presented when the general assembly takes place, but there was no obligation for hopefuls to come to France to make their case.

Contacted by AFP, the UAE embassy in Paris said its staff were not authorised to speak to the press.

Who is Ahmed Mansoor?

Mansoor began his human rights activism in the UAE in 2006. Soon after, he caught the attention of the country's rulers and its people when he successfully campaigned for the release of two Emiratis jailed for comments they made online.

In 2009, he led an effort opposing a draft media law that threatened freedom of expression and launched a petition urging the UAE president, Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan (the ruler of Abu Dhabi), not to approve it. His efforts were successful and the president suspended the draft law.

Mansoor's work towards democratic reforms continued, triggering escalating harassment and threats. And in April 2011, he was arrested, held in jail for nearly eight months, and convicted of "insulting the rulers".

On 27 November 2011, Mansoor was sentenced to three years in jail. The next day, thanks largely to an international outcry, he and four others that were sentenced with him were pardoned.

But the government would not give him a waiver - known as a certificate of good conduct - and without it, he could not get a job. His bank accounts were also frozen, his passport confiscated, and he was banned from travelling.

Since his arrest, Mansoor has initiated several hunger strikes to protest against his treatment. Among his demands were an end to solitary confinement and access to necessities, including blankets and personal hygiene products.

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ASIA

Afghanistan

Female Afghan Anchor Killed in Kabul Blast (Radio Free Afghanistan)

June 5, 2021

An Afghan news anchor was killed in a blast in western Kabul, the latest of a series of attacks on journalists in the country.

Mina Khairi, a female anchor for Ariana News, died on the evening of June 3 when an explosion ripped through a minivan. The blast also killed four other people, including Khairi's mother, and seriously wounded the journalist's sister and six more civilians. The 23-year-old had worked as a presenter for Ariana's radio and television programs since 2017. Abdul Mu'eed Hashimi, the head of the Committee to Protect Journalists in Afghanistan, told RFE/RL's Afghan Service that according to initial information, the attack on Khairi was targeted. Ariana director Sharif Hassanyar said Afghan media would not be deterred by the attack. "Mina Khairi's martyrdom cannot hinder freedom of expression and media activity in Afghanistan," he said. Since March 2020, 11 journalists and media workers have been murdered in Afghanistan, Reporters Without Borders (RSF) said this week. The watchdog has formally asked the International Criminal Court in The Hague to investigate the murders as possible war crimes. RSF said it "has every reason to believe that armed groups, especially the Taliban or Taliban affiliates, are responsible for this wave of killings."

Afghan Hazaras being killed at school, play, even at birth (The Spokesman-Review) By Kathy Gannon

June 11, 2021

Just running errands in the mainly Hazara neighborhoods of west Kabul can be dangerous. One day last week, Adila Khiari and her two daughters went out to buy new curtains. Soon after, her son heard that a minibus had been bombed – the

fourth to be blown up in just 48 hours.

When his mother didn't answer her phone, he frantically searched hospitals in the Afghan capital. He found his sister Hosnia in critical condition with burns over 50% of her body. Then he found his mother and other sister, Mina, both dead. Three days later, on Sunday, Hosnia died as well.

In all, 18 people were killed in the two-day string of bombings against minivans in Kabul's Dasht-e-Barchi district. It was the latest in a vicious campaign of violence targeting Afghanistan's minority Hazara community – one that Hazaras fear will only get worse after the final withdrawal of American and NATO troops this summer.

Hundreds of Afghans are killed or injured every month in violence connected to the country's constant war. But Hazaras, who make up around 9% of the population of 36 million people, stand alone in being intentionally targeted because of their ethnicity – distinct from the other ethnic groups, such as Tajik and Uzbek and the Pashtun majority – and their religion. Most Hazaras are Shiite Muslims, despised by Sunni Muslim radicals like the Islamic State group, and discriminated against by many in the Sunni majority country.

After the collapse of the Taliban 20 years ago, the Hazaras embraced hopes for a new democracy in Afghanistan. Long the country's poorest community, they began to improve their lot, advancing in various fields, including education and sports.

Now many Hazaras are moving to take up arms to protect themselves in what they expect will be a war for control among Afghanistan's many factions. Inside the Nabi Rasool Akram Mosque compound, protected by sandbags stacked against its ornate doors and 10-foot high walls, Qatradullah Broman was among the Hazaras attending the funeral of Adila and Mina this week.

The government doesn't care about Hazaras and has failed to protect them, he said. "Anyone who can afford to leave, they are leaving. Those who can't are staying here to die," said Broman. "I see a very dark future for our people."

There is plenty for Hazaras to fear.

Since it emerged in 2014 and 2015, a vicious Islamic State affiliate has declared war on Afghanistan's Shiites and has claimed responsibility for many of the recent attacks on the Hazaras.

But Hazaras are also deeply suspicious of the government for not protecting them. Some worry that government-linked warlords, who also demonize their community, are behind some of the attacks.

Former government adviser Torek Farhadi told the Associated Press that within the political leadership, "from the top down," there is a "sorry culture" of discrimination against Hazaras. "The government, in a cynical calculation, has decided Hazara lives are cheap," he said.

Since 2015, attacks have killed at least 1,200 Hazaras and injured another 2,300, according to Wadood Pedram, executive director of the Kabul-based Human Rights and Eradication of Violence Organization.

Hazaras have been preyed on at schools, weddings, mosques, sports clubs, even at birth.

Last year, gunmen attacked a maternity hospital in the mainly Hazara districts of west Kabul. When the shooting ended, 24 people were dead, including newborns and their mothers. Last month, a triple bombing at the Syed Al-Shahada school in the same area killed nearly 100 people, mostly Hazara schoolgirls. This week, when militants attacked a compound of de-mining workers, shooting and killing at least 10, witnesses said the attackers tried to pick Hazaras out of the workers to kill.

Some of these attacks, deliberately targeting civilians, hospitals and children, could rise to the level of war crimes, said Patricia Gossman, associate director for Asia at Human Rights Watch.

Pedram's organization has petitioned the U.N. Human Rights Commission to investigate the killing of Hazaras as genocide or a crime against humanity. It and other rights groups also helped the International Criminal Court in 2019 compile suspected war crimes cases in Afghanistan. "The world doesn't speak about our deaths. The world is silent. Are we not human?" said Mustafa Waheed, an elderly Hazara weeping at the burial of Mina and her mother.

A black velvet cloth inscribed in gold with Quranic verses was draped over the two bodies. Family and friends carried them on wooden beds, then placed them inside the graves. Mina's father fell to the ground crying.

"The U.S. can go into space, but they can't find out who is doing this?" Waheed said. "They can see an ant move from space, but they can't see who is killing Hazaras?"

In the face of the killings, talk has turned to arming Hazara youth to defend the community, particularly in the districts that

the community dominates in western Kabul. Some Hazaras say the May 8 attack on the Syed al-Shahada school was a turning point.

It is a significant reversal for a community that showed such hope in a new Afghanistan. After the fall of the Taliban, many Hazara militias gave up their weapons under a government disarmament program, even as other factions were reluctant.

"We used to think the pen and the book were our greatest weapon, but now we realize it is the gun we need," said Ghulam Reza Berati, a prominent Hazara religious leader. Fathers of the girls killed in the school attack are being told to invest in weapons, said Berati, who helped bury many of the girls.

Sitting on the carpets of west Kabul's Wali Asar Mosque, Berati said Hazaras are disappointed in the democracy brought by the U.S.-led coalition. Hazaras have largely been excluded from positions of prominence, he said.

Hazaras worry about continuing IS attacks and about the potential return of the Taliban to power after the American withdrawal. But they also worry about the many heavily armed warlords who are part of the government. Some of them carried out violence against Hazaras in the past, and Hazaras fear they will do so again if post-withdrawal Afghanistan slides into a repeat of the brutal inter-factional civil war of the early 1990s.

One warlord who is still prominent in Kabul, Abdul Rasool Sayyaf, led a Pashtun militia that massacred Hazara civilians during a ferocious 1993 battle with Hazara militias in Kabul's mainly Hazara neighborhood of Afshar.

Rajab Ali Urzgani became a sort of folk hero in his community as one of the youngest Hazara commanders during the Battle of Afshar – only 14 at the time. Now 41 and still known by his nom de guerre, Mangol, he returned to Afshar earlier this month with the AP to visit the site. He stopped to give a prayer for the dead at a mass grave where nearly 80 men, women and children were killed in the bloodshed are buried. A black Shiite banner flies at the entrance. Mangol held out little hope for peace in Afghanistan following the U.S. and NATO withdrawal.

"When the foreigners withdraw, the war will happen 1,000%," he said. "The war will happen like in the past with the different groups, and we will defend our family and our dignity."

Australia: New information unveiled on the deadliest alleged war crimes in Afghanistan (WION)
June 11, 2021

In what is considered the 'deadliest' alleged atrocity involving Australian Special Forces, unarmed civilians were shot in cold blood to cover tracks. Nearly one year ago, ABC Investigations revealed how Australian special forces killed up to 10 unarmed Afghan civilians during a 2012 raid in Kandahar Province. More details have emerged about the same.

As a part of the investigation, ABC contacted some of the men of the Zulu 1 patrol. Violating the Australian Rules of Engagement, the SAS patrol commander, Sergeant T, ordered the American door gunner to fire around the Afghans below the chopper to stop them from scattering. Soon after the Black Hawk set down in the field, Sergeant T himself opened fire at the farmers in the field.

An Australian Special Operations officer, deployed to Afghanistan, alongside the Special Air Service Regiment (SAS), agreed to speak with ABC Investigations on the condition of staying anonymous. One of the men on that patrol returned to the base and told the officer what unfolded in that field.

ABC quoted the officer saying, "He told me from his perspective what happened, which was that the patrol commander had accidentally shot one of this group of farmer. And then they made the decision that they couldn't leave anyone behind to tell [what happened]".

This is when the officers decided to kill all of the farmers. The man told the officer that there was a very young person, about 13 or 14.

"He described shooting someone as they hid within the tractor wheel, cowering. I can't remember if that was the 14-year-old ... I believe he said he shot more than one, but I can't remember the exact details. "Honestly, it just sounded like a bit of a spree", quoted ABC.

The SAS soldier who was on the raid and who made the admission to the Special Operations officer is now known as Soldier C.

The raid is termed as the worst one-day death toll uncovered till the date of alleged unlawful killings by Australian soldiers in Afghanistan.

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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)
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War Crimes Investigation in Myanmar

Resistance Fighters Inflict Heavy Losses on Junta Forces in Myanmar's Chin State (The Irrawaddy)
June 7, 2021

Around 50 junta soldiers were killed on Sunday as fighting intensified between regime troops and Chin civilian resistance fighters in Mindat, Chin State, prompting the regime to call in air strikes. Resistance fighters also claimed junta forces used chemical weapons during the clashes.

Around 50 junta soldiers were killed on Sunday as fighting intensified between regime troops and Chin civilian resistance fighters in Mindat, Chin State, prompting the regime to call in air strikes. Resistance fighters also claimed junta forces used chemical weapons during the clashes.

At about 10 a.m. on Sunday, Chinland Defense Force-Mindat fighters launched a defensive action against around 100 military soldiers traveling to raid Phayar Sakhon and other villages in northeastern Mindat.

A spokesperson for Chinland Defense Force-Mindat told The Irrawaddy on Monday that the civilian resistance fighters were later attacked in Mindat by an artillery unit based in Kyaukhtu, Magwe Region, 33 km to the east.

Civilian resistance fighters were also attacked with heavy explosives by junta troops based in Mindat and a nearby village.

In the shootout, around 40 junta soldiers were killed. Two Mindat civilian resistance fighters were killed and six injured.

After losing a large number of soldiers in the shootout, the military regime bombarded the civilian resistance fighters twice using fighter aircraft, according to a statement from the Mindat People's Administration.

A spokesperson for the Mindat Defense Force said most of their resistance fighters were armed with old-fashioned homemade hunting rifles, and some with homemade single-barrel shotguns. The junta used heavy explosives, artillery, automatic weapons and fighter aircraft.

The spokesperson also claimed that the junta troops used chemical weapons in attacking the civilian resistance fighters, saying some of the military's explosives contained no shrapnel but left the civilian fighters unconscious or feeling dizzy.

At about 10 a.m. on Sunday, another shootout between military troops and the Mindat Defense Force broke out near Shat Village in northwest Mindat.

The shootout occurred when civilian fighters took defensive action against 80 junta soldiers traveling to conduct raids in villages that are sheltering internally displaced persons from Mindat. During the shootout, civilian resistance fighters were also attacked by artillery from the military's Battalion 271 based in the mountaintop town of Mindat.

In the firefight, about 10 junta soldiers were killed. Meanwhile, a civilian resistance fighter was killed and 15 were injured by the junta's artillery shells.

The shootout continued until Monday morning, a member of the Mindat Defense Force said. The spokesperson for the Mindat Defense Force said the military regime is committing war crimes against the people as it is using powerful weapons including artillery, explosives, automatic rifles, and aircraft to attack civilian resistance fighters armed with old-fashioned homemade firearms. The spokesperson added that the junta soldiers are using narcotics. "The international community and Myanmar have already learned what kind of institution the military regime is. There are no words to describe the inferior status and brutality of the junta. So, we will keep fighting them," the spokesperson said.

Firefights between the military troops and civilian resistance fighters from the Mindat Defense Forces have been occurring continuously since May 12, when a ceasefire agreed in late April broke down.

Due to the firefights, 90 percent of Mindat's population of 25,000 have fled the town. Most residents are now sheltering at camps opened in villages in the township.

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AMERICAS

North & Central America

Trudeau Calls for the Catholic Church to Take Responsibility for Deaths of Indigenous Children (Vice) By Anya Zoledziowski
June 4, 2021

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, who personally asked Pope Francis to apologize to residential school survivors and their families in 2017, is asking the Catholic Church to "step up" and take responsibility for its role in residential schools after the bodies of 215 undocumented children, some as young as 3, were found buried under a former Catholic-run residential school.

People across the country should put pressure on bishops and cardinals, Trudeau told reporters on Friday.

"It's going to be a really important moment to make it clear that we expect the Church to step up and take responsibility for its role in this and be there to help in the grieving and the healing, including with records, as necessary," Trudeau said. "We're still seeing resistance from the Church, possibly from the Church in Canada."

Canada and the Vatican are facing international condemnation for “large-scale human rights violations,” with UN human rights experts calling on Canada and the Catholic Church to conduct prompt and thorough criminal investigations.

According to court documents, Canada’s federal government has so far denied legal liability for residential schools, while the Vatican has refused previous requests to apologize and has stayed silent this week.

“The judiciary should conduct criminal investigations into all suspicious death and allegations of torture and sexual violence against children hosted in residential schools, and prosecute and sanction the perpetrators and concealors who may still be alive,” says a statement issued by the UN’s Human rights Special Procedures office, which is staffed by independent, volunteer experts who advise on human rights issues.

Last week, Tk’emlúps te Secwépemc First Nation announced it found the children under the former Kamloops Indian Residential School using ground-radar technology. The findings reiterated what Indigenous communities have been saying for years: there are unmarked graves at residential schools across the country. An estimated 4,000 to 15,000 children, many undocumented, were killed at residential schools nationwide.

Residential schools were funded by the Canadian government and operated by churches to forcibly assimilate an estimated 150,000 First Nations, Inuit, and Métis children. More than half of all schools were Catholic-run.

“Large-scale human rights violations have been committed against children belonging to Indigenous communities,” the UN statement says. “It is inconceivable that Canada and the Holy See would leave such heinous crimes unaccounted for and without full redress.”

The experts are also urging Canada to implement the Truth and Reconciliation calls to action, first published in 2015. So far, only eight of 94 have been implemented—and just one related to unmarked burials of children killed at residential schools. “For too many years, victims and their families have been waiting for justice and remedy. Accountability, comprehensive truth, and full reparation must be urgently pursued,” it says.

At the same time, a group of 15 lawyers has asked the International Criminal Court (ICC) to investigate Canada and the Vatican for crimes against humanity.

“The complainants submit the deaths, mass unmarked grave, and general treatment of the 215 deceased children constitute crimes against humanity. The complainants also submit it is likely other such mass graves exist elsewhere in Canada in or around other residential schools and have been covered up by the government of Canada and/or Vatican, their agents, employees, or actors,” says the letter. It’s addressed to Karim Khan, chief prosecutor at the ICC.

The letter asks for an investigation into the circumstances of deaths and mass burials of the 215 children. “The aboriginal people of Canada, and all people of Canada, need assurance that the agents, employees, and actors of the government of Canada and the Vatican behind these crimes against humanity are subject to justice,” it says.

ICC can step in and investigate when countries refuse or are unable to do so themselves, and it can compel all those involved to submit relevant documents and information. The body steps in when at least one of four crimes—genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and aggression—is suspected. Crimes against humanity, or “serious violations committed as part of a large-scale attack against any civilian population,” the ICC site says, can include murder, rape, imprisonment, enforced disappearances, and enslavement, especially committed against women and children.

On Thursday Vancouver Catholic Archdiocese apologized for the Church’s “unquestionably wrong” role in residential schools, and is now pledging resources for further investigations and related mental health support.

Groups to Canada: Prosecute alleged Guatemalan war criminal (AP) June 16, 2021

Two activist groups on Wednesday called for Canada’s government to prosecute a man believed to be living in Canada who they say was involved in the massacre of more than 200 people in Guatemala in 1982.

The Canadian government has been attempting to strip former Guatemalan soldier Jorge Vinicio Sosa Orantes of Canadian citizenship since 2017 on the grounds that he was an active participant in the massacre and lied about his role when he applied for citizenship.

In documents filed in federal court, Sosa Orantes has said he was not even in the village of Las Dos Erres when the killings took place.

Lawyers Without Borders Canada and the Canadian Partnership for International Justice said at a news conference that Canada shouldn't become a retirement destination for alleged war criminals and that he should be prosecuted for crimes against humanity and war crimes.

In 2014, Sosa Orantes was sentenced to 10 years in prison in the United States for lying about his role in the Guatemalan civil war in his U.S. citizenship application.

U.S. court records show he was released from prison in July 2019 but remained detained by immigration authorities until late 2020, and the groups say they were informed by an American nongovernmental organization that he has since been deported to Canada.

The Canadian government has said in court filings it believes Sosa Orantes was a senior member of a military special forces unit and directed other soldiers as they tortured, raped and killed villagers.

It also alleges he threw a grenade and fired a gun into a well where victims, some still alive, had been thrown.

U.S. prosecutors have said Sosa was a member of a special forces patrol that went to Dos Erres in December 1982 to search for weapons believed stolen by guerrillas. The weapons were never found and prosecutors say the patrol decided to kill the villagers after some of the soldiers began raping the women.

More than two decades later, Sosa failed to mention his military service or role in the massacre on his application to become an American citizen even though the paperwork inquired about affiliations and past crimes, prosecutors said.

Sosa left Guatemala in 1985 and sought asylum in the United States, claiming he was fleeing Guatemalan guerrillas. After being denied asylum in the U.S., he visited the Canadian consulate in San Francisco to seek haven in Canada. He was granted refugee status, eventually becoming a permanent resident and citizen of Canada.

He later married an American and applied for naturalization in the U.S. in 2007.

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South America

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Venezuela

U.S. sanctions part of "comprehensive assault" against Venezuela: FM (xinhua) June 10, 2021

U.S. sanctions against Venezuela are part of a "comprehensive assault" against the South American country, Venezuelan Foreign Affairs Minister Jorge Arreaza said Wednesday.

"It's not just the sanctions, the unilateral coercive measures. Let's see this as a comprehensive assault, a political and diplomatic assault, definitely an economic assault, a communicational and ideological assault. It is a real assault with operations by mercenaries," Arreaza said.

The foreign minister spoke at the opening of a virtual academic conference called "Unilateral coercive measures: disrespect for

international law and serious human consequences," which gathered experts in the field and diplomatic envoys accredited to the United Nations Human Rights Council.

"There is no doubt" that the measures applied by Washington "have hurt the Venezuelan economy and the Venezuelan people, and constitute crimes against humanity," said Arreaza.

From every perspective, unilateral coercive measures are illegal under international law and that is clearly established by the United Nations General Assembly itself, in different debates and resolutions, he added.

The International Criminal Court Has Postponed The Announcement Of The Investigation Into Crimes Against Humanity Of The Maduro Regime (Amico Hoops) By Aygen Marsh

June 16, 2021

The International Criminal Court has postponed the announcement of the investigation into the case Crimes against humanity committed by the Maduro regime.

Bensouda, who finished his duties at the head of the ICC's chief prosecutor's office on Tuesday, said he hoped to announce whether or not he would open an investigation in Venezuela into crimes against humanity once the court settled a request from the Caribbean country. .

"With regard to Venezuela, I had committed myself to reaching a final decision, to the extent possible, for the remainder of my term.. Perhaps in anticipation of this outcome, as you will see in the media, the ICC Chamber has received a file from the Government of Venezuela asking the Chamber to exercise judicial oversight over the conduct of our preliminary examination. This was given in secret, so I cannot refer to them in detail, although the Venezuelan authorities themselves mentioned the fact that they were presented," Bensouda wrote, a farewell letter.

The International Criminal Court's Office of the Prosecutor's preliminary investigation, which opened to Venezuela in February 2018, is examining alleged abuses committed by security forces at demonstrations and prisons since at least April 2017.

in the message, The chief prosecutor of the International Criminal Court says she has reached a final conclusion on the investigation and was ready to present it But with the appeal lodged by the Maduro regime, he decided to wait for the ICC Chamber's decision before making any announcement.

"These actions and their results are currently classified as confidential, though. We expect it to be announced soon. Given the elapsed time, the only thing I can do at this point is to hand over the document, which has been completed, to the next public prosecutor for consideration and final decision," added Bensouda.

Chavez's attorney general, Tarek William Saab, reported on Monday that he had submitted to the Consumer Protection Commission a fourth report that completes cases of "model punishment" for human rights violations., in connection with the initial examination to which the Caribbean country is subjected.

The Public Prosecutor also stated that "Continues to provide information without knowing what the performance parameters are From the entity mentioned in this case, an issue that has been claimed time and time again."

The Chavista authorities had already submitted a request for judicial observation last month to the judges of the International Criminal Court, where they complained about the treatment. discriminatory "Yeah" Unequal "With regard to those received by other countries that are also under preliminary examination, according to the attorney general.

In the face of this allegation, the ICC Prosecutor said, Fatou Bensouda He denied it during an interview with the news agency EFE To ignore this claim and provide a response that includes examples and statistics on its "commitment" to Venezuela since the start of the examination

"Regarding the statement that my office had nothing to do with Venezuela, and that it was not transparent or did not provide information, I can definitively say it's wrong The Prosecutor of the Hague Tribunal confirmed.

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Truth and Reconciliation Commission

National Civil Society Council Openly Declares Support for War and Economic Crimes Court in Liberia (Front Page Africa) By Gerald C. Koinyeneh

June 3, 2021

As calls for the establishment of a war and economic crimes court continue to garnered grassroots' momentum, the National Civil Society Council of Liberia (NCSCL) has become the latest to join the campaign.

The NCSCL is a conglomeration of civil society organizations across Liberia. In a landmark statement issued in Monrovia, the NCSCL, through its Chairperson, Mrs. Loretta Pope-Kai, for the first time said the time for the court was 'ripe and appropriate'.

"It is worth mentioning that the National Civil Society Council had strongly declared its full and unwavering support for the establishment of a War and Economic Crimes Court (WECC) for Liberia and the Council is engaged in consultative processes to this end," the Council announced.

It continued: "NCSCL believes the time is now ripe and appropriate to fight the culture of impunity in Liberia and put to 'an end defiant, unrepentant and remorseless' postures of alleged perpetrators of war crimes in the full glare of victims of the country's atrocities and gruesome acts of mayhems in Liberia."

The Council's call for the court was contained in the statement it released recently, where it called on the Government of Liberia to implement the series of human rights violations documented by the U.S. State Department latest human rights report on Liberia.

The Council said it has rigorously analyzed the contents of the report, and as a result quantified at least 143 human rights practices mentioned in it, some of which were gross violations.

The Council condemned the Government's 'lackadaisical attitude' towards addressing the culture of impunity by implementing the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) recommendations which called for the setting up of a war and economic crimes court to prosecute individuals responsible for Liberia's civil strife dating back from 1979 to 2003.

Excerpt of the statement: "Also rated very poorly in the "2020 Country Report on Human Right Practices: Liberia" is the Government's attitude regarding international and non-governmental investigation of alleged abuses of human rights, including gruesome atrocity committed against humanity during Liberia's civil wars. This brings to fore concern regarding the implementation of the Truth and Reconciliation Report."

The Council called on the Government to establish a war and economic crime court to fight the culture of impunity and to promote genuine peace and reconciliation in Liberia.

'No Turning Back.

Responding to why it took so long for the NCSCL to join the campaign for the court, Mrs. Pope-Kai said they had to get the views of key stakeholders including member based institutions. Following series of consultations, she said the Council has reached a general consensus and was in full support of the establishment of the court to end the culture of impunity.

When asked what will it cost Liberia if the court is not set up, she said: "It comes back to a situation of a visual circle of impunity. A fight against impunity. If it is not established, then we don't want to fight corruption or violence to include Sexual and Gender Based violence."

She added that it was the appropriate time for the court because since the TRC's recommendations more than a decade ago, past and successive governments have failed to include it on their agenda, adding "It has become clear that the culture of impunity has now become a defining issue for the advancement of democracy, development and prosperity of Liberia. Now that TRC has become a public agenda and that it is defining factor, this TIME IS MOST RIFE, and no turning back."

The Kamloops graves put Truth and Reconciliation back in the spotlight, but will it stay there? (National Post) By Ryan Tumilty

June 5, 2021

In a minority House of Commons, legislation generally moves slowly, but sometimes events, usually tragedies, force swift action.

Canada declared war on Germany 10 days after the invasion of Poland. Damaging railway or airline strikes have been legislated to an end in hours, and when the pandemic began, MPs decided overnight on a plan to shutter the Commons.

This week, the tragedy spurring action was not a fresh scar, but an old wound in the form of 215 small and unmarked graves at a residential school in Kamloops, B.C. — deaths that pierced Canadians' image of what this country is.

The fact that victims of residential schools still lie in unmarked graves throughout the country was highlighted six years ago by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC).

Finding those graves was part of its 94 Calls for Action — recommendations that Justin Trudeau, prime minister for only a few months when the final report was released in December 2015, pledged to “fully Implement” and so right “one of the darkest chapters in Canadian history.”

But the Liberal government now stands accused of political inaction on the recommendations, of fighting against some of them, and of moving too slowly in the face of the whole tragedy of residential schools.

“When does the atrocious become an emergency,” asked Marie Wilson, one of the TRC commissioners this week.

Much work remains on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's 94 Calls to Action Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc First Nation Chief Rosanne Casimir says the discovery of the 215 children's graves at the former Kamloops Indian Residential School is just the beginning.

The Kamloops graves have spurred monuments across Canada, rows of empty, tiny shoes sit on the steps of libraries, city halls and around Parliament Hill's Centennial flame.

Murray Sinclair, former senator and TRC commissioner, warned that the Kamloops 215 would not be the only dead children Canada would find.

“We know there are lots of sites similar to Kamloops that are going to come to light,” he said. “Survivors talked about during the time they were there about children who suddenly went missing, some of the survivors talked about children being buried in large numbers.”

The graves and the public furore that followed prompted MPs to listen and, most importantly, to act.

In the week since the grim discovery, two bills have been pushed through the Commons and \$27 million is now available to search for other graves at other schools.

Less than a day after the news broke in Kamloops, MPs gave unanimous consent to push through C-6, a bill creating a National Day for Truth and Reconciliation. The bill cleared the Senate Thursday and is now law.

Another unanimous consent motion allowed bill C-8 to pass Thursday night. That bill adds a line to Canada's citizenship oath acknowledging that new citizens should respect the country's treaties with Indigenous people.

The government also announced \$27 million, first budgeted in 2019 but not spent, that will go to fund searches at other former schools.

Both of the bills were part of the 94 Calls to Action.

The Calls to Action were meant to address the legacy of schools, uncover the full history, and correct the damage done to Indigenous communities over generations.

The most charitable report card on those 94 calls is the one the government gives itself. It says it has completed 16 of 76 that are within its purview, other report cards from outside groups suggest the government has accomplished as few as eight.

Five of the Calls to Action centred around research to identify the Indigenous children who died while in residential schools. The commissioners called for coroners, churches and governments to hand over records, for a national register to be created, to have proper memorials at gravesites that have been located, and to make money available to find the ones that have not.

In testimony at a House of Commons committee, Sinclair said those recommendations are not complete.

“We think that that’s a sad commentary on the commitment, the lack of commitment the government has to trying to close the story of what happened in residential schools.”

Wilson said she was glad the issue was getting attention, but the Kamloops discovery didn’t change known facts.

She said survivors, and even official records, have made it clear children died in significant numbers in residential schools, victims of neglect, abuse, disease and violence. Wilson said if Canada wanted to make real progress it could not focus on this for just a week.

“I think it’s extremely important that continued and sustained, nonpartisan response and prioritization of resources is needed to do this work and all that is being addressed under that broad banner of reconciliation.”

The 94 Calls to Action were preliminary released just a few months before the 2015 election. Speaking then as leader of the Commons’ third party, Trudeau pledged to implement every single one.

As prime minister, Trudeau has not backed away from his commitment, but he has also come far short of living up to it.

Cindy Blackstock, executive director of the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society, said not only has Trudeau failed to enact most Calls to Action, he was actively working against them.

“There still are more First Nations’ children in foster care than there were at the height of residential schools, as a result of Canada’s conduct,” she said.

In 2016, Blackstock’s organization won a case at the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal arguing the child welfare system was discriminating toward First Nations’ children.

The tribunal found the system’s funding structure incentivized removing children from their homes, rather than helping struggling parents. It ordered the government to provide \$40,000 to children who had been unfairly taken from their homes, which the government is challenging in court.

The government is also litigating a case on Jordan’s Principle, a concept it says it is committed to, which mandates that disputes between the federal and provincial governments over who pays shouldn’t delay First Nations children from receiving health or social support.

Blackstock said even though the TRC included Calls to Action on both of those issues, the government was challenging both in court.

“The number one call to action is equity in child welfare to keep families together. The third call to action is Jordan’s Principle, and Canada will be litigating against both of those issues in two weeks time.”

Blackstock said the 215 graves had galvanized the public’s attention, but worried the public, the media and politicians would stop paying attention.

She said when the court first ruled in 2016 that children in care were being discriminated against it made headlines, but they soon went away.

“The media covered it very well for a few days, and then it got knocked off a media circuit by a story of Trudeau elbowing another member of parliament in the House of Commons.”

Crown Indigenous Relations Minister Carolyn Bennett said her government was fully committed to all 94 calls.

“Absolutely. And I think that we have been able to achieve 80 per cent of the ones with federal or shared responsibility that either are completed or really well underway,” she said.

The government has achieved some and has put billions into improving child welfare, education and health care. Many of the calls fall outside the government’s jurisdiction asking provinces, municipalities and churches to take steps, she said.

The commissioners called on the Pope to apologize publicly for the Catholic church’s role in the system. Trudeau raised it with the Pope in 2017, but the church has so far declined to apologize.

Within hours of the TRC’s report being released, Trudeau made his pledge to implement all of the Calls to Action. But six years later, the federal government’s website seems to acknowledge they are far more difficult to fulfill.

For instance, the commissioners called for the repeal of section 43 of the criminal code, which allows parents to use reasonable force on their children. The Liberals have introduced no bill to take that step and the government's own tracking website says only the issue "raises differing and strongly held views across Canada."

When does the atrocious become an emergency? Bennett didn't offer a specific timeline to enact all the Calls to Action, but she insisted real progress was being made.

"I think a lot of Indigenous people feel that reconciliation is a journey not a destination," she said. "Canada will continue to have to be corrected to make sure that we are on a path of reconciliation."

She said she was hopeful Canadians would keep the pressure on governments at all levels to address the legacy of residential schools.

"Once you know the truth, you can't unknow the truth. And I think all Canadians are now joining the path of decolonization and healing and reconciliation."

Bennett defended the government's actions in the case Blackstock iwa leading. She said the government intended to compensate all of the children who were taken into care, but disagreed with the one-size fits all model that has been ordered.

"All children affected by the child and family services ruling will be compensated. At the moment it's a matter of how you do that."

NDP leader Jagmeet Singh said the Liberals have not made the Calls to Action a priority.

"It's been six years in power, they've done a fraction of the 94 and they shouldn't need to be pushed so hard to do it."

He said even the \$27 million released this week was only made available when the Kamloops story hit the news.

"It's pretty cynical of them to do it now, just after this horrible discovery when they could have done it years ago."

Indigenous Relations Minister Carolyn Bennett: "Canada will continue to have to be corrected to make sure that we are on a path of reconciliation." Indigenous Relations Minister Carolyn Bennett: "Canada will continue to have to be corrected to make sure that we are on a path of reconciliation."

Singh's party used their opposition day motion in the House on Thursday to call on the government to end its litigation over Jordan's Principle, the child welfare system and lawsuits with some residential school survivors and make real progress. He said when it comes for a vote next week it will be a test of the Liberals commitment.

"We want to see something real for indigenous people. It is not good enough to just express condolences. There are choices we can make today, and I'm hoping that this is a moment where we make this a priority."

Assembly of First Nations Chief Perry Bellegarde gave the government credit for the actions it had taken, spending \$40 billion on child welfare and education over the last six years and making other concrete steps, but he said the problems were generational and so would be the solution.

"That's going to take more than five fiscal years to close so we need continued investments over five, 10, 15, 20 years for us to get to the same starting line as everybody else in Canada."

Bellegarde said he hoped the public's attention didn't fade.

"We have to utilize this new energy and attention and focus to call on governments, all governments, federal and provincial and territorial, municipal and First Nations, to work together to implement all 94 Calls to Action."

He said the graves of 215 children were history talking and Canadians needed to listen.

"It's like the children have woken everybody up. It's almost like we were in a dark place, and now light is being shined on it. We have to take advantage."

Sudan Must Deliver Long-Awaited Justice by Ending Impunity for Atrocity Crimes in Darfur, International Criminal Court Prosecutor Tells Security Council (Relief Web) June 9, 2021

Creation of Transitional Justice Commission Underway, Sudan's Representative Says

Sudan must now fully seize its critical role in delivering long-awaited justice to victims by ending impunity for perpetrators of

atrocities committed in Darfur almost 20 years ago, the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court told the Security Council today.

Briefing the 15-member organ for the final time in her current capacity as Prosecutor, Fatou Bensouda presented the thirty-third report on the situation in Darfur, pursuant to resolution 1593 (2005), highlighting achievements and challenges ahead. Today, “developments in Sudan amply demonstrate that the arm of justice is long and patient,” she said, recalling productive meetings with authorities and victims in affected communities during a recent visit to Darfur — the Court’s first in 15 years. Citing forward steps towards delivering justice, she said the Office had presented evidence at hearings in May for two suspects, and a new page had been turned towards constructive cooperation between the Court and the transitional Government of Sudan to address outstanding issues.

Still, the road ahead remains long and fraught with dangers, she said. The transitional Government must now tangibly demonstrate that the new Sudan is now a full-fledged member of the international community that has joined the fight against impunity and is fully committed to justice and the rule of law. Almost all the suspects are in the custody of the Government of Sudan, and there is no legal impediment to their surrender to Court. Raising several concerns, she said a volatile security situation in some areas of Darfur has seen tribal fighting and armed clashes between Government forces and armed rebel groups contribute to large-scale displacements and deaths. She also expressed dismay at reports indicating an increase in incidents of sexual and gender-based violence against women and girls.

At the same time, she said, the situation in Darfur is a clear demonstration of how the framers of the Rome Statute system envisaged the Court and the Security Council working together towards the twin goals of justice and peace. The Council’s referral of the Darfur situation to the Court in 2005 — the first of its kind related to atrocities — brought hope to the victims by sending a clear message: justice is not only important in its own right, but also has a multiplier effect on achieving sustainable peace, she said. (See Press Release SC/8351.)

“Justice and accountability in Sudan, including Darfur, cannot be achieved without maintaining security and stability for vulnerable communities,” she said, calling on Council members and regional partners to help Sudan break this troubling cycle of violence. Indeed, the support of all United Nations Member States in restoring and maintaining lasting peace in Sudan remains as important today as it was 16 years ago, she said, adding that: “I trust that the recent progress that has been made in the Darfur situation, after so many years of shattered promises and disappointment, will serve as a beacon of hope to the victims of atrocities in other situation countries, as well.”

In the ensuing discussion, many Council members voiced concerns about chronic violence, with some calling for Sudan to meet its obligations to the responsibility to protect civilians. Many commended recent positive steps, including the operationalization of Sudan’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission and a Special Court for Darfur crimes.

Calling for international support for such steps, Kenya’s delegate highlighted a recent African Union Peace and Security Council meeting recognizing the readiness of Sudan’s transitional Government to address justice-related issues. The representative of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, acknowledging current national efforts, said Sudan bears primary responsibility for protecting its citizens as well as for investigating and prosecuting atrocities.

Council members whose States are not party to the Rome Statute and do not recognize the Court shared their perspectives. China’s delegate emphasized that the Court should follow the principle of fully respecting the sovereignty of the Government of Sudan. India’s delegate, recognizing Sudan’s efforts to deliver justice, called on the international community to support the nation in its political transition. The United States representative, expressing full support for the Court’s investigations, called on the transitional Government to honour its obligations under the Juba Peace Agreement and resolution 1593 (2005).

Sudan’s representative said that ensuring justice for crimes committed in Darfur is a priority for the transitional Government. Citing a range of steps being taken, he said work is under way to establish a transitional justice commission whose tasks will include, among other things, revealing the truth, providing restitution and pursuing reconciliation. Once established, the commission will conduct an expanded dialogue to ensure that it fulfils the expectations of victims and achieves the spirit of justice, he said.

Also delivering statements were representatives of Mexico, Tunisia, Norway, the United Kingdom, Niger, Ireland, Viet Nam, France, Russian Federation and Estonia.

The meeting began at 10:02 a.m. and ended at 11:35 a.m.

Briefing

FATOU BENSOU DA, Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, presented the thirty-third report on the situation in Darfur, pursuant to resolution 1593 (2005). Briefing the Council for the final time in her current capacity as Prosecutor, she said the situation in Darfur is a clear demonstration of how the framers of the Rome Statute system envisaged the Court and

the Security Council to work together towards the twin goals of justice and peace. The Council's referral of the Darfur situation to the Court in 2005 — the first of its kind related to atrocity crimes — brought hope to the victims by sending a clear message: justice is not only important in its own right, but also has a multiplier effect on achieving sustainable peace.

Outlining recent achievements, she said “developments in Sudan amply demonstrate that the arm of justice is long and patient”, recalling the productive meetings she held with victims and Sudanese authorities during a recent visit to Darfur — the Court's first in 15 years. The Court and the Government of Sudan have turned a new page in their relationship, with constructive dialogue and cooperation replacing the old days of hostilities. Following the conclusion of a Memorandum of Understanding on 14 February, her team has undertaken investigative activities in Sudan and begun to prepare to go to Darfur soon. She remained confident that the Sudanese authorities, the United Nations and its entities will continue to extend the same excellent cooperation and support to her successor as they have done to provide invaluable support to the Court's work and her recent visit to Darfur.

However, the road ahead remains long and fraught with dangers, she continued. Accountability remains critical for lasting peace. During her recent visit, she said she had conveyed to Sudanese officials, including the Prime Minister, the wishes victims had expressed for the four outstanding warrants to be executed and the suspects handed over to the Court. Stressing the urgent need for Ahmad Muhammad Harun to be transferred to Court custody, she said the Government must tangibly demonstrate that the new Sudan is now a full-fledged member of the international community that has joined the fight against impunity and is fully committed to justice and the rule of law. Almost all the suspects are in the custody of the Government of Sudan, and there is no legal impediment to their surrender to Court.

Recalling that her visit to Darfur resulted in pledges by the Walis or Governors of the three states she visited to support the Office and the Court in pursuit of justice, she said meetings with affected communities provided a unique opportunity to manage victims' expectations and explain what the Court is capable of, what it does and what it cannot do. However, more work remains to be done in this regard. Pointing to other gains, she said that between 24 and 26 May, the Pre-Trial Chamber II convened the confirmation of charges hearing for Mr. Abd-Al-Rahman, during which the Office presented evidence in order to demonstrate that there are substantial grounds to believe that the suspect was responsible for all 31 counts charged in relation to crimes alleged to have been committed in Kodoom, Bindisi, Mukjar, Deleig and surrounding areas between August 2003 and March 2004.

However, she regretted to note that the security situation in some areas of Darfur remains volatile, with continued tribal fighting and armed clashes between Government forces and armed rebel groups contributing to large-scale displacements and deaths. Dismayed by reports indicating an increase in incidents of sexual and gender-based violence against women and girls, especially internally displaced persons, she said these despicable crimes must be denounced. “Justice and accountability in Sudan, including Darfur, cannot be achieved without maintaining security and stability for vulnerable communities,” she said, calling on Council members and regional partners to help Sudan break this troubling cycle of violence.

The Court's success to date stems from broad support, she said, thanking all stakeholders, including the Security Council, State parties and non-State parties to the Rome Statute and civil society, for their assistance. The referral of the Darfur situation to the Office in 2005, the first of its kind, was a landmark development in the fight to end impunity for perpetrators of atrocity crimes. The support of all United Nations Member States in restoring and maintaining lasting peace in Sudan, by promoting the rule of law and protecting human rights, remains as important today as it was 16 years ago, she said, adding that: “I trust that the recent progress that has been made in the Darfur situation, after so many years of shattered promises and disappointment, will serve as a beacon of hope to the victims of atrocity crimes in other situation countries, as well.”

Statements

JUAN RAMÓN DE LA FUENTE RAMIREZ (Mexico) emphasized that implementing the Juba Peace Agreement is a priority for achieving lasting peace. Everyone must work towards that goal. He appealed for the surrender of wanted individuals, and in the case of Abdallah Banda Abakaer Nourain, urged Sudan and countries in the region to do more to locate, arrest and render him to the International Criminal Court. Underscoring the need to collect evidence, he said that he hoped to see even closer cooperation between the Court and UNITAMS and United Nations agencies in Sudan, particularly in terms of logistical support. He went on to appeal for a cessation of violence in Darfur, which is an obstacle to the collection of evidence on the ground.

ALI CHERIF (Tunisia) said that his country is following with satisfaction developments in Sudan and salutes the transitional Government's tireless efforts to ensure harmony across Sudanese society. He commended the fact that peace and justice are proceeding hand in hand in Darfur and welcomed ongoing direct talks in Juba between the transitional Government and the Sudan's People Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N). Noting that relations between the transitional Government and the Court have shifted to a higher level, he said that Tunisia supports efforts by the Office of the Prosecutor to gather more on-site evidence and to help achieve justice by working closely with victims and affected communities in Darfur.

TRINE SKARBOEVIK HEIMERBACK (Norway) welcomed the Prosecutor's landmark visit to Darfur, while voicing concern about the still-precarious security situation in some parts of that state and condemning all human rights violations and abuses, including sexual and gender-based violence and violence directed towards children. Large-scale displacement of the civilian population also remains of particular concern, she said, emphasizing that the victims of atrocities in Darfur deserve justice. "There will be no lasting peace in Sudan until there is accountability for the crimes that have been committed during the long years of conflict," she said, welcoming the confirmation of the charges hearing held by the International Criminal Court's Pre-Trial Chamber in the case against the Sudanese militia leader Kushayb. Praising Sudan's engagement with the Court, she urged the Government to transfer the remaining individuals for whom there are arrest warrants, echoing Ms. Bensouda's call to have Ahmad Muhammad Harun transferred to the Court in parallel with Mr. Kushayb and calling specifically for Mr. Banda to surrender.

THOMAS RATHMELL WOODROFFE (United Kingdom) said the continued work of the Prosecutor and the Court are ensuring that accountability is achieved. Given the current situation on the ground, he urged the Government to protect civilians and their safety. Welcoming the Prosecutor's historic visit, he said such positive developments attest to, among other things, the Government's cooperation with the Court. He urged the Government to continue to cooperate, including conducting a joint trial for Mr. Harun and Mr. Raman instead of trying them separately, with a view to minimizing the traumatization of victims. He called for the surrender of Mr. Banda. More broadly, he called on Sudan to continue its efforts to address the concerns of the Sudanese people.

CATHERINE NYABOKE NYAKOE (Kenya) noted positive steps Sudan is taking to ensure its national institutional and legal frameworks are supportive of international efforts — as mandated by Council resolution 1593 (2005) — while stressing that those steps must be reciprocated. In its April meeting, the African Union Peace and Security Council acknowledged the readiness of Sudan's transitional Government to address issues relating to transitional justice, including accountability for human rights violations, through a truth and reconciliation process, and called on African States to share their experiences and best practices. Describing that exchange as a critical step, he welcomed the operationalization of Sudan's Truth and Reconciliation Commission in relation to Darfur, as well as the Special Court for Darfur crimes. Calling for international support for such efforts, he recalled the Council's invitation to the Court and the African Union to discuss practical arrangements that will facilitate the Court's work — including the possibility of conducting proceedings in the region under resolution 1593 (2005) — and asked the Prosecutor to outline the status of her Office's engagement with the regional bloc to that end.

NIANDOU AOUGI (Niger) encouraged the Court to continue its constructive relationship with the transitional Government in Sudan. Turning to recent judicial activities, he welcomed the decision to ensure the participation of victims. Concerned about the widespread displacement of civilians, he also deplored the loss of human lives in connection with clashes between Sudan's military forces and armed groups. As a Council member, Niger has prioritized upholding the rights of women and children, he said, calling for the responsibility to protect to be upheld. He called on the Sudanese transitional Government to further strengthen its cooperation with the International Criminal Court.

DAI BING (China) expressed hope that the current good momentum advances, as the situation on the ground is largely stable. However, he called on the Government of Sudan to work towards scaling up capacity and addressing the root causes of conflict in light of recent sporadic clashes. He also emphasized that the International Criminal Court should follow the principle of fully respecting the sovereignty of the Government of Sudan in all regards.

GARETH BYNOE (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines) encouraged Sudan's transitional Government to stay on the progressive path and go forward with reforms, including finalizing the establishment of the Transitional Legislative Council. While Sudan faces lingering socioeconomic challenges and intercommunal challenges, its tenacity will permit it to forge ahead. International donors should continue to support Sudan and increase their contributions to the National Humanitarian Response Plan. He emphasized the importance of full and timely implementation of the Constitutional Document and the Juba Peace Agreement, adding that Sudan bears primary responsibility for protecting its citizens, as well as for investigating and prosecuting atrocities.

GERALDINE BRYNE NASON (Ireland) hoped that the positive engagement between the International Criminal Court and the transitional Government of Sudan during the last six months will mark the start of a strong relationship between them. At the same time, however, Sudan has an ongoing obligation to carry out four outstanding arrest warrants and surrender the remaining suspects to the Court. Noting that Sudan's transition remains fragile, she voiced deep concern about the killing of civilians and reports of sexual and gender-based violence in Darfur. "The pattern of violence and perpetration indicates that the power and impunity dynamics, which underlay the war in Darfur and the current situation investigation, have not yet been effectively addressed," she said. She went on to encourage the transitional Government to prioritize the establishment of transitional justice mechanisms under the Juba Peace Agreement, as part of Sudan's broader democratic transition.

DANG DINH QUY (Viet Nam) stressed the critical need to implement the Juba Peace Agreement and make progress on Sudan's transitional process. In that regard, UNITAMS and the Government should continue to work closely together. He

welcomed dialogue between Sudan's transitional Government and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North — Abdel Aziz al-Hilu faction and called on other remaining armed groups in Darfur to join the peace process. The Government should also further promote women's participation at the national and local levels. Turning to Sudan's humanitarian and economic challenges, he said the Government must do more to protect civilians and take steps to address intercommunal violence in Darfur. Sudan should also have easier access to debt relief and international financial facilities. Noting the Prosecutor's latest report, he said that establishing accountability for violations of international humanitarian law and serious criminal acts must be carried out in line with the fundamental principles of international law, including respect for a State's independence and sovereignty.

JEFFREY DELAURENTIS (United States), recalling that the Council referred the situation in Sudan to the International Criminal Court 16 years ago, underscored his country's full support for the Court's investigations and called on the transitional Government to honour its obligations under the Juba Peace Agreement and resolution 1593 (2005) to cooperate with the Court. He recalled that, in May, the Council detailed its concern about rising intercommunal violence in Darfur and the need for the authorities to address underlying issues, including gross violations of human rights, lack of trust between local communities and the indifference of the former regime in Khartoum towards Sudanese citizens who simply wanted a better future for their children and families. Going forward, the Council must continue to underscore the need to build lasting peace and security, promote human rights and hold those responsible for insecurity to account. At the same time, the transitional Government bears a responsibility to protect all Sudanese people, he said, adding that ending a culture of impunity is an important step in that direction.

DIARRA DIME-LABILLE (France), describing the Prosecutor's visit to Khartoum as historic, said that building a durable and inclusive peace in Sudan will not be possible without justice. She urged the transitional Government to grant International Criminal Court investigators access to Darfur without delay or hindrance and with satisfactory security conditions. Dialogue between the Court and the Sudanese authorities must be intensified and consider all possibilities set out in the Rome Statute. The resurgence of intercommunal violence in Darfur underscores the fragility of the security situation, she said, condemning in particular human rights violations and gender-based and sexual violence against women and girls. She went on to say that Sudan's national commission for transitional justice, proposed in the Juba Peace Agreement, should be set up without delay.

GENNADY V. KUZMIN (Russian Federation) said his delegation's position on the work of the International Criminal Court has not undergone any changes.

RAVINDRA RAGUTTAHALLI (India), noting that his delegation is not a member of the International Criminal Court nor a signatory of the Rome Statute, said the Government of Sudan has shown a willingness to address issues relating to transitional justice, including accountability for human rights violations, through a truth and reconciliation process. The parties to the Juba Peace Agreement have also agreed to establish a truth and reconciliation commission and a Special Court for Darfur Crimes, whose jurisdiction will include genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes since 2002. Going forward, stakeholders must engage in outstanding issues and find solutions. All assistance should be given to Sudan in its political transition, he said, urging the international community to demonstrate its support. For its part, India has assisted in capacity-building and other areas.

GERT AUVÄÄRT (Estonia), Council President for June, spoke in his national capacity, calling on all States to uphold the provisions of the Rome Statute. Hopefully, the Prosecutor's recent visit paves the way for strengthening cooperation in pursuit of justice. Further cooperation between the Government of Sudan and the International Criminal Court may be warranted to ensure greater accountability. The four suspects with outstanding arrest warrants related to atrocity crimes must be surrendered to the Court without delay. Concerned about the security situation, he called on the Sudanese authorities to accelerate efforts to enhance the protection of civilians and restoration of the rule of law in Darfur. He expressed hope that Sudan will be cooperating closely with UNITAMS to help to build these capacities, and remained hopeful that by the next reporting period, there will be further concrete positive steps taken to provide justice to the victims of crimes committed. Justice needs to play a central role in Sudan's transition, he said, adding that: "The Sudanese people have demanded a civilian Government, justice, and security; it must be our common aim to support these demands."

Ms. BENSOUDA took the floor a second time to thank Council members for their kind words and to express appreciation for the work of her team in the Office of the Prosecutor. "Where I have fallen short, it was not for lack of trying," she said.

MOHAMED IBRAHIM MOHAMED ELBAHI (Sudan) said that his country's transitional Government is sparing no effort to uphold justice in Darfur because peace and justice go hand in hand. Following the signing of the Juba Peace Agreement in October 2020, the transitional Government is working closely with all parties to that instrument to achieve stability and a lasting and comprehensive peace. At the same time, Khartoum is also pursuing dialogue with those outside the peace process. He recalled that justice is one of the key themes of the Juba Peace Agreement, which underscored the need to cooperate with the International Criminal Court and adopt transitional justice arrangements. At the same time, the transitional Government is implementing a national plan on the protection of civilians, with the participation of signatories to the Juba Peace Agreement.

Ensuring justice for crimes committed in Darfur is a priority for the transitional Government, he said, recalling that the two sides signed a memorandum of understanding to set up a framework for cooperation and to facilitate the Court's work in the country. He quoted Abdallah Hamduk, Prime Minister of Sudan, as saying last week that the transitional Government is working with the International Criminal Court and victim groups to find the best ways to bring wanted suspects to justice before the Court.

Sudan continues to work on improving living conditions in Darfur, which is undergoing a fundamental shift from conflict to peacebuilding, he added. To that end, it is working on the establishment of a transitional justice commission that would deal with cases in which transitional judicial methods would be difficult to use. Its work will include revealing the truth, establishing justice, providing restitution and pursuing reconciliation. Once established, this commission will carry out an expanded dialogue to ensure that it fulfils the expectations of victims and achieves the spirit of justice.

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Terrorism

Protection call for Burkina Faso civilians after terror attack leaves 132 dead (U.N. News) June 7, 2021

The tweet by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights followed condemnation by UN Secretary-General António Guterres of the terror attack in the north of Burkina Faso, which reportedly also left seven children dead and displaced hundreds.

The outrage, which was reported by the Government, is one of the deadliest in years in the west African nation, where three days of mourning are underway.

Reports indicate that the unidentified assailants initially targeted a gold mine near a village in the Province of Yagha, close the border with Niger, before attacking the community's market.

Unacceptable toll In a message issued by his spokesperson, Mr. Guterres condemned the "unacceptable human toll" of the incident; he also underscored the "urgent need" to redouble support to Member States fighting the growing threat of violent extremism throughout the Sahel.

Echoing that call, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for West Africa and the Sahel, Mahamat Saleh Annadif, reaffirmed the UN's solidarity with the Government and people of Burkina Faso and their efforts to fight terrorism and consolidate peace and development.

Such attacks have become relatively commonplace in parts of the Central Sahel, where the UN humanitarian office OCHA said that they have increased eight fold between 2015 and 2020.

Daily reality "Security incidents, attacks, and kidnappings are a daily reality for millions of civilians", OCHA said in a recent online situation update, which highlighted how communities "are caught between armed groups, intercommunal violence and military operations that severely impact their access to basic social services, livelihoods and assistance".

The UN humanitarian office noted that more than 1.1 million people are now internally displaced in Burkina Faso, where conflict and violence have continued to force people to leave their homes since the beginning of the year, particularly in the regions of Sahel and Centre-Nord.

In April, clashes between armed groups and security forces – in addition to attacks against communities and pillaging also reached northern and eastern regions, prompting further displacement and almost 26,000 newly displaced in March.

Highlighting the growing threat of violent extremists in central African nations, OCHA noted in the Lake Chad region, violent attacks tripled between 2015 and 2020.

The Man Accused Of Hitting A Muslim Family With His Car Is Facing Terrorism Charges (NPR) June 14, 2021

Prosecutors laid terrorism charges Monday against a man accused of driving down and killing four members of a Muslim family in London, Ontario.

The prosecution said Nathaniel Veltman's four counts of first-degree murder constitute an act of terrorism and prosecutors have upgraded those charges under Canada's criminal code. Police allege the incident was a planned and premeditated attack targeting Muslims.

Veltman also faces one count of attempted murder due to terrorism activity.

The upgraded charges were laid as Veltman made a brief court appearance via video Monday morning. He has yet to enter a plea.

Salman Afzaal, 46, his 44-year-old wife Madiha Salman, their 15-year-old daughter Yumna and her 74-year-old grandmother, Talat Afzaal were killed while out for an evening walk on June 6.

The couple's nine-year-old son, Fayez, was seriously injured but is expected to recover.

Saboor Khan, a friend of the family, said upgrading the charges against Veltman was "the right thing to do."

"The family and the community has been terrorized and many of us are afraid to leave our homes," Khan said.

A funeral for the family drew hundreds of mourners to the Islamic Centre of Southwest Ontario over the weekend.

Veltman's next court date is scheduled for June 21.

Andrew Dymock: Neo-Nazi guilty of terrorism charges (BBC News) June 11, 2021

A politics student who called for the "extermination" of Jewish people has been found guilty of 12 terrorism charges.

Andrew Dymock, from Bath, established the banned right-wing groups System Resistance Network (SRN) and Sonnenkrieg Division.

He also published an article stating that Jewish people were a "cancer".

The 24-year-old was convicted at the Old Bailey and is due to be sentenced on 24 June.

From his parents' house in Bath and his student bedroom in Aberystwyth he established two now proscribed groups.

Dymock believed in what is known as the "Siege" ideology which advocates rape as a political weapon.

The groups claimed they were committed to using violence to end democracy and drive non-white people out of Britain.

The son of two academics, Stella and Dr David Dymock, a professor of dentistry at Bristol University, Andrew Dymock was first exposed by a BBC investigation in 2018.

As the verdicts were delivered, he told jurors "thank you for killing me".

In total he was convicted of 15 offences:

Five counts of encouraging terrorism
Four of disseminating terrorist publications
Two of terrorist fundraising
One of possessing material useful to a terrorist
One of possessing racially inflammatory material
One of stirring up racial hatred
One of stirring up hatred on the grounds of sexual orientation
Det Ch Supt Martin Snowden, head of counter terrorism policing north east, said as he had established two terrorist organisations, Dymock was a "key leader" and his conviction was a "key step in protecting the UK".

The neo-Nazi given away by his rainbow sheets
The trial heard he used the SRN website to publish an article stating Jewish people should be exterminated.

He stated a "racial holy war is inevitable" and "every stabbing, bombing, shooting further plays into our hands".

Dymock had also engaged in terrorist fundraising by seeking and receiving financial donations via the SRN website using a dedicated Paypal account he created.

He used the SRN Twitter account to share extremist texts and called for "total war".

Dymock denied responsibility for the accounts, claiming he was set up by his now former partner, who had failed to recruit him to join banned terrorist group National Action (NA).

Prosecutor Jocelyn Ledward earlier told jurors he was not being prosecuted for holding racist, anti-Semitic or homophobic beliefs, or for his "adherence to a neo-Nazi creed".

She said: "Rather, he is facing prosecution for his encouragement of terrorist activity, of violence, as a means to shape society in accordance with his beliefs, rather than through free speech and democracy."

An examination of Dymock's computer revealed longstanding extremist views dating back to when he was 17, including a Google translation of the words "Kill all of the Jews".

On 8 October, 2017, he wrote about the creation of SRN on a right-wing webpage stating the group was "focused on building a group of loyal men, true to the cause of national socialism and establishing the fascist state through revolution".

Jurors heard how he was expelled from SRN in late February 2018.

Dymock was arrested at Gatwick Airport the morning after a BBC News investigation in December 2018 exposed his extremist activities.

Police found extreme right-wing literature in his luggage along with clothing bearing neo-Nazi logos.

He also had books, flags, clothes and badges with links to the extreme right wing in his bedroom at home and university.

Dymock claimed he was "set up" by others, and that material linking him to content on the SRN website and Twitter account was "planted in his possession without his knowledge".

At trial he denied being a neo-Nazi and told police: "In fact, I am bisexual but lean towards being homosexual, in direct conflict with Nazism."

He claimed he was instead the victim of a conspiracy.

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Piracy

Two persons shot dead in pirates' attack in Rivers (TheNEWS) By Okafor Ofiebor

June 3, 2021

Two persons were shot dead after their boats were attacked by sea pirates on Ke community waterways in Degema local government area of Rivers State last week, it has been gathered.

The two persons were killed in two separate attacks on boats returning to Port Harcourt through Ke Community waterways.

According to an eyewitness who is also the Chairman of Ke Community Development Committee, CDC, Daibi Ekine, the pirates attacked the two community boats and stole the two 75 horsepower boat engines before running away.

"The incidents of Sea piracy attacks are too rampant in our waterways, especially in our territory. That is why we have been calling on the Rivers State Government to deploy security agencies to come to our aid so that we can travel safely".

Our correspondent reports that consistent attacks by pirates have become a bane to marine transportation in coastal communities areas of the Niger Delta.

Besides, lives that are prematurely cut short, goods, speedboats worth millions of naira have also been lost to the pirates. An average Speed boat engine, depending on horsepower, cost not less than N2.5million.

In July 2019, Governor Nyesom Wike during the launch of "Operation Sting," the State security outfit, said his administration has provided the right logistics and equipment to support war against sea pirates on the states' waterways.

He said: "76 patrol/operational vehicles fitted with communication gadgets; 8 armoured fitted gunboats, to tighten coastal security and protect our waterways from the activities of criminals; 2Armoured Personnel Carriers for Policeswift responses

actions; 450 hand-held mobile radios to enhance communication among the security operatives and overcome the current wide gaps in intelligence gathering”.

The Governor added that the State Government has established operational bases in all the 23 Local Government Areas of the State to strengthen the command and control structures of the initiative and ensure effective coordination and synergy between the State headquarters, the Local Government Areas and the communities to achieve the common objectives of providing comprehensive security cover for the our State.

He said, “To achieve quick, timely and effective response we have established 30 toll free emergency call centres with capacity to support and transmit 30 concurrent calls from the public during distress situations and or during ongoing criminal activities in or around our neighbourhoods”.

He said that the state is not yet as peaceful as the administration desires, hence the renewed effort to stamp criminality.

Governor Wike specifically assured riverine communities that his administration will ensure their safety. He said that “Operation Sting” has been mandated to work on security in the waterways.

Pirates seize 4 Koreans, 1 Filipino crew off Benin (Gulf Times) June 3, 2021

Pirates kidnapped four Koreans and one Filipino crew member from a tuna-fishing vessel close to Benin in the Gulf of Guinea earlier this week, Ghanaian police said.

The Gulf of Guinea, a key shipping route extending from Senegal to Angola, accounted for the vast majority of maritime crew abductions last year, with pirates targeting commercial vessels.

The Ghana-registered boat was attacked on Tuesday although the Ghana navy recovered the vessel and rescued some crew members, Felix Charles Asare, crime officer for the Marine Police Unit told AFP late on Wednesday.

‘Efforts are under way to rescue the abducted crew members,’ he said.

‘Information we've gathered from the crew members indicate that the pirates took away five other members made up of four Koreans and a Filipino.’

He said Ghana's navy had been on the alert in the country's territorial waters as pirates intensified attacks.

Armed pirates kidnapped five other seamen two weeks ago, stealing valuables after holding the crew for six hours before releasing them, he said.

Major international shipping and maritime companies last month called for a coalition to combat piracy in the Gulf of Guinea, including signatories from Europe, Japan, China and India.

Several EU nations often have naval vessels in the area, but pirate gangs, mostly Nigerians, are increasingly attacking beyond Nigeria's coastal waters, where they know ships are more vulnerable.

The Gulf of Guinea accounted for more than 95 percent of global maritime kidnappings last year 130 out of 135 cases, according to the International Maritime Bureau, which monitors security at sea.

Only 10 Maritime Crime Convictions Secured In 2 Years, Says Buhari (Daily Trust) By Muideen Olaniyi June 10, 2021

President Muhammadu Buhari says the Federal Government has secured 10 convictions for various maritime offences since the Suppression of Piracy and other Maritime Offences Act was signed into law in June 2019.

President Buhari said this at the official flag-off of the Integrated National Security and Waterways Protection Infrastructure in Nigeria also known as the Deep Blue Project at the ENL Terminal, Apapa Port, Lagos.

The President said the flag-off of the project marked an important milestone in the collective effort to tackle security challenges in the form of piracy and other maritime crimes in Nigeria and the Gulf of Guinea, stressing that the intervention will facilitate a conducive environment for the maritime sector to thrive and contribute to the diversification of the Nigerian economy.

“I am confident that the project, which provides a robust maritime security architecture, will enhance maritime domain awareness capability and improve law enforcement action, particularly in the prosecution of suspects under the Suppression

of Piracy and other Maritime Offences Act which I signed into law in June 2019.

“This Flag-off is an important step in the continuing shift in strategic action about regional maritime security.

“It will serve as a benchmark for member states in the Gulf of Guinea and other relevant stakeholders to further develop innovative strategies and align efforts with the subsisting framework to improve maritime security in the region,” he said.

Buhari, who called for greater collaborations among countries in the Gulf of Guinea to secure Nigeria’s waters and beyond, said the assemblage of the new maritime security assets was coming at a critical time when global discussions are centered on piracy activities and the new dimension it has taken in the region.

The President, who assured of government’s commitment to ensure the project’s sustainability in a statement issued by his spokesman, Femi Adesina, urged all critical stakeholders to work collectively for the greater benefit of all Nigerians, member states of the Gulf of Guinea and the global maritime community.

President Buhari, who witnessed the demonstration of a range of assets to tackle maritime security, supervised the naming of two Vessels, Deep Blue Abuja (DB-Abuja) and Deep Blue Lagos (DB-Lagos) by the Minister of State, Transportation, Senator Gbemisola Saraki.

Nigeria Launches Deep Blue Campaign to Stop Regional Piracy (The Maritime Executive) June 10, 2021

Nigeria marked the official launch of its highly anticipated Integrated National Security and Waterways Protection Infrastructure, also known as the Deep Blue Project. The country’s leaders gathered to show off some of the \$195 million of equipment that will be used in a coordinated effort with its primary objective of securing Nigerian waters along the Gulf of Guinea and the country’s oil infrastructure with a coordinated combination of land, sea, and air forces.

Leading up to the launch ceremonies, Nigeria’s Maritime Security Unit (MSU) of the Deep Blue Project, comprising personnel from the Nigerian Navy, Nigerian Army, Nigerian Air Force, Nigeria Police, and Department of State Services, conducted simulation exercises. Their goal was to demonstrate their preparedness for full deployment to fight the ongoing menace of piracy, mostly emerging from the Nigeria's Niger Delta region.

According to Director General of the Nigerian Maritime Administration and Safety Agency (NIMASA), Dr. Bashir Jamoh, “With the deployment of the assets of the Deep Blue Project, we are entering another level of national security designed for total spectrum maritime security and better domain awareness using some of the latest technology. This effort to secure our waters will give Nigerians more leverage to harness the enormous resources of our maritime environment and aid the drive towards economic diversification.”

Security services have repeatedly warned recently of the increasing threats and dangers in the region from piracy. The Gulf of Guinea has seen the highest number of kidnappings and assaults on ships along with oil theft on land, robbery, and human and drug trafficking.

The Deep Blue Project is the first integrated maritime security strategy in West and Central Africa aimed at the ongoing threats of piracy and robbery. Among the assets that Nigeria will be deploying are 16 armored vehicles for coastal patrol, two special mission vessels, 17 fast interceptor boats, two special mission aircraft for surveillance of the country’s exclusive economic zone (EEZ), three special mission helicopters for search and rescue operations, and four unmanned aerial vehicles. The Maritime Security Unit is made up of 600 specially trained troops.

Coordinating the efforts, the Nigerians have set up a central command and control center based in Lagos, which will also liaise with other regional security efforts. Nigeria also admits that prosecution of suspected criminals was a challenge in the past, but says that the Suppression of Piracy and Other Maritime Offenses (SPOMO) Act passed by its National Assembly will now provide legal backing for prosecution and punishment of offenders.

In addition to questions if Nigeria has the political will to truly confront piracy, security analysts have highlighted that the pirates are becoming more brazen and violent in their attacks. In January 2021, four armed assailants staged an attack on a box ship which was called the attack was well-coordinated and sophisticated that resulted in the death of one member of the crew and the abduction of 15 others. Recently, concerns have been raised that the pirates have been going after more targets including regional fishing vessels and operating further offshore, sometimes more than 200 nautical miles away from their camps in the Nigerian Delta.

While it is several years since plans for this initiative were first announced, the shipping industry welcomed the official launch of the program. In a joint statement from the leaders of shipping industry associations, the International Chamber of

Shipping, INTERTANKO, INTERCARGO, and BIMCO as well as the Oil Companies International Marine Forum, they congratulated Nigeria expressing their hope that it “will seriously impact on the ability of pirate groups to prey on merchant shipping.”

In May, responding to growing concerns and increasing attacks in the region, a task force of stakeholders from across the shipping industry released the Gulf of Guinea declaration on the Suppression of Piracy. Since the release of the declaration three weeks ago, over 320 organizations across the maritime industry including flag state administrations, ship owners, charterers, and shipping associations, all signed on committing themselves to tangibly supporting anti-piracy law enforcement efforts, all aimed at finally bringing an end to the dangers of shipping in the Gulf of Guinea.

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Gender-Based Violence

The Other Pandemic: Rape And Sexual Violence In War (Forbes) By Dr. Ewelina U. Ochab
June 14, 2021

June 19 marks the International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict. The day was established by the U.N. General Assembly in 2015 to shed light on the issue of conflict-related sexual violence. The sort of violence it focuses on includes: “rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, forced pregnancy, forced abortion, enforced sterilization, forced marriage and any other form of sexual violence of comparable gravity perpetrated against women, men, girls or boys that is directly or indirectly linked (temporally, geographically or causally) to a conflict.”

The date was deliberately chosen to commemorate UN Security Council Resolution 1820 (2008) which first recognized the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war, rather than an unintended consequence of war. The use of rape and sexual violence is a pandemic that is yet to be addressed comprehensively. It continues to be used across several conflicts, and currently there is little hope that the crime will ever be addressed, let alone prevented.

It is a weapon of war that aims to hurt and humiliate, and much more than that.

In Ethiopia the use of rape and sexual violence against ethnic Tigrayan women is considered to be a genocidal method to bring about the destruction of the community. There, reportedly, the perpetrators rape and gang rape the women, and then subsequently mutilate, having told their victims that “A Tigrayan womb should never give birth.”

In Cameroon’s Anglophone regions, women have been subjected to rape and sexual violence at the hands of armed separatists, military and civilians. The conflict, which has turned the region into a lawless one, is entering its fifth year. It leaves women unprotected and vulnerable to further such atrocities. Between February and December 2020, the U.N. documented 4,300 incidents of rape and sexual violence, and gender-based violence in the region, and between January and March 2021, nearly 500 cases of rape and sexual violence and 500 cases of gender-based violence.

In Syria, close to 3,000 Yazidi women and children continue to be enslaved having been abducted by Daesh in August 2014 (from Sinjar, Iraq). If they are still alive, the Yazidi women and girls most likely continue to be subjected to rape and sexual and physical abuse. They need urgent rescue.

In Iraq and Myanmar, survivors of rape and sexual violence are left without adequate medical assistance and so continue to re-live their experiences from years ago.

This does not even take into consideration the use of rape and sexual violence outside of conflict areas. For example, in the case of Uyghur women in camps.

This pandemic does not have a miraculous jab or cure that can give hope to all those suffering that the future will be more prosperous. Despite several international legal duties, U.N. resolutions, voluntary pledges and so on, the use of these crimes continues. While considering current trends it is very difficult to eliminate the crime altogether, there are steps that can be taken to deter the perpetrators and to support the survivors.

Among others, the perpetrators must be brought to justice for their crimes. For example, despite the use of rape and sexual

violence by Daesh, the perpetrators have been prosecuted predominately for terror related crimes, not rape and sexual violence (and neither for genocide that in the case of Yazidis would also incorporate rape and sexual violence). This sends a horrific message that the rape and sexual violence, the pain and suffering of the women and girls, is irrelevant. Understandably, there are issues with the existing laws that accommodate this approach. A society which is being told that marital rape is not a crime or that a wife can be disciplined will add to the ideologies that enable such atrocities against women and girls as those perpetrated against Yazidis and others. These need to be addressed to combat any perception that a woman can be subjected to any sort of violence by her husband.

Survivors of such atrocities must be provided with comprehensive assistance, whether for their physical or mental consequences of the rape and sexual violence, but also with assistance that will help them to move on and rebuild their lives crushed by the horrific experiences. No woman should walk alone in her suffering after the experience of rape and sexual violence.

The pandemic of rape and sexual violence cannot be accepted as given. It will not change over night. However, small steps can and must be taken now.

Underreported Crime of Sexual Violence in Conflict Cannot Be Allowed to ‘Slip Further into the Shadows’, Secretary-General Warns on International Day (ReliefWeb) June 15, 2021

Following is UN Secretary-General António Guterres’ message for the International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict, observed on 19 June:

Following is UN Secretary-General António Guterres’ message for the International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict, observed on 19 June:

Sexual violence in conflict is a cruel tactic of war, torture, terror and repression. It reverberates down generations and threatens both human and international security.

In places affected by conflict, the turmoil caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has made it even more difficult to hold perpetrators of sexual violence to account. At the same time, survivors face new obstacles to reporting crimes and accessing support services.

Even as we respond to the pandemic, we must investigate every case and maintain essential services for every survivor. We cannot allow this already underreported crime to slip further into the shadows. Perpetrators must be punished.

Investment in recovery from the pandemic must tackle the root causes of sexual and gender-based violence.

On this International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict, let’s resolve to uphold the rights and meet the needs of all survivors, as we work to prevent and end these horrific crimes.

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Commentary and Perspectives

The Nobel committee should resign over the atrocities in Tigray (The Guardian) By Kjetil Tronvoll
June 7, 2021

The war on Tigray in Ethiopia has been going on for months. Thousands of people have been killed and wounded, women and girls have been raped by military forces, and more than 2 million citizens have been forced out of their homes. Prime minister and Nobel peace prize laureate Abiy Ahmed stated that a nation on its way to “prosperity” would experience a few “rough patches” that would create “blisters”. This is how he rationalised what is alleged to be a genocide.

Nobel committee members have individual responsibility for awarding the 2019 peace prize to Abiy Ahmed, accused of waging the war in Tigray. The members should thus collectively resign their honourable positions at the Nobel committee in protest and defiance.

The committee justified awarding the Nobel to Ethiopia’s premier for his “efforts to achieve peace and international

cooperation, and in particular for his decisive initiative to resolve the border conflict with neighbouring Eritrea". Today, Eritrean forces, along with Ethiopia's federal and Amhara regional state forces are accused of war crimes and crimes against humanity in what Abiy characterises as a "law enforcement operation" in Tigray.

The war began last November, when federal soldiers entered Tigray alongside Eritrean forces, claiming the objective was to arrest the elected regional government and leaders of the Tigray People's Liberation Front party (TPLF) for rebellion. The Tigray leadership withdrew from the regional capital, Mekelle, into the mountains, with thousands of combat-ready troops. It was clear from the outset that war was inevitable, as Tigrayans would not submit to the centralising policies of Abiy, which they believe undermine their constitutionally enshrined autonomy.

The campaign has become increasingly repugnant. The US has criticised Abiy for ethnic cleansing. Numerous massacres of civilians have been revealed, and rape of women and girls has been systematically carried out to "cleanse the blood line", as soldiers have reportedly said, and break spirits. Civil infrastructure, such as hospitals, water facilities, schools and universities have been direct targets of bombings and looting, with the aim to destroy capacity to govern.

Even worse is the humanitarian consequence. Today, 5.2 million Tigrayans, about 85% of the region's population, need aid to survive, but it is not reaching them. Food and emergency assistance from the UN and international organisations is obstructed by federal red tape and Ethiopian and Eritrean soldiers. Hundreds of thousands are in danger of dying from starvation this summer. We may soon again see images of mass death in Tigray, similar to those from the famine that took place during the Ethiopian civil war and inspired the Live Aid concert in 1985.

Human rights experts believe there is reason to declare genocide in Tigray, when analysing the political intentions behind the systematic mass murders of civilians, sexual violence and more. The patriarch of the Ethiopian Orthodox church has said that the government is carrying out a genocide. The final legal conclusion must however be for a future international criminal tribunal.

What then is the responsibility of the Nobel committee towards someone who uses the prize to legitimise genocidal warfare against his own people? Did they undertake a comprehensive risk assessment before giving the prize to an incumbent prime minister who was not democratically elected in a country that has always been an authoritarian state? Or is this, in hindsight, something the committee could not have foreseen?

Already, in early 2019, the reforms in Ethiopia and the peace process with Eritrea were known to have lost momentum. Liberal political reforms in the country were backsliding. Some also warned that the peace prize itself could destabilise rather than consolidate the region.

After the war began, I had a call from a high-ranking Ethiopian official: "I will always hold the Nobel committee responsible for destroying our country," he said. "After Abiy received the peace prize, he viewed this as a recognition of his politics and would no longer listen to objections or the dangers of recentralised power in Ethiopia."

There is international criticism of Abiy's candidature and the committee's "non-stance" on any crimes against humanity by military forces under the command of a Nobel laureate. But the committee has stayed silent, carrying on a century's tradition of refusing to discuss the judging process. Last year, in reaction to Abiy's decision to postpone the 2020 elections indefinitely, the Nobel committee came out in defence of the laureate, reasserting its position on the prize. Now, after the outbreak of war, members of the committee remain disinclined to discuss their original assessment.

Initiatives by Ethiopian diaspora organisations to hold the Nobel committee legally liable for the award's consequences have further damaged the reputation of the Nobel prize.

On the guidelines enshrined in Nobel rules is that once a prize is awarded, it cannot be withdrawn. So how could the committee express its condemnation of the war and the politics of Abiy should it wish to? All members have an individual responsibility – it is not officially known whether any voted against. They should therefore acknowledge this, collectively resign, and let the Norwegian parliament appoint a new committee.

As a collective action, it would be perceived as taking responsibility for the error – and as a protest against the war.

At the same time, the Nobel Institute should upgrade its expertise, undertake comprehensive risk assessments and analyse relevant conflicts and contexts on which awards are based. It seems clear that procedures failed in awarding Abiy the prize.

In appointing a new committee, Norway's political parties must drop the tradition to nominate retired politicians. This would provide the much-needed arm's length between the prize and the Norwegian political elite. International members should be brought in, with expertise in what the prize is actually about: war and peace, international law, human rights. The Nobel name carries international weight and a committee with world-class capabilities should protect it.

Kjetil Tronvoll is professor of peace and conflict studies at Norway's Bjørknes University College, Oslo.

The discovery of unmarked children's graves in Canada has Indigenous people asking: how many more?

(The Guardian) By Cindy Blackstock and Pamela Palmater

June 9, 2021

Last month, the Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc First Nation found the remains of 215 children who had been buried in unmarked graves at the site of a former Indian residential school in British Columbia. Residential schools, which operated in Canada from 1883 to 1996, were government-funded, church-run institutions that took Indigenous children away from their families, with the aim of "[killing] the Indian in the child".

This was not just a metaphor. The site of the unmarked graves that were discovered was one of many that are believed to exist at or near more than 100 residential schools all over Canada. These graves were often visible from the windows of the schools. Some children were even forced to bury their own classmates.

While the federal government of Canada sent condolences, it continued to water down its commitment to reconciliation. It is currently in the process of litigation to avoid paying compensation to residential school survivors and First Nations children. The long-awaited government response to an inquiry into murdered and missing Indigenous women and girls – prompted by the hugely disproportionate rates of violence they suffer, itself amounting to a "Canadian genocide" – was seen as just a plan to make a plan.

Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), which ran from 2008 to 2015, heard testimony from thousands of residential school survivors, families and staff about widespread physical and sexual abuse; starvation and neglect; medical experimentation; torture and death. In its final report, the TRC issued 94 calls to action, which called for local and central governments, along with churches, to release documents about the deaths of children in these schools and make resources available to help locate all the graves. It was never acted upon, so Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc had to raise funds itself to find the children. The latest discovery was made using ground-penetrating radar.

Residential schools were designed by the federal government and operated by the churches as part of the government's "final solution to the Indian problem" – to quote a government official from 1907. The TRC documented at least 6,000 deaths in these schools but, given the lack of access to government and church documents, stated that the real figure was likely much higher. In 1907, Dr Peter Bryce, Canada's chief medical officer, had raised the alarm, stating that the death rate at residential schools was 8,000 for every 100,000, putting the total number of deaths closer to 12,000. We won't know until governments and churches fully disclose their documents. Neither governments nor the churches can argue that they did not know. Media at the time reported that "Indian boys and girls are dying like flies".

The Catholic church was responsible for operating about 60% of the Indian residential schools in Canada. Thus, it holds a significant number of documents and has chosen not to disclose them all. The federal government also purged more than 15 tonnes of documents, including 200,000 documents from Indian Affairs, between 1936 and 1944. Even today, the federal government is withholding thousands of unredacted documents from the St Anne's residential school survivors – records that survivors say prove their claims of abuse.

The residential school survivors participated in the TRC to save their grandchildren from the systemic discrimination and abuse that they experienced. Yet, the sad reality is that there are three times as many First Nations children in foster care today than at the height of residential schools, and the Canadian government has had a direct hand in making that tragedy happen. A federal government document shows that between 1989 and 2012, First Nations children spent more than 66m nights away from their families. The federal government underfunds First Nations children's public services, which frustrates recovery from the multi-generational trauma that is the legacy of the residential schools.

The government adopted all of the TRC calls to action in 2015 with significant public support, however, when the media coverage died down so did the state's enthusiasm for implementation. The news of the 215 children placed the TRC back on the front pages, directing attention to how few calls to action are being done.

Elsewhere, obstructionism and litigation reigns. The Canadian Human Rights Tribunal ordered the federal government to cease providing unequal public services to First Nations children in 2016, but it chose not to do so, spurring the tribunal to issue 19 further orders to press Canada to comply. On 14 June, the Canadian government is taking First Nations children to court again. Canada wants to deny children (and these are still children) \$40,000 each in compensation.

Moreover, Indigenous female experts, advocates, grassroots groups and organisations speak out about Canada's continued failures to take substantive steps to address its laws, policies and practices that have created and maintained high rates of race

and sex-based discrimination, including children in care, over-incarceration, homelessness and violence.

Canadian representatives will offer flowery speeches about reconciliation with Indigenous peoples, while maintaining us in conditions that – to quote a lawyer who reviewed the schools in 1907 – are in “uncomfortable nearness with the charge of manslaughter”. We need the international community to push Canada to end these historical and ongoing injustices. It can – but it has so far chosen not to.

‘I won’t be bullied’: expert who helped spark war crimes inquiry speaks out after Dutton criticism (The Guardian) By Daniel Hurst

June 11, 2021

The military sociologist whose interviews with Australian special forces soldiers helped trigger the long-running inquiry into alleged war crimes has vowed she won’t be “bullied or intimidated”.

Dr Samantha Cromptvoets – who has faced criticism from the defence minister, Peter Dutton, over a planned new book – also said on Friday she believed the response to the Brereton inquiry had “become political” and the trend was “unhelpful”.

“I am unapologetic about raising issues that I see as significantly jeopardising the reputation and capability of our defence force,” she told a conference hosted by the Australian Strategic Policy Institute.

Without naming anyone, she added: “For those who wish to silence me or my work, I won’t be bullied or intimidated. Cultural change needs to happen.”

Cromptvoets is currently seeking approval through government processes for her forthcoming book, titled *Blood Lust, Trust & Blame*, which is due for release next month. She has faced criticism from several politicians, including Dutton, and a number of media outlets.

While Cromptvoets has maintained that it is not a tell-all book, and is based on material in the public domain, Dutton has said he has “real concerns about the whole situation”.

The defence minister told 2GB radio last week he had “sought some legal advice” and he did not think Cromptvoets’ company would be awarded any more defence contracts.

Cromptvoets said on Friday she had “recently written a book that may or may not be published next month” and it had “received quite a bit of attention”.

She said she had had the privilege to work closely with Defence on issues relating to culture for more than a decade, adding: “What was intended to be a fairly straightforward project in 2015 became something much bigger when individuals began disclosing to me alleged crimes perpetrated by Australian troops in Afghanistan.”

She said cultural reform was “easily ridiculed” if it was “framed as a social justice agenda” – but she contended that a failure to learn the lessons of the past would present significant risks to the ADF’s war-fighting capability.

“Culture reform in Defence has never really been about political correctness or a woke agenda – whatever that is,” she said. “It has been about ensuring that Defence people – its soldiers, sailors, aviators, public servants – are set up to succeed and to thrive and to be an effective fighting force.”

The Brereton inquiry found “credible” evidence to implicate 25 current or former ADF personnel in the alleged unlawful killing of 39 individuals and the cruel treatment of two others. The newly established office of the special investigator will consider the evidence ahead of potential prosecutions.

Cromptvoets said she understood why people wanted “to move on from stories of alleged war crimes, to fix morale, to better understand and respond to veteran health”.

“And as someone with a partner currently in hospital, undergoing treatment for combat-related PTSD, I get it,” she said. “Allegations of war crimes are really uncomfortable.”

Cromptvoets said failing to appropriately understand and talk about allegations of war crimes would be “a grave injustice to the courageous men and women who came forward and told their stories, with all that they had to lose professionally and personally”.

“Failing to understand why these may have occurred and ensuring that the same environmental and other factors don’t conspire again to allow this to happen, is a risk,” she said.

“It’s risk to our national security, to our international reputation, and to our collective national psyche.”

When he addressed the same Aspi conference the previous day, Dutton said he meant what he said about the government “having the back” of Australian defence force personnel.

Dutton said hundreds of veterans had taken their lives after returning from conflict zones in the Middle East. “There has been a morale issue we need to address,” Dutton said. “I don’t want us to forget the lessons of Brereton, but equally we’re not going to be mired in it.”

[British backing for Israel helps to sustain the unbearable status quo (The Guardian) By Rafeef Ziadah
June 13, 2021

I often tell my first-year politics students that the study of politics is the study of power. And what we saw last month, above all, was the glaring disparity in power between Israel and the Palestinians.

When Palestinians in Gaza and around the world celebrated the news of a ceasefire, breathing a sigh of relief, many commentators hailed it as a return to calm. For Palestinians, however, “calm” means a status quo of occupation, blockade, and repression.

In fact, one can say the true nature of this conflict is what happens between the periodic escalations – the constant grind of life under apartheid. Israeli power over the Palestinians is not simply military, and it is not only maintained by force; it is sustained by international support. The significance of this support becomes obvious during Israeli military offensives – last month, the US wilfully obstructed a UN security council statement on Gaza to buy more time for Israel’s bombing campaign – but the key elements of this international support are consistent.

The most substantial diplomatic and financial support comes from the US – \$3.8bn (£2.7bn) annually, most of which is in military aid and circulates back to the US arms industry. International governments’ support for Israel has continued even as Israeli political and military leaders have been accused of serious violations of international law and the illegal use of force – abuses serious enough to warrant an international criminal court investigation.

The UK has also given Israel its full backing. While Britain has a particular legacy in the conflict, as the former colonial power in historical Palestine, support continues today with a thriving arms trade between the two states. Approved export licences for arms sales from the UK to Israel cover components for small arms, ammunition, night-sight technology and intelligence.

The UK also imports Israeli-made weapons. For example, in 2016, Israel’s major arms producer, Elbit, in conjunction with Thales UK, completed delivery on most of the 54 Watchkeeper drones as part of an £800m contract. Between 2018 and 2020 the British Ministry of Defence bought £46m worth of military equipment from Elbit. Such weapons are marketed as “battle-tested” – demonstrating the ways that day-to-day violence against Palestinians spurs a profitable industry with international reach.

Recent research revealed that British-made military components and hardware were used by Israeli forces during last month’s airstrikes on Gaza, in spite of government claims about Britain’s tough arms export controls. The Israeli F-35 warplanes that are used to bomb the densely populated territory have component parts from a host of UK suppliers, including BAE Systems, GE Aviation, Martin-Baker, Selex, Cobham, Ultra Electronics, UTC Actuation Systems and Rolls-Royce.

According to Campaign Against Arms Trade, between 2016 and 2020, the UK issued single individual export licences for arms sales to Israel to a value of £400m. This is a significant increase from the £67m in licences from 2011 to 2015.

Last month in Leicester, campaigners occupied the rooftop of UAV Tactical Systems, a subsidiary of Elbit Systems. Elbit Systems UK has nine production sites and offices in the country. The Leicester facility manufactures the Hermes drone that has been used by Israel’s military in Gaza. Campaigners managed to disrupt production for several days before another protest started against an Elbit factory in Oldham.

These actions highlight just how much Britain is entwined with Israel’s military power. Within innocuous buildings hidden in industrial estates in England, one of Israel’s major private weapons firms operates freely, with no consequences for how its weapons are used in Palestine or elsewhere.

The quintessential British company JCB, which makes bulldozers, was one of three British firms listed by the UN as complicit in the construction of illegal settlements and demolition of Palestinian homes. JCB is currently being “examined” by the UK government to determine whether its due diligence process complies with human rights guidelines set by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

While Israel portrays itself as a small state simply acting in self-defence, in reality it is carrying out a decades-long military occupation, denying Palestinian refugees the right to return and continuing to displace hundreds of families. It has one of the strongest militaries in the world, aided and abetted by the backing of international powers. This is why Palestinians have appealed to people of conscience around the world to protest against such blatant complicity with Israel's violations of human rights and international law.

British-based organisations such as War on Want and Campaign Against Arms Trade have called for an end to military exports to Israel and a review of UK arms sales. This is an important step in challenging the unequivocal support Israel receives in military aid while it continues to violate Palestinian rights daily. When MP Zarah Sultana held up pictures of Palestinian children killed during the latest assault on Gaza and directly asked Boris Johnson if UK-made weapons were used in the bombardment of Gaza, he did not deny it. But he quickly deflected the question with a string of platitudes about Britain's support for a two-state solution.

The endless lip service to the two-state solution rings hollow as the US, UK and EU assist Israel in creating facts on the ground that have made it functionally impossible – including ongoing illegal settlement construction, land confiscation, displacement, restrictions on Palestinian movement and the incarceration of thousands of Palestinians. Hiding behind the smokescreen of “quiet diplomacy”, these states continuously undermine Palestinian attempts to hold Israel to account; Boris Johnson, for example, has opposed the international criminal court inquiry into atrocities committed in the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem.

In the face of this, Palestinians can only point out the hypocrisy as they continue to protest. The general strike called on 18 May by all Palestinians was a heartening moment of unity, breaking the barriers imposed by military checkpoints and walls.

Palestinians also rely on the power of ordinary people around the world willing to speak out and challenge the complicity of their own governments in maintaining this conflict. The demonstrations around the world, across many capitals and small towns – and the statements of solidarity by trade unions, artists and academics – attest to the fact that more and more people are coming to understand the status quo is untenable.

Some may choose to avert their eyes after Gaza, Jerusalem, Lydd (Lod) and Haifa are no longer dominating the headlines. But Palestinians do not have that option. Ending the arms trade with Israel is a crucial step for unmasking the illusion of “calm” that obscures the ongoing oppression of Palestinians, and for honestly confronting Britain's role in maintaining this brutal status quo.

Rafeef Ziadah is a lecturer in comparative politics of the Middle East at Soas University of London.

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WORTH READING

Responding to Human Rights Abuses in the Digital Era: New Tools, Old Challenges (Stanford Journal of International Law)

By Jonathan Kolieb and Marta Poblet

June 14, 2021

The twenty-first century cyberspace offers unprecedented opportunities for prosperity and development, but also a series of new and evolving threats to international peace, security, and human rights. For some years now, there have been sustained efforts from civil society groups across the world to harness the Internet for human rights causes. However, by publicising human rights abuses in near-real time to mass audiences, the new uses of digital technologies may also challenge the legitimacy of the international legal order itself, especially if states are not able to action their legal obligations to prevent those crimes. This Article examines some examples of the interplay between people, digital tools, and open data, and the capacity to deploy innovative digital ways to assist human rights monitoring. It also considers both the opportunities and challenges involved in using digital tools to assist in the prevention of egregious human rights abuses, such as

war crimes and genocide. The paper concludes by reflecting on the impact of digital technologies on public perceptions about international law.

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