



War Crimes Prosecution
Watch

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

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AFRICA

NORTH AFRICA

Libya

Libya: shocking new evidence of retaliatory attacks on civilians (Amnesty International UK)

June 5, 2020

New evidence obtained by Amnesty International indicates that war crimes and other violations may have been committed between 13 April and 1 June by warring parties in Libya during the latest surge in fighting near Tripoli.

Amnesty has examined scores of incidents through witness testimonies, satellite imagery and analysis of open-source photos and videos - providing mounting evidence of looting, the indiscriminate shelling of civilian neighbourhoods, the planting of anti-personnel landmines in civilian buildings, and the parading of corpses.

A recent escalation in fighting in Tripoli's suburbs and in western Libya - with several towns changing hands between armed groups affiliated with the internationally-recognised Government of National Accord and the self-styled Libyan National Army - has seen a recent escalation in unlawful retaliatory attacks.

On 13 April, the Government of National Accord's Surman command issued a statement warning its troops against such retaliatory acts, committing itself to investigating such "individual incidents". However, to date, no commanders or fighters implicated in these crimes have been held to account or removed from active duty.

Amnesty is calling on all warring parties and associated forces in Libya to immediately halt attacks against civilians and other violations of international humanitarian law, including those being carried out to punish civilians for their perceived affiliations with rival groups. Amnesty is also calling on members of the UN Human Rights Council to urgently establish a Commission of Inquiry or similar mechanism to investigate violations of international humanitarian law and other human rights violations, determine responsibility and preserve evidence of crimes in order to secure justice for the victims.

Despite a comprehensive UN arms embargo in place on Libya since 2011, the UAE and Russia have provided significant military support to the Libyan National Army, while Turkey has backed the Government of National Accord. There have been numerous illicit arms transfers and direct military support, and Amnesty is currently carrying out investigations into this influx of military equipment and foreign fighters.

Diana Eltahawy, Amnesty International's Middle East and North Africa Deputy Director, said: "Civilians in Libya are once again paying the price, as all parties escalate retaliatory attacks and other grave violations showing utter disregard for their lives and the laws of war. "We are calling on all parties to the conflict and affiliated militias and armed groups to immediately halt indiscriminate attacks and other serious violations carried out against civilians associated with rival groups. Commanders must publicly condemn these acts. "Countries such as Turkey, Russia and the UAE must cease violating the UN arms embargo." Houses looted, corpses paraded, and threats to kill women and babies

On 13 April, Government of National Accord-affiliated forces using Turkish arms and equipment captured the cities of Surman and Sabratha, and several towns west of Tripoli. Witnesses told Amnesty that these forces looted several civilian houses and public buildings, including the Sabratha main hospital, setting homes on fire. Amnesty also verified a photo published on social media by a Government of National Accord fighter, showing fellow fighters celebrating next to the corpses of several Libyan National Army combatants.

Video footage analysed by Amnesty shows further incidents of retaliation against civilians for their perceived affiliation to one side or another. One video shows armed men looting civilian property in the town of Al-Asabah, 75 miles south of Tripoli, after Government of National Accord forces took control on 21 May.

In another video posted on social media on 30 April, again verified by Amnesty, a Government of National Accord-affiliated fighter is seen threatening "Kaniyat forces" (aligned with the Libyan National Army) that they would "not to leave a single woman alive" when they capture the town of Tarhuna, south-east of Tripoli. Meanwhile, Kaniyat forces have themselves committed serious violations against civilians in Tripoli and Tarhuna.

Meanwhile, another video on the personal page of a Libyan National Army fighter examined by Amnesty shows him threatening to kill anyone in Benghazi, along with "those in his house even if babies", if they mourn those who died fighting with the Government of National Accord. Amnesty verified one video showing the Libyan National Army first infantry brigade parading fighters' corpses in a pick-up truck, while calling a captured Government of National Accord fighter a "Syrian dog" on

18 April.

Anti-personnel landmines

There is mounting evidence of the use of anti-personnel landmines in flagrant violation of an international ban on their use.

Residents told Amnesty that on or around 22 May, forces aligned with the Libyan National Army placed anti-personnel landmines as they withdrew from the neighborhoods of Ain Zara and Salah el-Din south of Tripoli. At least one civilian was killed by a landmine when he returned to his house on 22 May, according to his family.

There is evidence that Libyan National Army-affiliated forces have laid extensive tripline-activated anti-personnel landmines and other booby-traps in homes and other civilian objects. Photos and videos verified by Amnesty show Russian and Soviet-era anti-personnel landmines - including MON-50s, MON-90s, OZM-72s and MS3s - prohibited by international law due to their indiscriminate nature. Foreign personnel employed by the Russian military company

Wagner were observed leaving areas shortly before landmines were discovered. Civilian neighbourhoods shelled by both sides

During the course of April and May, Libyan National Army forces shelled civilian neighborhoods in Tripoli, resulting in civilian casualties and damage to property in the neighborhoods of Ain Zara, Tariq el-Sour, Souq al-Talata, and Souq El-Joma. Amnesty has verified images of the aftermath of these attacks, showing civilians who had been killed and wounded. Witnesses and a medical source confirmed to Amnesty that an attack launched by Libyan National Army forces on Souq Al-Talat on 31 May left at least three civilians dead and 11 wounded, including a child whose leg was amputated.

Meanwhile, Government of National Accord-aligned forces carried out indiscriminate attacks during April and May in Tripoli's suburb of Qasr Bin Ghashir, Beni Walid, Tarhuna and close to Ash Shwayrif village - again with civilian casualties reported. At least one girl was killed by shelling in Qasr Bin Ghashir on 1 June, according to witnesses, while several buildings were damaged, with photos of the damage verified by Amnesty.

An Amnesty investigation last year into the fighting in Libya found that both sides and their affiliated forces had been responsible for indiscriminate and disproportionate attacks, as well as the use of a range of inaccurate explosive weapons in populated urban areas.

Libya: Retaliatory attacks against civilians must be halted and investigated (Amnesty International)

June 5, 2020

New evidence obtained by Amnesty International indicates that war crimes and other violations may have been committed between 13 April and 1 June by warring parties in Libya during the latest surge in fighting near Tripoli, including, looting, indiscriminate attacks, and the planting of anti-personnel landmines in civilian buildings.

Amnesty International has examined scores of incidents through witness testimonies, analysis of open source photos and videos, and satellite imagery. The organization calls on all warring parties and associated forces in Libya to immediately halt attacks against civilians and other violations of international humanitarian law, including those being carried out to punish civilians for their perceived affiliations with rival groups.

“Civilians in Libya are once again paying the price as all parties escalate retaliatory attacks and other grave violations showing utter disregard for the laws of war and lives of civilians,” said Diana Eltahawy, MENA Deputy Regional Director at Amnesty International.

“We are calling on all parties to the conflict and affiliated militias and armed groups to immediately halt indiscriminate attacks and other serious violations carried out against civilians associated with rival groups. Commanders must publicly condemn these acts. Countries such as Turkey, Russia and the UAE must cease violating the UN arms embargo.”

For years, the Libyan judicial authorities have been unable or unwilling to act leaving years of impunity to fuel these grave violations. Amnesty International is also calling on members of the UN Human Rights Council to urgently establish a Commission of Inquiry or similar mechanism to investigate violations of international humanitarian law and other human rights violations, determine responsibility and preserve evidence of crimes in order to secure justice for the victims.

Acts of Retaliation

The recent escalation in fighting in Tripoli's suburbs and western Libya, with several western towns changing hands between

armed groups affiliated with the internationally recognized Government of National Accord (GNA) and the self-styled Libyan National Army (LNA) which is now in de facto control of much of eastern and southern Libya, has sparked an escalation of unlawful retaliatory attacks.

On 13 April, GNA affiliated forces, using Turkish arms and equipment transferred in violation of the UN arms embargo, captured the cities of Surman and Sabratha and several towns west of Tripoli. Witnesses told Amnesty International that members of GNA affiliated armed groups looted several civilian houses and public buildings, including the Sabratha main hospital, and set homes on fire. Amnesty International also verified a photo published on social media by a GNA fighter, showing GNA fighters celebrating next to the corpses of several LNA fighters. Video footage analysed by Amnesty International shows further incidents of retaliation against civilians for their perceived affiliation to one side or another.

One video Amnesty International verified shows armed men looting civilian property in the town of Al-Asabah, 120 kms south of Tripoli, after GNA forces took control on 21 May. A local resident told Amnesty International that he witnessed an incident where armed men looted the house of an LNA fighter.

In another disturbing video posted on social media on 30 April, verified by Amnesty International, a GNA-affiliated fighter is seen threatening “Kaniat forces” (affiliated with the LNA) that they would “not to leave a single woman alive” when they capture Tarhuna. Amnesty International examined another video with a GNA affiliated fighter threatening another Tawergha in and Sirte, in reference to the forced eviction of the city’s entire population in retaliation for the use of city as a launching ground for attacks against Misratah. With the GNA taking control of Tarhuna, such statements raise fears over further revenge attacks against civilians.

Kaniat forces affiliated with the LNA have committed serious violations against civilians in Tripoli and Tarhuna. The United Nations Support Mission in Libya reported numerous unlawful killings by Kaniat forces.

Another video examined by Amnesty International on the personal page of an LNA fighter shows him threatening to kill anyone in Benghazi, along with “those in his house even if babies,” if they mourn those who died fighting along the GNA. Amnesty International verified a video showing LNA first infantry brigade parading fighters’ corpses in a pickup truck, while calling a captured GNA fighter “A Syrian Dog” on 18 April.

Anti-personnel Landmines

LNA forces have also committed serious violations, including acts of retaliation such as the use of anti-personnel landmines in flagrant violation of the international ban.

Residents told Amnesty International that around 22 May forces aligned with the LNA placed anti-personnel landmines as they withdrew from the neighborhoods of Ain Zara and Salah el-Din south of Tripoli. At least one civilian was killed when he returned to his family house on 22 May by a landmine that was planted in his family house according to his family.

LNA affiliated forces laid extensive tripline-activated anti-personnel landmines and other booby-traps in homes and other civilian objects. Photos and videos verified by Amnesty International, show Russian and Soviet-era anti-personnel landmines, including MON-50s, MON-90s, OZM-72s, and MS3s, prohibited by international law due to their indiscriminate nature. Some homes in Ain Zara that were booby-trapped were labeled “опасно,” which translates as “dangerous” in Russian. Foreign personnel employed by the Russian military company Wagner were observed leaving these areas immediately before the landmines were discovered. Indiscriminate attacks

In the course of April and May, LNA forces have shelled civilian neighborhoods in Tripoli, resulting in civilian casualties and damage to civilian property in the neighborhoods of Ain Zara, Tariq el-Sour, Souq al-Talata, and Souq El-Joma, according to witnesses, residents and a medical source in the GNA-affiliated Ministry of Health. Amnesty International verified images of the aftermath of these attacks, showing civilians killed and wounded. Witnesses and a medical source confirmed to Amnesty International an attack launched by LNA forces on Souq Al-Talat on 31 May, which left at least three civilians dead and 11 wounded, including a child whose leg was amputated.

Forces aligned to the GNA have also carried out indiscriminate attacks across the months of April and May in Tripoli’s suburbs of Qasr Bin Ghashir, Beni Walid, Tarhuna and close to Ash Shwayrif village, leading to civilian casualties according to family members and a medical source and photos examined and verified by Amnesty International. At least one girl was killed by shelling in Qasr Bin Ghashir on 1 June according to witnesses, while several buildings were damaged according to photos verified by Amnesty International.

Amnesty International’s August 2019 field investigation into the fighting that broke out in April that year, found that both GNA and LNA affiliated forces were responsible for indiscriminate and disproportionate attacks as well as the use of a range of inaccurate explosive weapons in populated urban areas.

Amnesty International has also documented the use of civilian objects by the GNA for military purposes, endangering civilians. Civilian airports in Tripoli and Misratah receive military shipments from Turkey, while the Special Deterrence Force GNA aligned militia has maintained its base and prison near the airport. LNA forces have repeatedly shelled the airport, which has put it out of action several times and caused damage to civilian aircraft.

Background

Since April 2020, GNA forces have been advancing against LNA positions in western Libya, capturing several coastal areas and the Al-Watiya airbase, pushed back LNA forces from Tripoli's suburbs and took control of Tarhuna and towns around Gharyan.

On 13 April, the GNA's Surman command has issued a statement warning its troops against retaliatory acts, committing to investigate such "individual incidents". To date, no commanders or fighters implicated in such crimes have been held to account or removed from active duty. Despite a comprehensive UN arms embargo in place since 2011, the UAE and Russia and Turkey have been supporting the LNA and GNA, respectively, through illicit arms transfers and direct military support.

Amnesty International is carrying-out investigations into the continued influx of military equipment and foreign fighters -- in violation of the UN arms embargo -- to both sides to the conflict.

Libya: Mass graves found in strategic city of Tarhuna (Express Tribune)

June 12, 2020

Mass graves have been found in the city of Tarhuna, the last stronghold of warlord Khalifa Haftar before it was liberated by the Libyan army last week.

The Press Office of the Libyan government's Burkan Al-Ghadab (Volcano of Rage) Operation shared images of the mass graves.

"So far, two bodies have been exhumed. The region is full of corpses," Lutfi Tevfik Misrati, the head of an office investigating disappeared people in the country, told Anadolu Agency. "We think that there are 10 to 12 bodies in another grave in the field. Graves were found at five or more different points," Misrati said.

Health authorities will perform autopsy for the dead bodies and the necessary steps will be taken for their burial, he added.

The Libyan Red Crescent officials said an investigation was launched in the region and they asked support from the military prosecutor's office and the office investigating disappeared people.

Later in the day, the Libyan Interior Minister Fathi Bashagha announced that Haftar's militias burned some prisoners in containers, and buried tens of others alive in mass graves, according to initial reports.

Libyan security forces documented many "crimes against humanity" committed by Haftar's militias in the city of Tarhuna, Bashagha said in a statement released by the social media account of Burkan Al-Ghadab (Volcano of Rage) Operation.

For its part, the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) called for launching investigation into the incident.

"UNSMIL notes with horror reports on the discovery of at least eight mass graves in past days, the majority of them in Tarhuna," UNSMIL tweeted. "International law requires that the authorities conduct prompt, effective & transparent investigations into all alleged cases of unlawful deaths."

UNSMIL urged investigators "to promptly undertake the work aimed at securing the mass graves, identifying the victims, establishing causes of death and returning the bodies to next of kin."

The mission stressed readiness to provide support as required.

Libya on Friday announced that it had found 106 bodies, including women and children, in a hospital in Tarhuna soon after it was liberated from Haftar's forces.

A written statement by the Burkan Al-Ghadab Operation said that according to initial evaluations, the victims had been executed.

Health Ministry spokesperson Amin al-Hashemi said there were signs of torture on most of the bodies.

The Libyan army on Thursday arrested 10 militants affiliated with warlord Khalifa Haftar in the outskirts of Tarhuna city.

Meanwhile, the Libyan army awaits government orders to start an operation to liberate Sirte city from Haftar's militia.

The army's Sirte Al-Jufra Operations Commands asserted its readiness saying it has received all required reinforcements, ammunition and logistics equipment.

Following the ouster of late ruler Muammar Gaddafi in 2011, Libya's new government was founded in 2015 under a political deal led by the UN

The internationally recognised Libyan government has been under attack by Haftar's forces since April 2019, with more than 1,000 killed in the violence.

The Libyan government launched Operation Peace Storm in March to counter attacks on the capital, and recently repelled the 14-month assault. It also regained strategic locations, including Al-Watiya airbase and the city of Tarhuna.

Haftar militias' attack on Libyans continues, UN urges for probe (Daily Sabah)

June 14, 2020

Despite calls for a cease-fire, militias loyal to putschist Gen. Khalifa Haftar continues to target civilians and new mass graves are being discovered nearly every day in places they vacate. The United Nations is closely monitoring the situation and is repeating its call for a probe into the conflict while warning of further escalations.

A woman was killed and her son was wounded on Saturday when a landmine planted in a residential area south of the capital Tripoli by Haftar's withdrawing forces exploded, the Libyan Army said. According to a statement issued by the press office of the Burkan Al-Ghadab (Volcano of Rage) Operation, the explosion took place in the Ayn Zara region.

Data compiled by Anadolu Agency (AA), based on Libyan Army figures, shows that at least 30 civilians have died and 40 others have been wounded by landmine explosions in the last 10 days.

Meanwhile, the Libyan government announced Friday that three additional mass graves were found in Tarhuna, which was liberated by the army last week from Haftar militias. They were found in areas where eight other mass graves were recently found. Tarhuna was used as the operation and supply center of the forces loyal to Haftar, according to the U.N.

The Justice Ministry also announced the grave areas will be cordoned off for forensic investigations.

The U.N. Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) called the mass graves "terrifying."

"UNSMIL notes with horror reports on the discovery of at least eight mass graves in past days, the majority of them in Tarhuna," the UNSMIL tweeted.

More than 150 bodies, including women and children, were exhumed from the graves near Haftar's last stronghold in western Libya before its liberation.

The internationally recognized Libyan government has been under attack by Haftar's forces since April 2019, with more than 1,000 killed in the violence.

The GNA launched Operation Peace Storm in March to counter attacks on the capital and recently regained strategic locations, including al-Watiya air base and Tarhuna.

UN urges investigation after mass graves found

"Yesterday, the U.N. Mission in Libya expressed horror at the reports of at least eight mass graves in past days, the majority of them in Tarhuna," Stephane Dujarric, the spokesperson for Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, said in a statement late Friday.

"International law requires that the authorities conduct prompt, effective and transparent investigations into all alleged cases of unlawful deaths," he added.

"The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs said that nearly 24,000 people have fled their homes in the last week following increased insecurity in southern Tripoli, Tarhuna and Sirte," Dujarric said.

"Most people have fled to eastern Libya. Most of the newly displaced are sheltering with relatives, friends and other host families. The U.N., once again, urges all parties to the conflict to respect the rule of law, for civilians to be protected, and for all efforts to be made to deescalate tensions," he added.

The Libyan government also released a statement on Saturday, pointing out that Haftar's forces have been committing crimes against humanity in the war-torn country.

The government accused the Haftar militia of "executing an entire family, including women, children and elderly, dropping their bodies to water wells and burying some of them alive." It also added that these crimes are "genocide."

Despite an increasing number of graves being found, people are still missing, the statement further stated.

It also called for an international probe and reaction against such brutalities and crimes against humanity.

Libya calls on UN Security Council to probe mass graves found in Tarhuna (Daily Sabah)

June 14, 2020

Libya's foreign minister on Sunday urged the United Nations Security Council to refer mass graves discovered in the city of Tarhuna to the International Criminal Court (ICC).

According to a written statement published by the Foreign Ministry on its Facebook account, Mohamed Siala sent a letter to the U.N. Security Council.

He said that they had found 11 mass graves, in which some people, including women and children, were buried alive, in Tarhuna, a city liberated from putschist Gen. Khalifa Haftar's militias on June 5.

Siala, in his letter, asked the Hague-based court to initiate the necessary steps to probe the crimes committed by Haftar's militias.

"The UN Security Council this time must adopt a determined stance against violations which were committed by Haftar's militias and could be counted as crimes against humanity," he said.

According to U.N. figures, eight mass graves have been found in Libya recently, mostly in Tarhuna.

The Libyan Army has recently inflicted heavy blows on the warlord and liberated Tripoli and Tarhuna from his militants.

The internationally recognized Libyan government has been under attack by Haftar's forces since April 2019, with more than 1,000 killed in the violence.

The government launched Operation Peace Storm in March to counter attacks on the capital and recently regained strategic locations, including al-Watiya air base.

Libya's government was founded in 2015 under a U.N.-led agreement, but efforts for a long-term political settlement failed due to the military offensive by Haftar's forces.

Libya: Apparent War Crimes in Tripoli (Human Rights Watch)

June 16, 2020

The Libyan Arab Armed Forces (LAAF) should urgently investigate evidence that fighters affiliated with it apparently tortured, summarily executed, and desecrated corpses of opposing fighters, Human Rights Watch said today.

The attacks by the armed group, which is under the command of General Khalifa Hiftar, were recorded and posted on social media in May 2020. One video shows fighters whom Human Rights Watch has identified as being linked to the armed group beating a man whom they later claimed to have killed. Another shows people Human Rights Watch also identified as fighters with the group apparently desecrating the body of a detained fighter linked with the international recognized Government of National Accord (GNA).

"Khalifa Hiftar needs to urgently hold his forces accountable for any war crimes they are committing and apparently advertising online," said Hanan Salah, senior Libya researcher at Human Rights Watch. "Senior LAAF leadership has ignored these crimes, but they should be held accountable by domestic and international courts for complicity in abuses."

In a letter sent to General Hiftar on May 28, Human Rights Watch requested information about these two incidents and any investigation into them and possible consequences for those responsible. The LAAF, formerly known as the Libyan National Army (LNA), has not responded.

Governance in Libya remains divided between the two entities engaged in an armed conflict since April 2019: the

internationally recognized and Tripoli-based GNA and the rival Interim Government based in eastern Libya that is affiliated with the LAAF. The LAAF has received military support from the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Jordan, Egypt, and Russia, and political support from France. It includes fighters from Sudan, Chad, and Syria, and from a Kremlin-linked private military company. Turkey is the main military backer of the GNA, with some fighters from Chad, Sudan, and Syria. A two-way arms embargo ordered by the United Nations Security Council in 2011 and renewed multiple times remains in force.

On May 6 and 7, two videos and a photograph showing the ill treatment of a man by a group of men in military and civilian clothing were posted on social media. The incident took place in Ain Zara and the two men are apparently linked with the LAAF Battalion 646, one of the apparent attackers says in one of the videos. Both men can be seen hitting a man's face in one video while he is immobilized on the ground, accusing him of being a foreign mercenary. The other video shows the same man, this time blindfolded, being forced down a staircase by a group of armed men.

The first of these videos and the photograph of the same incident were posted on May 6 on a Facebook page. The title of this post claimed that the victim had been subsequently killed: "God is great, praise be to God, one of Juwaili's mercenaries was arrested in Abu Salim and he was turned into a rotten cadaver.... Glory and eternity to the martyr of Battalion 646." Osama Juweili is the GNA military commander for the western region.

The owner of the Facebook page, in response to comments by others, states that the detainee had been subsequently killed.

In another video that appeared on Twitter on May 9, three armed men in army fatigues circle the body of a man who is lying face down in a pool of blood on the street. All three men are apparently linked to the LAAF, according to photographs being shared online that identify one of the apparent attackers. This person violently shakes the man's head, calling him "a rotten cadaver" and "a dog" and says, "this is how you will end" as a warning to other opposing fighters. Human Rights Watch could not determine the location of this video.

Human Rights Watch previously documented summary executions and desecration of corpses of opposition fighters by LAAF-linked groups in Benghazi, the group's eastern stronghold. The International Criminal Court, which has a mandate to investigate war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide in Libya since 2011, issued a warrant in 2017 and another in 2018 for the arrest of an LAAF commander, Mahmoud al-Werfalli, for his role in a series of extra-judicial executions and desecration of fighters' corpses. Al-Werfalli remains at large.

The torture of detainees and summary execution of fighters who have been captured or who have surrendered are war crimes. Articles 292 and 293 of the Libyan Penal Code prohibit the desecration of corpses. International humanitarian law obligates all conflict parties to take all possible measures to prevent bodies of the dead from being despoiled.

All parties to the conflict in Libya, including foreign backers such as the UAE, Russia, and Turkey, are obliged to abide by the laws of war. Those who commit, order, assist, or have command responsibility for war crimes in Libya are subject to prosecution by domestic courts or the International Criminal Court, which has a mandate over war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide committed there since February 15, 2011.

Senior military commanders carry legal responsibility for ordering or failing to prevent serious violations that forces under their command are committing and failing to hand over any of their subordinates responsible for war crimes to face criminal investigation and a fair trial. Senior LAAF commanders are obligated to support steps to hold those responsible for these actions accountable, Human Rights Watch said.

To help end the cycle of impunity in Libya, the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva should, during its upcoming session in June, establish an international fact-finding mission to document violations, identify those responsible, including external actors, preserve evidence where possible for future criminal proceedings, and publicly report on the human rights situation in Libya.

"Senior LAAF commanders should know that they too can be held accountable for a plethora of war crimes by their rank and file if they don't hold those responsible for the crimes to account," Salah said.

Incident One

Human Rights Watch reviewed a 41-second video and a photograph posted on May 6 on the Facebook page [warning, graphic] apparently belonging to an LAAF fighter from Battalion 646 who states that the incident took place in Ain Zara, an area in the southern suburbs of Tripoli. The video shows a dark-skinned man wearing civilian clothes – a white shirt and beige trousers – sitting on the ground with his arms tied behind his back and a rope around his neck that is connected to his legs. Two men, one wearing civilian clothes, the other wearing army fatigues, hit the bound man several times on his face and back with their hands and walkie-talkies while shouting profanities and accusing him of being a mercenary.

The photograph posted on the same Facebook profile shows the two men smiling at the camera while holding up the tied-up

man by a rope around his neck

Human Rights Watch reviewed another 50-second video [warning, graphic] posted on Twitter on May 7 that shows 8 men, including the 2 men visible in the video posted on Facebook the previous day, roughly escorting the same man in beige trousers and white shirt, this time blindfolded with his hands bound behind his back, down 2 flights of stairs. Two of the men carry weapons and a walkie talkie. The video ends with the men leading the blindfolded man outside.

The title of the post accompanying the photo and video on Facebook from May 6 says that the man had been subsequently killed, calling him a “rotten cadaver.”

Incident Two

On May 9, a 30-second video [warning, graphic] was posted on Twitter that shows 3 armed men in army fatigues circling around a man who is lying face down in a pool of blood on a small street between multi-story buildings. It is not possible to determine the extent of the man’s injuries except for a head injury. It is also not clear whether the man is severely wounded or dead. According to a forensic expert who reviewed the video at the request of Human Rights Watch, the man’s blood had not yet congealed, which indicates that the bleeding occurred within one hour or less before the video was taken.

The person recording the video, apparently a fighter linked with the LAAF, violently shakes the man’s head and, speaking directly into the camera, calls him “a rotten cadaver” and says “this is what will happen to you,” in an apparent reference to opposing armed groups from the GNA.

Hafter’s LNA should urgently investigate apparent evidence of war crimes by aligned forces: HRW (Libya Herald) By Sami Zaptia

June 17, 2020

Khalifa Hafter’s Libyan National Army (LNA) and its aligned forces should urgently investigate apparent evidence of war crimes, Human Rights Watch (HRW) said yesterday. Senior LNA commanders are obligated to support steps to hold those responsible for these actions accountable, it added

It called on the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva, during its upcoming session in June, to establish an international fact-finding mission to help end the cycle of impunity.

This should document violations, identify those responsible, including external actors, preserve evidence where possible for future criminal proceedings, and publicly report on the human rights situation in Libya.

Here is the full HRW statement:

The Libyan Arab Armed Forces (LAAF) – also referred to as the Libyan National Army (LNA) - should urgently investigate evidence that fighters affiliated with it apparently tortured, summarily executed, and desecrated corpses of opposing fighters, Human Rights Watch said today.

The attacks by the armed group, which is under the command of General Khalifa Hiftar, were recorded and posted on social media in May 2020. One video shows fighters whom Human Rights Watch has identified as being linked to the armed group beating a man whom they later claimed to have killed. Another shows people Human Rights Watch also identified as fighters with the group apparently desecrating the body of a detained fighter linked with the internationally recognized Government of National Accord (GNA).

“Khalifa Hiftar needs to urgently hold his forces accountable for any war crimes they are committing and apparently advertising online,” said Hanan Salah, senior Libya researcher at Human Rights Watch. “Senior LAAF leadership has ignored these crimes, but they should be held accountable by domestic and international courts for complicity in abuses.”

In a letter sent to General Hiftar on May 28, Human Rights Watch requested information about these two incidents and any investigation into them and possible consequences for those responsible. The LAAF, formerly known as the Libyan National Army (LNA), has not responded.

Governance in Libya remains divided between the two entities engaged in an armed conflict since April 2019: the internationally recognized and Tripoli-based GNA and the rival Interim Government based in eastern Libya that is affiliated with the LAAF. The LAAF has received military support from the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Jordan, Egypt, and Russia, and political support from France. It includes fighters from Sudan, Chad, and Syria, and from a Kremlin-linked private military company. Turkey is the main military backer of the GNA, with some fighters from Chad, Sudan, and Syria. A two-way arms embargo ordered by the United Nations Security Council in 2011 and renewed multiple times remains in force.

On May 6 and 7, two videos and a photograph showing the ill treatment of a man by a group of men in military and civilian clothing were posted on social media. The incident took place in Ain Zara and the two men are apparently linked with the LAAF Battalion 646, one of the apparent attackers says in one of the videos. Both men can be seen hitting a man's face in one video while he is immobilized on the ground, accusing him of being a foreign mercenary. The other video shows the same man, this time blindfolded, being forced down a staircase by a group of armed men.

The first of these videos and the photograph of the same incident were posted on May 6 on a Facebook page. The title of this post claimed that the victim had been subsequently killed: "God is great, praise be to God, one of Juwaili's mercenaries was arrested in Abu Salim and he was turned into a rotten cadaver.... Glory and eternity to the martyr of Battalion 646." Osama Juweili is the GNA military commander for the western region.

The owner of the Facebook page, in response to comments by others, states that the detainee had been subsequently killed.

In another video that appeared on Twitter on May 9, three armed men in army fatigues circle the body of a man who is lying face down in a pool of blood on the street. All three men are apparently linked to the LAAF, according to photographs being shared online that identify one of the apparent attackers. This person violently shakes the man's head, calling him "a rotten cadaver" and "a dog" and says, "this is how you will end" as a warning to other opposing fighters. Human Rights Watch could not determine the location of this video.

Human Rights Watch previously documented summary executions and desecration of corpses of opposition fighters by LAAF-linked groups in Benghazi, the group's eastern stronghold. The International Criminal Court, which has a mandate to investigate war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide in Libya since 2011, issued a warrant in 2017 and another in 2018 for the arrest of an LAAF commander, Mahmoud al-Werfalli, for his role in a series of extra-judicial executions and desecration of fighters' corpses. Al-Werfalli remains at large.

The torture of detainees and summary execution of fighters who have been captured or who have surrendered are war crimes. Articles 292 and 293 of the Libyan Penal Code prohibit the desecration of corpses. International humanitarian law obligates all conflict parties to take all possible measures to prevent bodies of the dead from being despoiled.

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Democratic Republic of the Congo

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DRC attacks may be war crimes, says UN (Church Times) By Rebecca Pavely
June 12, 2020

Five girls under the age of 15 were among 16 civilians killed in the latest attack in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo. All the individuals had recently returned

to their village, having previously been displaced by violence.

The attack was confirmed by UNICEF, which said that it had received more than 100 allegations of serious offences against children from the region in the past two months alone, including rape, killing, and maiming.

The attack occurred in Ituri province, where violence flared up again last December after the launch of a government-led military operation against armed groups operating in the area. This situation has been worsened by inter-ethnic tension in the region.

The UN estimates that more than 1300 civilians have been killed in escalations of separate conflicts in eastern DRC, including Ituri and north Kivu, in the past eight months; and 1.2 million people have been forced from their homes.

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, said at the weekend: "The generalised and systematic nature of some of the attacks on civilians in both Ituri and North Kivu may amount to crimes against humanity and war crimes".

The Bishop of Winchester, the Rt Revd Tim Dakin, whose diocese is linked with the Province of the DRC, called on his diocese to pray for "our Companion Link brothers and sisters in DR Congo, particularly for Bishop William Bahemuka and those in the Diocese of Boga in the Ituri Province affected by large-scale displacement and violence".

6 killed, villagers flee homes in DR Congo (Anadolu Agency) By Felix Tih

June 15, 2020

At least six people were killed in three villages in the Democratic Republic of Congo's northeastern gold-rich Ituri province, local media reported on Monday.

The incidents occurred over the weekend in the Ndjala, Jili, and Logari villages in the Ituri province, according to UN Radio Okapi.

"They attacked these villages by burning houses and [...]they killed six people including two women. The population fled," Benjamin Ngabu, a human rights activist in the region was quoted as saying.

He called for the rapid deployment of security forces in these villages to allow the population to return to their places of origin.

"We recommend that the military and administrative authorities undertake field visits and investigate to find the real perpetrators of this crime," he said.

Increased attacks

Attacks on civilians have mounted in recent months in the eastern DRC, triggering protests in Beni last December, where locals blamed the UN peacekeeping force, MONUSCO, for failing to protect them.

The army launched an offensive in January against militias operating in the gold-rich province of Ituri as part of a wider offensive launched last October.

Most of the attacks in the region are blamed on the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of Congo (FARDC), the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), and Cooperative for Development of Congo (CODECO) insurgent groups.

ADF and FARDC rebels have set aside their political demands and are mostly involved in the trafficking of minerals in the eastern DRC, which has abundant gold deposits.

On May 4, the new head of CODECO rebel group called for an end of violence, but attacks against civilians persisted throughout the month, according to the International Crisis Group.

Six Killed as Militia Torch Homes in East DR Congo: Local Official (The Defense Post)

June 16, 2020

Six civilians were killed and dozens of homes were torched in an attack in the east of the Democratic Republic of Congo blamed on the notorious ADF militia, a local official said Monday.

The attack took place Sunday near the Eringeti-Kainama road, leaving four women and two men dead, said Sabiti Njiamoja, an official at the governor's office in Eringeti, in North Kivu province. "Six (other) civilians are reported to be missing and more than 60 homes were torched," he told AFP.

Locals are burying the dead after the six civilians “were gratuitously murdered by the ADF,” added Njiamoja, whose town along with Oicha and Mbau have become a triangle of death in North Kivu’s Beni region.

The Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) have killed hundreds in the region since late last year, in apparent retaliation for a military offensive against their bases.

The ADF is a mainly Muslim movement that originated in neighboring Uganda in the 1990s, opposed to the rule of Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni. In 1995, it moved into the DRC, which became its base of operations, although it has not carried out attacks inside Uganda for years.

In January the army announced it had dislodged the ADF from its main strongholds and neutralized several of the group’s leaders after months of military activity. However, attacks such as the one on Sunday have continued, with more than 500 people killed since the end of October, according to UN figures.

More than 1,000 civilians have died in attacks blamed on the ADF in the Beni region since October 2014. They often target farmers returning from the fields or at home in their villages at night

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Mali

Two UN peacekeepers killed in northern Mali attack (Al Jazeera)

June 14, 2020

The United Nations peacekeeping force in Mali says two of its soldiers were killed in an attack on their convoy in the country's north.

A logistical convoy of the UN mission travelling between the towns of Tessalit and Gao was attacked on Saturday evening by "unidentified armed individuals" who killed two of the soldiers, the mission, known as MINUSMA, said in a statement on Sunday.

It did not indicate the nationalities of those killed.

The convoy had stopped when it was attacked near the village of Tarkint, northeast of Gao.

The UN troops "retaliated firmly and sent the assailants fleeing", the statement said.

The head of the peacekeeping mission, Mahamat Saleh Annadif, condemned the "cowardly acts aimed at paralysing the mission's operations on the ground".

Last month, three UN peacekeepers from Chad were killed in the country when their convoy hit a roadside bomb.

The blast in the northern region of Aguelhok left four more soldiers seriously wounded.

Established in 2013, the UN peacekeeping mission in Mali has some 13,000 troops, drawn from several nations, deployed across the vast semi-arid country that has been facing a worsening security situation in recent years.

What began as a localised revolt in Mali's north in 2012 soon spread to the centre of the country and then to neighbouring Niger and Burkina Faso.

The UN peacekeeping force, a French military intervention, and military campaigns by national armies have failed to stem the violence, which has killed 4,000 people in the three countries last year and displaced hundreds of thousands, according to UN figures.

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Kenya

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Kenyan police 'killed 15' since start of coronavirus curfew (Aljazeera)
June 5, 2020

Police in Kenya have reportedly been involved in the killing of 15 people since the government imposed in March a dusk-to-dawn curfew as part of a series of sweeping

measures to combat the spread of novel coronavirus.

The Independent Policing Oversight Body (IPOA) said in a statement seen by AFP news agency on Friday that it had received 87 complaints against police since the curfew and heightened security measures were rolled out on March 27.

The complaints included deaths, shootings, harassment, assaults, robbery, inhuman treatment and sexual assault.

"After preliminary investigations, 15 deaths and 31 incidents where victims sustained injuries have directly been linked to actions of police officers during the curfew enforcement," the policing oversight body said.

'Chaotic and violent' The IPOA statement was released earlier this week as the United States was gripped by anger over police brutality and racism following the killing of another Black man, George Floyd, at the hands of white officers.

Activists on social media have drawn parallels with Kenya's scourge of police brutality, which often goes unpunished.

Kenya's police force is often accused by rights groups of using excessive force and carrying out unlawful killings, especially in poor neighbourhoods.

In April, Human Right Watch (HRW) accused the police of imposing the curfew in a "chaotic and violent manner from the start", sometimes whipping, kicking and tear-gassing people to force them off the streets.

It described the case of 13-year-old Yassin Hussein Moyo who died in the capital, Nairobi, on March 31 after being shot while standing on his balcony as police forced people into their homes on the street below.

In others, a tomato seller died in western Kakamega after being hit by a tear gas canister, while four men were beaten to death in different parts of the country.

"It is shocking that people are losing their lives and livelihoods while supposedly being protected from infection," Otsieno Namwaya, HRW's senior Africa researcher, said at the time.

In a February report detailing the killing of at least eight people in Nairobi's low-income neighbourhoods, HRW said police "continue to kill crime suspects and protesters in cold blood despite persistent calls to end the killings and the use of excessive force".

Interior Minister Fred Matiangi on Friday criticised police excesses, but "took exception to painting the entire service with the same brush", his office said in a statement.

"We have challenges in our law enforcement, and we must all rise and start dealing with them collectively instead of creating a stigma around the police," Matiangi said.

According to the statement, the country's chief prosecutor Noordin Haji has formed a specialised unit to speedily handle cases of police violence, and is currently working on 171 cases of such brutality, 81 of which are in court.

On Thursday, the IPOA announced six police officers would be arrested and prosecuted, one for the killing of Moyo, another for shooting dead a secondary school teacher while responding to a burglary at a market in western Siaya, and four others for seriously assaulting a man during an arrest.

In early April, President Uhuru Kenyatta apologised for the violence following the enforcement of the curfew.

"I want to apologise to all Kenyans for ... some excesses that were conducted," he said at the time. "But I want to assure you that if we work together, if we all understand that this problem needs all of us, and if we pull in the same direction, we will overcome."

To date, Kenya has confirmed 2,474 coronavirus cases and 79 related deaths.

Coronavirus threatens Kenya goal to end female genital mutilation by 2022 (Reuters) By Nita Bhalla
June 9, 2020

The coronavirus pandemic has put Kenya's goal of ending female genital mutilation (FGM) by 2022 in jeopardy, campaigners against the practice warned, amid reports of "mass cuttings" involving hundreds of girls being held while schools are closed.

One in five women and girls aged between 15 and 49 in Kenya have undergone FGM, which usually involves the partial or total removal of the female genitalia and can cause a host of serious health problems, says the United Nations.

Kenya criminalised the practice in 2011, but it persists as some communities see it is necessary for social acceptance and increasing their daughters' marriage prospects.

Domtila Chesang, an anti-FGM campaigner in West Pokot county which borders Uganda, said she had received reports of up to 500 girls undergoing FGM since schools closed on March 16.

"Girls are not going to school, they are just sitting at home. Some are coming of age. Parents are facing an uncertain future due to loss of income caused by the coronavirus, so they are having the girls cut and will marry them off," said Chesang.

"We cannot respond and campaign the way we used to as our movements are restricted and a lot of it is hidden. It's very unlikely Kenya will meet the target of ending FGM by 2022. The coronavirus is a major setback."

Chesang said the government had also ordered charities to shut rescue shelters as they did not comply with social distancing measures, leaving many girls unable to escape communities where they were at risk of FGM.

An estimated 200 million girls and women worldwide have undergone the ancient ritual of FGM, practised in at least 27 African countries and parts of Asia and the Middle East.

Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta pledged in November to end FGM by 2022 - eight years ahead of the 2030 global goal agreed by U.N. member states.

The head of the Anti-FGM Board, a semi-autonomous government agency, said she had received reports of FGM from counties including West Pokot, Baringo and Samburu and were working with local police to rescue girls and arrest suspects.

"The government is aware of the cases being reported in West Pokot. There have been a number of arrests and a number of girls found at risk," said Bernadette Loloju.

A fact-finding team had been dispatched to West Pokot to investigate the mass cuttings, she said.

"We are very concerned and have launched awareness campaigns through radio as most people are at home. We are also mobilising community members to be alert and report cases."

Loloju said the Anti-FGM board was in discussion with the Department for Children's Services to issue guidelines for shelters so that they can reopen.

But with schools not expected to reopen in Kenya until September, campaigners fear a heightened risk to girls from not only FGM, but also child marriage, teen pregnancy and sexual violence.

"Progress to end FGM has been tremendously interrupted because of the pandemic. Much of the response plan is based on physical engagement with communities, which has been hampered," said Felister Gitonga, programme officer for Equality Now.

"But we won't know the scale of the problem until schools reopen in September. Our concern is that many girls won't return - so we are working with partners and local administration to track those girls who don't return and find out why."

Kenya Charges Police Officer with Murder for Coronavirus Curfew Death (Voice of America) By April Zhu
June 12, 2020

Kenya's Independent Policing Oversight Authority (or IPOA) on Thursday announced a police officer was being charged with murder in the shooting death of Yassin Hussein Moyo.

The thirteen-year-old boy was standing on the balcony of his parent's home in Nairobi on March 30 when he was hit by a bullet as police enforced a nighttime coronavirus curfew.

Jonathan Lodompui, vice chairman of the policing oversight authority, a civilian group established to investigate and audit police misconduct, says more officers have been disciplined, but he would not disclose how many.

"They have really been disciplined. Some of them have been recalled, some of them have been interdicted, and some certain disciplinary action or role models have been preferred against them," he said.

The IPOA said Thursday that five other police officers were facing charges over other deaths, shootings, and assaults that predated Kenya's curfew.

In a statement earlier this week, the oversight body said 15 deaths linked to police during the curfew are under investigation.

But rights groups say since Kenya's curfew began March 27 police are responsible for at least 26 deaths, the vast majority in poor neighborhoods.

Juliet Wanjira is secretariat of the Mathare Social Justice Centre, an organization that documents extrajudicial police killings. She says charges brought against officers has not led to fewer civilians being killed.

"Arresting the killer of Yassin Moyo is not going to bring Yassin Moyo back. It's not going to. What is justice really? Justice is preventing Yassin Moyos from being killed, and that is what we need IPOA and this government to do."

Public anger is beginning to boil over.

Video on social media showed protesters defying the curfew Monday night in Nairobi's Mathare slum and setting tires on fire in outrage over the shooting death of an elderly homeless man.

The protesters accuse Kenyan police of killing the man, whom locals called Vaite, while enforcing the curfew.

Speaking to Kenya's NTV news Tuesday, Kenya Police Spokesman Charles Owino claimed that Vaite was shot not by police but by men on motorcycles.

"If any police officer, including myself, if I take the law into my own hands and kill someone, you will not need to expose it. I'll be taken to court," Owino said.

The police oversight authority says Vaite's death is one of those being investigated.

The IPOA says 87 complaints of police violence have been lodged since the curfew, including shootings, robbery, and sexual assault.

The executive director of Amnesty International Kenya, Irungu Houghton, says the spike in cases shows that not enough disciplinary actions are being taken.

"If you continue to retain a veil of secrecy around both the disciplinary actions that you're taking and the officers that are being disciplined, then essentially what you are sending is a signal to the other officers is that they can continue doing what they're doing and that there will be no consequences."

Kenya's prosecution of police officers is exceedingly rare. Since the IPOA's establishment in 2012, Kenya has convicted only seven police for unlawful deaths.

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The Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina, War Crimes Chamber

Official Court Website [English translation]

Coronavirus Safeguards Stop Large-Scale Bosnian War Trials Resuming (Balkan Transitional Justice) By Emina Dizdarevic

June 5, 2020

When an official decision was made to ease restrictions imposed to curb the spread of the coronavirus in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the state court began scheduling hearings in war crimes trials - but no hearings will be held yet in cases involving a large number of defendants, Minka Kreho, a judge who is president of the criminal section at the court, told BIRN.

The country's judicial overseer, the High Judicial and Prosecutorial Council, has decided that hearings can only be held in courtrooms where an adequate physical distance between all the defendants can be ensured. More than 15 cases currently ongoing before the court involve a larger number of defendants.

"We shall have to wait for a new decision by the Crisis Committee [official body set up to deal with the pandemic] or for the virus to be put under control before we can go ahead with those trials," Kreho said.

She said that after the relaxation of the pandemic restrictions, the court decided that trials of up to five defendants could start again on June 1. Those hearings will be conducted in two biggest courtrooms in the state court building in Sarajevo, where appropriate distance between all the participants can be ensured.

Nermina Alukic, a war victim who has waited for justice for more than two decades, is one of those who will be affected by this new delay to war crimes proceedings.

In 2015, Alukic testified at the state court about the murders of her father and brother in June 1992 in a massacre in the village of Zecovi, near Prijedor.

They were among more than 150 people who were killed in the attack, among them women, children and elderly people. The survivors were sent to detention camps, where some were killed and others were abused.

Thirteen people – former Bosnian Serb Army soldiers and policemen, as well as the head of the Serb Democratic Party and Crisis Committee in the village of Rasavci – are on trial in the Zecovi case. They are accused of involvement in murders, rapes, torture, robbery and the destruction of property.

"The way things are happening is not right. How many people have died [before the trial finally started], how many witnesses? How many neighbours have died? They did not live to see trials. They did not live to see their children being found. They did not live to see anything," Alukic told BIRN.

"If it keeps going like this, God knows if I will live to see it," she said.

When the pandemic hit Bosnia and Herzegovina, the country's judicial overseer, the High Judicial and Prosecutorial Council ordered the postponement of all trials.

The HJPC's president, Milan Tegeltija, told BIRN that if there was a courtroom that could accommodate 50 people with the mandatory distance between them, all trials could resume. "If such a space is not available, you cannot work," Tegeltija explained.

Lawyer Sabina Mehic said that she expects trials to resume in full capacity soon, irrespective of the number of defendants per

case.

“I work on cases with eight to ten defendants on average. If this continues for months, it will not be in accordance with defendants’ rights to an efficient trial,” Mehic explained.

“It is not right from the perspective of victims either. More than 25 years have passed since the war. The victims [in war cases] are elderly people. Justice cannot wait forever,” she added.

For years, victims and experts have expressed concerns about delays to war crimes cases due to badly-written indictments and the country’s failure to adopt a new nationwide strategy for the processing of such cases. A lack of political will has often been blamed for the situation.

Bosnia adopted a National War Crimes Processing Strategy in 2008 which stipulated that the most complex war-crimes cases should be completed within seven years – ie. by 2015.

As that deadline expired, a revised strategy was prepared by which all cases should be completed by 2023. But the Council of Ministers, Bosnia’s state-level government, has still not adopted the revised strategy.

The revised strategy says that the state prosecution has more than 550 unresolved war crimes cases involving more than 4,500 identified perpetrators, and as many cases in which the perpetrators are unknown.

“I am generally dissatisfied with the processing of war crimes in Bosnia. I am not talking about prosecutors and judges, I am talking about the overall setting,” Tegeltija said.

“I think there is declarative support for prosecuting all criminals and ensuring satisfaction for victims rather than a real will and intention to create the conditions for something like that to happen,” he added.

Nedžad Smailović, a legal adviser at the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, said the pandemic will have a negative effect on the processing of war crimes, as well as other serious crimes, and that for many victims of these crimes, justice has been postponed.

“Processing war crimes represents the most important challenge for judiciary in Bosnia and Herzegovina,” said Samilović.

Among the obstacles are the “politicisation of war crimes processing” and the prioritisation of cases, he added.

As a way to ensure the continued processing of war crimes during the pandemics, the HJPC proposed that regulations be laid down and online trials introduced in Bosnia and Herzegovina. But the Justice Ministry objected to the initiative from the start.

“When the HJPC came up with the initiative to revise the law in order to enable online trials or smaller trials to continue, I reacted immediately and said it was impossible, because it was not possible to revise four laws at all levels in Bosnia and Herzegovina in such a short period of time. My entity colleagues agreed with me,” Justice Minister Josip Grubesa told BIRN.

Grubesa argued that it was impossible to organise online hearings because they mostly involved older people who do not have a full grasp of new technology.

A separate room with a video link where such people could gather would have had to be provided, but it was also unclear how lawyers would be able to accompany their clients and how conversations with witnesses would take place.

Tegeltija disagreed with Grubesa, however.

“I don’t think it is complicated, I don’t think it is impossible. We proposed a concrete legal solution on how [the law] should be revised or amended... so it provides for such type of online trials,” he said.

Mehic said the idea of holding online hearings is intended to protect defendants’ rights to an efficient trial within a reasonable timeframe, as well as providing victims with justice.

“So the idea is good, but the issue is whether it is feasible or not. The question is how many other rights would be violated by introducing online hearings. The issue of trials being public is problematic, in my opinion. How would the public be able to follow those trials?” she asked.

June 10, 2020

Former Territorial Defence fighter Milan Trisic went on trial at the Bosnian state court on Wednesday, accused of committing crimes against humanity in the village of Hranca and in the town of Bratunac in 1992.

He is accused of participating in the persecution of Bosniak civilians from the village and of involvement in murders, detentions, forcible disappearances and torture.

Trisic allegedly directed 50 women and children from Hranca to the village bus station, where around 250 village residents had already been brought, on May 3, 1992. After that they were taken to Bratstvo stadium and temporarily detained.

He then allegedly participated in questioning the remaining residents of Hranca on May 9 and pillaged houses, which were set on fire afterwards.

He allegedly acted as a guard when civilian men from the village were transported to the Vuk Karadzic school building in Bratunac, where they were detained and forced to sing Chetnik songs. The indictment alleges that he then hit them.

While taking civilians to be detained at the school on May 11, Trisic allegedly separated a man called Selmo Ibisevic from the others and hit him with a baton.

“Ibisevic fell down and passed away later on due to the injuries,” prosecutor Ahmed Mesic said.

The indictment further accuses Trisic of being responsible for the deaths of several other civilians who were held in the school gym.

He is charged with taking several men to the locker room and toilet, where he hit them with a steel table leg.

He allegedly crushed another man up against a wall with a car, which caused his death.

The indictment also claims that Trisic and other people forced the imam at the Bratunac mosque to drink beer and then assaulted him.

The prosecutor said the imam’s body was later found separately from his head.

Trisic was deported to Bosnia and Herzegovina from the US in October last year.

While in the US, he was prosecuted for giving false data about his participation in the Bosnian war.

Bosnian Prosecutor Demands Jailing of Croat Fighters for Prisoner Abuse (Balkan Transitional Justice) By Albina Sorguc

June 11, 2020

In closing arguments at the Bosnian state court on Thursday, the prosecution asked for Mile Pazin and Vide Kresic to be found guilty of crimes against civilian prisoners in the Stolac area in 1993.

“The prosecution considers that it has proved beyond doubt that the defendants committed the crimes that they are charged with in this case,” said Bosnian state prosecutor Igor Dubak.

Pazin is accused of arresting and physically and mentally mistreating women, children and several men who were detained in a school building in Crnici, near Stolac, from where they were transferred to detention facilities in Djulici and Kaplan Mahala.

Kresic is accused of the mental and physical mistreatment of civilians detained at the Kostana Hospital in Stolac.

Dubak said that Pazin was commander of the Civil Protection force in the municipality of Stolac, and Kresic was a Croatian Defence Council fighter at the time.

He argued that it had been proved that Bosniak prisoners, including women, children and elderly people, were kept in inhumane conditions in the detention facilities, and were deprived of food and robbed of their money and gold jewellery.

The defence lawyers will present their closing arguments on July 2 or 9.

Bosnian Serb Ex-Officer Goes on Trial for Village Attack (Balkan Transitional Justice) By Marija

Tausan

June 11, 2020

The trial of Mile Ujic, who is accused of persecuting Bosniak civilians during a widespread and systematic attack in the Rogatica area, opened at the Bosnian state court in Sarajevo on Thursday.

Ujic is accused of involvement in murders, forcible resettlement and detentions of local Bosniak residents during the attack by the Bosnian Serb Army, police and paramilitary units from Serbia.

The indictment alleges that on August 2, 1992, Ujic commanded a group of 50 members of the Bosnian Serb Army's Gucevska Company during an assault on the village of Kozadre in the Rogatica area.

Several civilians, including minors, were injured in the attack. After that, the men's hands were tied and they were taken away, alongside women and children, towards the nearby village of Dobrasina, while soldiers set several houses on fire.

According to the charges, the Bosniaks were then unlawfully locked inside a house, and Ujic arrived the following day and referred the injured for treatment.

It is further alleged that two or three days later, the women and children were transported to Rogatica and then to Hresa, near Sarajevo. Eight men were taken away and killed and their remains were only exhumed in 1998.

Prosecutor Dzevad Muratbegovic said that Ujic was accused as a co-perpetrator, citing his presence at the site and command.

The indictment alleges that during the war Ujic held several senior roles including being a member of the Crisis Committee in Rogatica and the de facto deputy commander of the Bosnian Serb Army's Rogatica Brigade.

The first witnesses are due to be heard on June 12.

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International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY)

Official Website of the ICTY

France court agrees to transfer Rwanda genocide suspect to UN tribunal (Jurist) By Joshua Cossin

June 4, 2020

The Paris Court of Appeals on Wednesday affirmed a lower court decision to transfer Felicien Kabuga to Arusha, Tanzania, to be tried for his role as the primary financier of the 1994 Rwandan genocide.

Kabuga will be handed over to the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals (IRMCT), which is primarily based out of The Hague but also includes a branch in Arusha. A judge in The Hague ruled last month that Kabuga would be tried at the Arusha site of the IRMCT, which took over for the UN's International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) after it closed in 2015.

The now 84-year-old Kabuga has been on the run for 26 years. During that time, he adopted a fake identity and utilized his vast resources alongside a network of family connections to evade international authorities in numerous countries throughout Europe and Africa. Kabuga was once of Rwanda's richest men before he was indicted by the ICTR in 1997 on a variety of charges. During his time as fugitive, authorities offered a \$5 million reward in 2002 for information leading to his capture.

The seven counts against Kabuga included the charge of genocide as well as "direct and public incitement to commit genocide"

by using his position as the chairman of Rwanda's FDN national defense fund to funnel money to militia groups. Kabuga has also been accused of forming the infamous Interahamwe militia that carried out many of the massacres as well as the Radio-Television Libre des Mille Collines, which is prominently recognized as having incited many to support the genocide and to commit acts of violence. It is believed that Kabuga supplied "an impressive number of machetes and other weapons to the Interahamwe militia" and may have even directly supervised Interahamwe massacres in Gisenyi, northwestern Rwanda, and in the Kigali district of Kimironko.

Kabuga was arrested on May 16 in Asnieres-sur-Seine in the Hautes-de-Seine department outside of Paris. Kabuga had originally asked for a trial in France, citing concerns of bias in the UN African courts, fears that he would be returned to Rwanda and his failing health. Kabuga attended the hearing in a wheelchair with a mask and barely reacted to the decision as it was read out.

He is expected to be transferred within 30 days to Arusha for trial, but, if the current pandemic affects travel, Kabuga will likely be tried instead at The Hague in the Netherlands. However, his lawyers are planning to appeal the ruling to France's highest court of appeal, the Court of Cassation, which could delay the transfer further.

The 1994 genocide resulted in the estimated death of 800,000 people. The end of the more than two-decade search for Kabuga, which resulted in his title as Africa's most wanted man, marks the beginning of closure for one of the most significant outstanding wounds from the tragedy.

Tanzania: Kabuga Losing Battle to Avoid Arusha Trial (All Africa) By Deus Ngowi
June 7, 2020

IT almost seems apparent that Rwanda's Felicien Kabuga, one of the world's most wanted fugitives, is losing his battle to resist being tried by the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals (IRMCT).

The Paris Court of Appeals has decided in favour of transferring Kabuga to Arusha for trial over his role in the 1994 Rwandan genocide.

He will be handed over to the Mechanism, a UN body responsible for trying Rwandans indicted by the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) in the Rwandan civil war.

The Court's President, Judge Pascale Belin, ruled that even in Tanzania, Kabuga could get medical services he is now enjoying in France.

His lawyer, Laurent Bayon, had told the Court that Kabuga was ill and sees a doctor almost each day and that the eight hours flight to Tanzania may jeopardise his health as well as search for truth about his involvement in the genocide. He is currently on a wheel chair.

"There is no evidence that Félicien Kabuga's condition is incompatible with his detention or transfer. No objective reason to doubt that the Mechanism is able to provide Félicien Kabuga with the same medical guarantees (in Tanzania) as those currently offered in France," said the judge.

Kabuga had expressed his preference for trial in France. His attorneys made the claim that their client's ill health and advanced age would have prohibited his being moved to another country.

Kabuga was arrested on May 16 in Asnieres-sur-Seine in the Hautes-de-Seine department outside of Paris.

A fugitive on the run for 26 years who had adopted a false identity, the 84-year-old is known as the financier of the Rwandan genocide.

An arrest warrant had been issued in his name by the Mechanism with a \$5 million reward.

While the road to a possible trial is still long for him, the Paris Court of Appeal that was responsible for ruling on the validity of the arrest warrant, ordered the transfer of Kabuga to the Mechanism that has an office in Arusha and another in The Hague, the Netherlands on 3 June.

The mass slaughter of rebel Tutsi and Hutu forces by the Rwandan government, known as the Rwandan genocide, spawned a civil war during the spring and summer of 1994 that killed between 500,000 and one million people.

Kabuga had been indicted by a tribunal in 1997 on seven separate counts, one of which was genocide.

The decision of the Paris Court on Arusha trial comes few days after The Mechanism Judge William Sekule, sitting at Arusha, decided that Kabuga be transferred and tried at the Arusha Branch of the Mechanism and not The Hague.

He was reacting to a motion by the Mechanism Prosecutor Serge Brammertz that was seeking to amend arrest and order for transfer of Kabuga so that he is transferred to The Hague, Netherlands, due to Covid-19 that has caused restrictions in movement and transport.

Dismissing the motion, Judge Sekule said the motion was not sufficiently supported and that if transfer to Arusha from France where he was arrested and is being detained is not possible at the relevant time, appropriate relief may be sought.

The ruling came a few days after Tanzania opened its skies and has since started receiving tourists and other visitors.

Kabuga's lawyers have said they will challenge the French Court's decision by filing two appeals in cassation - one on the QPC and another on the transfer to the Mechanism.

Once filed, the Court of Cassation will have two months to decide. Lawyers will then be able to refer the case to the European Court of Human Rights although the procedure is not suspensive. Kabuga's fate should therefore be decided by the end of September.

Kabuga Was Helped By An Extensive Network Of Accomplices- Amb. Rugwabiza (KTPress) By
Edmund Kagire
June 9, 2020

Genocide fugitive Félicien Kabuga could not have escaped justice without the help and support of a network of accomplices in African and European governments who facilitated him with documents and means to evade justice for 26 years.

The observation was made by Rwanda's Permanent Representative to the United Nations Amb. Valentine Rugwabiza during the United Nations Security Council video-teleconference on International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals (IRMCT) from The Hague on Monday.

During the session in which the president of IRMCT, Judge Carmel Agius, presented the Mechanism's 16th progress report to the Security Council, Amb. Rugwabiza said that Kabuga, who was arrested last month in Paris, France couldn't have escaped international Justice without the help of certain countries but did not name them.

"It is clear that Kabuga could not have escaped international justice for so long without an extensive network of accomplices, which enabled him to enjoy facilitation from Government institutions in the several African and European countries where he sojourned since 1994," Rugwabiza said.

"This raises a number of questions which we hope his trial will help answer," she said, adding that now that he has finally been arrested, the Rwandan government hopes that his trial will start without unnecessary delays.

Amb. Rugwabiza said that the arrest of Kabuga, 87, was a major development for international justice against the masterminds and perpetrators of the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi, having managed to escape justice for more than two decades.

"We commend the efforts of the office of Prosecutor Brammertz and the cooperation extended by France law enforcement agencies and others,"

"It is only when Members honor their obligations to extend cooperation to the Office of the Prosecutor, that arrests can be made and brought to justice," she said.

Kabuga, who was arrested in the northern Paris suburb of Asnières-sur-Seine, where he had been living under a false identity, was the main financier, the principal shareholder and the Chairman of the infamous Radio Télévision Libre des Mille Collines" (RTLM), which throughout the 100 days of the genocide, was inciting and calling for the killings and extermination of the Tutsi.

While appearing in a French court, Kabuga denied all the charges, including the importation into Rwanda, of tons of machetes which were used by Interahamwe militias and other perpetrators to kill the Tutsi, the targeted group for extermination.

The octogenarian who is set to be transferred to Arusha, Tanzania is fighting the planned relocation, opting to be tried in

France.

Rugwabiza said that justice for the victims of the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi is still an incomplete task with many genocide fugitives still on the run.

“I wish to recall that the Prosecutor General of Rwanda has issued more than 1000 indictments to several UN Member States, including members of this Council, requesting for their cooperation to arrest and prosecute individuals 4 indicted for genocide or transfer them to Rwanda to face justice,”

“Very few countries have responded to these indictments,” she said, adding that the UNSC resolution 1966 (2010), urged all Member States particularly those where genocide fugitives are suspected to be hiding, to further intensify cooperation with and render all necessary assistance to the Mechanism.

She said that there has been little cooperation despite the Council repeating the call, in subsequent resolutions, including most recently in resolution 2422 (2018).

Rigorous Provisions for Early release

For many years, Rwanda has opposed the early release of genocide convicts. Amb. Rugwabiza said that it is important for IRMCT in its efforts to revise grounds for consideration of applications for early release or commutation of sentence, to put into consideration Rwanda’s concerns.

“We note in particular the issuance of a revised Practice Direction to provide guidance on the procedure for the determination of applications for pardon, commutation of sentence, or early release of persons convicted by the Tribunal or by the Mechanism,”

“We also note the important inclusion of the need to consider the views of the associations of survivors of the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi and the opinion of the Government of Rwanda prior to granting any future application for early release,” she said.

Rwanda urged the Mechanism to attach rigorous provisions for conditional releases based on stringent and eligibility requirements to be fulfilled before the consideration of any application for early release.

“It is only in doing so, that we can make sure that those released by the Mechanism at the end of their sentence will find it costly to engage in activities propagating genocide denial or ideology in the future,” Rugwabiza said.

Amb. Rugwabiza reiterated the IRMCT concerns expressed in the Prosecutor’s report, that genocide denial and ideology continue to be propagated -something which is highly concerning.

“The Prosecutor’s report notes that efforts to deny, trivialize and minimize the genocide against the Tutsi, to detract attention from the facts of the genocide, are on the rise and being disseminated by genocide perpetrators yet to be brought to justice as well as their sympathizers, which include some government officials from UN Member States,”

“These actions should be unequivocally condemned by this Council,” Rugwabiza noted.

In his report to the council, the president of IRMCT, Judge Agius said that the Mechanism’s judicial workload has been impacted by the COVID-19 outbreak, putting on hold many activities.

He described the arrest of Kabuga as a ‘major breakthrough’, lauding the efforts of Prosecutor Brammertz and his team as well as France for the efforts to finally bring Kabuga to book.

He further thanked those who assisted the Mechanism in confirming the death of another fugitive, Augustin Bizimana, underscoring the the importance of cooperation and trust between member states.

On his part, Brammertz said that they will not rest until the remaining genocide fugitives are arrested or determined to be dead, urging concerned countries to cooperate.

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Domestic Prosecutions In The Former Yugoslavia

Serbian Court Urged to Convict Bosnian War Prison Commander (Balkan Transitional Justice) By

Milica Stojanovic

June 11, 2020

Serbia's war crimes prosecutor said in his closing statement to Belgrade Higher Court on Thursday that all the evidence showed that Husein Mujanovic was guilty of abusing Serbs held at a wartime prison that he commanded in Hrasnica.

Prosecutor Miodjub Vitorovic said the evidence "indisputably established that Husein Mujanovic committed the criminal act with which he is charged".

"I suggest that this court find him guilty and sentence him to 15 years," Vitorovic added.

According to the indictment, in the period from July 8 to October 15 1992 there were some 30 Serb prisoners in Hrasnica prison, which was run by the Bosniak-led Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The prisoners were held in poor conditions and abused. Some of them were beaten in a nearby fallout shelter, and six died as consequence of the beatings.

Mujanovic is charged with personally beating two prisoners who survived.

His defence denied that witnesses' statement and evidence have proved the accusations.

"Prosecution claims are based only on the statements of witnesses who have changed them for the last 20 years," defence lawyer Dusan Ignjatovic told the court.

"He was fighting for the opposite [Bosniak] side [in the Bosnian war], we were cheering for the other, let's try [to show] that those who were fighting against [Serbs], who could be perceived as enemies, that they can expect justice in Serbia," Ignjatovic said.

Mujanovic repeated that he is not guilty.

He was arrested in July 2018 by Serbian police at a border crossing between Bosnia and Serbia.

The verdict will be delivered on July 6.

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Turkey

Libya: shocking new evidence of retaliatory attacks on civilians (Amnesty International UK)

June 5, 2020

New evidence obtained by Amnesty International indicates that war crimes and other violations may have been committed between 13 April and 1 June by warring parties in Libya during the latest surge in fighting near Tripoli.

Amnesty has examined scores of incidents through witness testimonies, satellite imagery and analysis of open-source photos and videos - providing mounting evidence of looting, the indiscriminate shelling of civilian neighbourhoods, the planting of anti-personnel landmines in civilian buildings, and the parading of corpses.

A recent escalation in fighting in Tripoli's suburbs and in western Libya - with several towns changing hands between armed groups affiliated with the internationally-recognised Government of National Accord and the self-styled Libyan National Army - has seen a recent escalation in unlawful retaliatory attacks.

On 13 April, the Government of National Accord's Surman command issued a statement warning its troops against such

retaliatory acts, committing itself to investigating such “individual incidents”. However, to date, no commanders or fighters implicated in these crimes have been held to account or removed from active duty.

Amnesty is calling on all warring parties and associated forces in Libya to immediately halt attacks against civilians and other violations of international humanitarian law, including those being carried out to punish civilians for their perceived affiliations with rival groups. Amnesty is also calling on members of the UN Human Rights Council to urgently establish a Commission of Inquiry or similar mechanism to investigate violations of international humanitarian law and other human rights violations, determine responsibility and preserve evidence of crimes in order to secure justice for the victims.

Despite a comprehensive UN arms embargo in place on Libya since 2011, the UAE and Russia have provided significant military support to the Libyan National Army, while Turkey has backed the Government of National Accord. There have been numerous illicit arms transfers and direct military support, and Amnesty is currently carrying out investigations into this influx of military equipment and foreign fighters.

Diana Eltahawy, Amnesty International’s Middle East and North Africa Deputy Director, said: “Civilians in Libya are once again paying the price, as all parties escalate retaliatory attacks and other grave violations showing utter disregard for their lives and the laws of war.

“We are calling on all parties to the conflict and affiliated militias and armed groups to immediately halt indiscriminate attacks and other serious violations carried out against civilians associated with rival groups. Commanders must publicly condemn these acts. “Countries such as Turkey, Russia and the UAE must cease violating the UN arms embargo.”

Houses looted, corpses paraded, and threats to kill women and babies

On 13 April, Government of National Accord-affiliated forces using Turkish arms and equipment captured the cities of Surman and Sabratha, and several towns west of Tripoli. Witnesses told Amnesty that these forces looted several civilian houses and public buildings, including the Sabratha main hospital, setting homes on fire. Amnesty also verified a photo published on social media by a Government of National Accord fighter, showing fellow fighters celebrating next to the corpses of several Libyan National Army combatants.

Video footage analysed by Amnesty shows further incidents of retaliation against civilians for their perceived affiliation to one side or another. One video shows armed men looting civilian property in the town of Al-Asabah, 75 miles south of Tripoli, after Government of National Accord forces took control on 21 May.

In another video posted on social media on 30 April, again verified by Amnesty, a Government of National Accord-affiliated fighter is seen threatening “Kaniyat forces” (aligned with the Libyan National Army) that they would “not to leave a single woman alive” when they capture the town of Tarhuna, south-east of Tripoli. Meanwhile, Kaniyat forces have themselves committed serious violations against civilians in Tripoli and Tarhuna.

Meanwhile, another video on the personal page of a Libyan National Army fighter examined by Amnesty shows him threatening to kill anyone in Benghazi, along with “those in his house even if babies”, if they mourn those who died fighting with the Government of National Accord. Amnesty verified one video showing the Libyan National Army first infantry brigade parading fighters’ corpses in a pick-up truck, while calling a captured Government of National Accord fighter a “Syrian dog” on 18 April.

Anti-personnel landmines

There is mounting evidence of the use of anti-personnel landmines in flagrant violation of an international ban on their use.

Residents told Amnesty that on or around 22 May, forces aligned with the Libyan National Army placed anti-personnel landmines as they withdrew from the neighborhoods of Ain Zara and Salah el-Din south of Tripoli. At least one civilian was killed by a landmine when he returned to his house on 22 May, according to his family.

There is evidence that Libyan National Army-affiliated forces have laid extensive tripline-activated anti-personnel landmines and other booby-traps in homes and other civilian objects. Photos and videos verified by Amnesty show Russian and Soviet-era anti-personnel landmines - including MON-50s, MON-90s, OZM-72s and MS3s - prohibited by international law due to their indiscriminate nature.

Foreign personnel employed by the Russian military company

Wagner were observed leaving areas shortly before landmines were discovered.

Civilian neighbourhoods shelled by both sides

During the course of April and May, Libyan National Army forces shelled civilian neighborhoods in Tripoli, resulting in civilian casualties and damage to property in the neighborhoods of Ain Zara, Tariq el-Sour, Souq al-Talata, and Souq El-Joma. Amnesty has verified images of the aftermath of these attacks, showing civilians who had been killed and wounded. Witnesses and a medical source confirmed to Amnesty that an attack launched by Libyan National Army forces on Souq Al-Talat on 31 May left at least three civilians dead and 11 wounded, including a child whose leg was amputated.

Meanwhile, Government of National Accord-aligned forces carried out indiscriminate attacks during April and May in Tripoli's suburb of Qasr Bin Ghashir, Beni Walid, Tarhuna and close to Ash Shwayrif village - again with civilian casualties reported. At least one girl was killed by shelling in Qasr Bin Ghashir on 1 June, according to witnesses, while several buildings were damaged, with photos of the damage verified by Amnesty.

An Amnesty investigation last year into the fighting in Libya found that both sides and their affiliated forces had been responsible for indiscriminate and disproportionate attacks, as well as the use of a range of inaccurate explosive weapons in populated urban areas.

Libya: Retaliatory attacks against civilians must be halted and investigated (Amnesty International)

June 5, 2020

New evidence obtained by Amnesty International indicates that war crimes and other violations may have been committed between 13 April and 1 June by warring parties in Libya during the latest surge in fighting near Tripoli, including, looting, indiscriminate attacks, and the planting of anti-personnel landmines in civilian buildings.

Amnesty International has examined scores of incidents through witness testimonies, analysis of open source photos and videos, and satellite imagery. The organization calls on all warring parties and associated forces in Libya to immediately halt attacks against civilians and other violations of international humanitarian law, including those being carried out to punish civilians for their perceived affiliations with rival groups.

“Civilians in Libya are once again paying the price as all parties escalate retaliatory attacks and other grave violations showing utter disregard for the laws of war and lives of civilians,” said Diana Eltahawy, MENA Deputy Regional Director at Amnesty International.

“We are calling on all parties to the conflict and affiliated militias and armed groups to immediately halt indiscriminate attacks and other serious violations carried out against civilians associated with rival groups. Commanders must publicly condemn these acts. Countries such as Turkey, Russia and the UAE must cease violating the UN arms embargo.”

For years, the Libyan judicial authorities have been unable or unwilling to act leaving years of impunity to fuel these grave violations. Amnesty International is also calling on members of the UN Human Rights Council to urgently establish a Commission of Inquiry or similar mechanism to investigate violations of international humanitarian law and other human rights violations, determine responsibility and preserve evidence of crimes in order to secure justice for the victims.

Acts of Retaliation

The recent escalation in fighting in Tripoli's suburbs and western Libya, with several western towns changing hands between armed groups affiliated with the internationally recognized Government of National Accord (GNA) and the self-styled Libyan National Army (LNA) which is now in de facto control of much of eastern and southern Libya, has sparked an escalation of unlawful retaliatory attacks.

On 13 April, GNA affiliated forces, using Turkish arms and equipment transferred in violation of the UN arms embargo, captured the cities of Surman and Sabratha and several towns west of Tripoli. Witnesses told Amnesty International that members of GNA affiliated armed groups looted several civilian houses and public buildings, including the Sabratha main hospital, and set homes on fire. Amnesty International also verified a photo published on social media by a GNA fighter, showing GNA fighters celebrating next to the corpses of several LNA fighters. Video footage analysed by Amnesty International shows further incidents of retaliation against civilians for their perceived affiliation to one side or another.

One video Amnesty International verified shows armed men looting civilian property in the town of Al-Asabah, 120 kms south of Tripoli, after GNA forces took control on 21 May. A local resident told Amnesty International that he witnessed an incident where armed men looted the house of an LNA fighter.

In another disturbing video posted on social media on 30 April, verified by Amnesty International, a GNA-affiliated fighter is seen threatening “Kaniat forces” (affiliated with the LNA) that they would “not to leave a single woman alive” when they capture Tarhuna.

Amnesty International examined another video with a GNA affiliated fighter threatening another Tawergha in and Sirte, in reference to the forced eviction of the city’s entire population in retaliation for the use of city as a launching ground for attacks against Misratah. With the GNA taking control of Tarhuna, such statements raise fears over further revenge attacks against civilians.

Kaniat forces affiliated with the LNA have committed serious violations against civilians in Tripoli and Tarhuna. The United Nations Support Mission in Libya reported numerous unlawful killings by Kaniat forces.

Another video examined by Amnesty International on the personal page of an LNA fighter shows him threatening to kill anyone in Benghazi, along with “those in his house even if babies,” if they mourn those who died fighting along the GNA. Amnesty International verified a video showing LNA first infantry brigade parading fighters’ corpses in a pickup truck, while calling a captured GNA fighter “A Syrian Dog” on 18 April.

Anti-personnel Landmines

LNA forces have also committed serious violations, including acts of retaliation such as the use of anti-personnel landmines in flagrant violation of the international ban.

Residents told Amnesty International that around 22 May forces aligned with the LNA placed anti-personnel landmines as they withdrew from the neighborhoods of Ain Zara and Salah el-Din south of Tripoli. At least one civilian was killed when he returned to his family house on 22 May by a landmine that was planted in his family house according to his family.

LNA affiliated forces laid extensive tripline-activated anti-personnel landmines and other booby-traps in homes and other civilian objects. Photos and videos verified by Amnesty International, show Russian and Soviet-era anti-personnel landmines, including MON-50s, MON-90s, OZM-72s, and MS3s, prohibited by international law due to their indiscriminate nature. Some homes in Ain Zara that were booby-trapped were labeled “опасно,” which translates as “dangerous” in Russian. Foreign personnel employed by the Russian military company Wagner were observed leaving these areas immediately before the landmines were discovered.

Indiscriminate attacks

In the course of April and May, LNA forces have shelled civilian neighborhoods in Tripoli, resulting in civilian casualties and damage to civilian property in the neighborhoods of Ain Zara, Tariq el-Sour, Souq al-Talata, and Souq El-Joma, according to witnesses, residents and a medical source in the GNA-affiliated Ministry of Health. Amnesty International verified images of the aftermath of these attacks, showing civilians killed and wounded. Witnesses and a medical source confirmed to Amnesty International an attack launched by LNA forces on Souq Al-Talat on 31 May, which left at least three civilians dead and 11 wounded, including a child whose leg was amputated.

Forces aligned to the GNA have also carried out indiscriminate attacks across the months of April and May in Tripoli’s suburbs of Qasr Bin Ghashir, Beni Walid, Tarhuna and close to Ash Shwayrif village, leading to civilian casualties according to family members and a medical source and photos examined and verified by Amnesty International. At least one girl was killed by shelling in Qasr Bin Ghashir on 1 June according to witnesses, while several buildings were damaged according to photos verified by Amnesty International.

Amnesty International’s August 2019 field investigation into the fighting that broke out in April that year, found that both GNA and LNA affiliated forces were responsible for indiscriminate and disproportionate attacks as well as the use of a range of inaccurate explosive weapons in populated urban areas.

Amnesty International has also documented the use of civilian objects by the GNA for military purposes, endangering civilians. Civilian airports in Tripoli and Misratah receive military shipments from Turkey, while the Special Deterrence Force GNA aligned militia has maintained its base and prison near the airport. LNA forces have repeatedly shelled the airport, which has put it out of action several times and caused damage to civilian aircraft.

Background

Since April 2020, GNA forces have been advancing against LNA positions in western Libya, capturing several coastal areas and the Al-Watiya airbase, pushed back LNA forces from Tripoli’s suburbs and took control of Tarhuna and towns around Gharyan.

On 13 April, the GNA's Surman command has issued a statement warning its troops against retaliatory acts, committing to investigate such "individual incidents". To date, no commanders or fighters implicated in such crimes have been held to account or removed from active duty.

Despite a comprehensive UN arms embargo in place since 2011, the UAE and Russia and Turkey have been supporting the LNA and GNA, respectively, through illicit arms transfers and direct military support.

Amnesty International is carrying-out investigations into the continued influx of military equipment and foreign fighters -- in violation of the UN arms embargo -- to both sides to the xconflict.

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MIDDLE-EAST

Iraq

Grotian Moment: The International War Crimes Trial Blog

UN team probing Daesh horrors urges Iraq to pass war crimes law (The Daily Star)

June 15, 2020

UN investigators have collected millions of call data records implicating Daesh (ISIS) militants in atrocities committed in Iraq, but delays in passing a law to govern war crimes trials could hinder the pursuit of justice, according to the head of the investigation.

Karim A. Khan leads the team charged with investigating Daesh atrocities committed against the Yazidi minority and other groups. His team has obtained over 2 million call data records from service providers with the help of Iraq's judiciary, he told The Associated Press in an interview Sunday.

The data will help geolocate suspects in the summer of 2014, when the extremists killed and enslaved thousands of Yazidis after sweeping across northern Iraq. He said the records provide evidence that is admissible in court and can prove criminal responsibility "beyond reasonable doubt."

The records, along with witness testimony and other information, will allow the investigators to focus on those most responsible for the crimes that were committed, Khan said.

"We have targets," he said. "We are trying to build case files that can be properly prosecuted and adjudicated in Iraq or in third states."

The UN team is also working with Iraqi intelligence to extract data from cell phones and mass storage devices, including hard drives, left behind when Daesh members fled during operations to dislodge the group from the northern city of Mosul in 2016 and 2017.

Iraq declared victory over Daesh in December 2017. The extremists no longer control any territory in Iraq or neighboring Syria, but they have continued to carry out sporadic attacks in both countries.

Over 300 suspects have been identified in connection to the events in Sinjar, with some still residing in Iraq, Khan said, adding that the list of suspects is still growing. He said the use of 3D technology is helping with the analysis of mass grave sites.

Investigative teams were also established to look into Daesh crimes committed against fellow Sunni Muslims as well as other

ethnic minorities, such as the Shabak, Kakai and Turkmen. Investigators are also looking into the Daesh massacre of hundreds of captured Iraqi air force cadets in June 2014.

But Khan said the investigators are still waiting for Iraq to pass a law developed by President Barham Salih, lawmakers and the judiciary, that would allow Iraqi courts to prosecute war crimes, calling it a "key piece in the jigsaw."

Legislative efforts have been set back by recent political turmoil, including mass protests in October that led to the resignation of Prime Minister Adel Abdul Mahdi, as well as the coronavirus outbreak.

"Now that we have a new government in place, I am hoping parliament will consider this Iraqi law in the next period of time," Khan said. "That is going to be quite important for us."

Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi's government, sworn in last month, is grappling with an economic crisis spurred by falling oil prices and the pandemic.

Suspected Daesh members are currently being prosecuted under Iraq's terrorism laws in often hasty trials that have been criticized by rights groups. The law under consideration would bring trials in line with international laws governing genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity. Those crimes are not currently recognized by Iraqi law.

"Ultimately, this is not just an academic exercise of giving a nice Security Council report," Khan said. "We have victims and survivors that are waiting for justice."

Kurds demand an end to silence after Turkey's missile-attack on refugee camps (Morning Star) By Steve Sweeney
June 16, 2020

KURDISH representatives in Iraq called for maximum resistance and an end to international silence today after Turkish missile attacks on refugee camps hit at least 81 targets on Monday morning.

Co-chairs of the democratic institutions of Maxmur, Sengal and Qandil, the camps targeted by Turkey's devastating assault, warned of genocide against the Kurdish people unfolding before the eyes of the world.

They hit out at the United Nations, Nato and other global organisations for failing to take action or even speak out as Turkey continues to commit atrocities and war crimes against Kurds, both internally and beyond its borders.

"Their indifference allows Turkey to continue attacking us," warned co-chairs of Maxmur People's Assembly Cicek Cengiz and Haci Kacan today.

Turkey's latest air strikes were launched in the early hours of Monday as part of Operation Claw Eagle, announced by Defence Minister Hulusi Akar just hours beforehand.

He insisted that the mission was targeting the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which has bases in Iraq's Qandil mountains, and said the missiles had struck "terror bases," bringing the caves down on the terrorists' heads."

But all of the speakers highlighted how women in particular have been affected by the attacks, which are attempting to destroy the structures that they have built in the aftermath of genocide as well as displacement.

Ms Cengiz and Mr Kacan accused the UN of "failing to fulfil its duties" for not stopping Turkey's genocide against Kurds.

They said: "This is an injustice that has been going on for a long time. We have been suffering for the last 26 years as refugees from Turkey."

Many fled in the 1990s as the Turkish state razed more than 3,000 Kurdish villages to the ground in operations against the PKK.

The camp in Maxmur has been placed under a strict embargo by Iraq's Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) for more than a year "for no reason."

Along with Turkish air strikes, it is also subjected to frequent attacks from a resurgent Isis.

"Under these circumstances, people are suffering due to lack of access to the most basic, fundamental conditions of living," they said.

The representatives of all three regions called for all those who support human rights to “raise their voices,” saying the attacks are not just about Qandil or Rojava “but the whole of humanity.

“We will not kneel to the air strikes or the KRG,” they said, defiantly. “We will continue our fight for the right to life.

“It’s the responsibility of every human being to stand up against injustice and support the resistance.”

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Syria

Airstrikes again hit Syria’s rebel area, displace thousands (Washington Post)

June 9, 2020

Suspected Russian airstrikes pounded villages on the edge of the last rebel enclave in northwestern Syria, sending thousands of civilians fleeing, activists reported Tuesday — scenes unseen in the area since a cease-fire three months ago.

The violence at the edge of Idlib province is the most serious breach of the cease-fire in place since early March, when an agreement between Turkey and Russia halted the Syrian government’s three-month air and ground campaign into rebel-held Idlib.

The Syria Response Coordination Group, a team of aid workers, said the military escalation displaced more than 5,800 civilians in the last 24 hours from areas in southern Idlib and western Hama countryside. Many of the displaced had only recently returned to their villages after the cease-fire, the group said.

On Monday, insurgents launched a limited offensive against government-held positions, briefly seizing a couple of villages. Government troops, backed by Russian air support, responded, repelling the insurgents but also widening their area of operations, targeting 10 villages, according to Mohamed Rasheed, a Syrian media activist documenting the offensive.

Rasheed reported airstrikes, believed to be carried out by Russia’s air force, on a number of villages in southern Idlib. He said he documented 45 airstrikes since Monday.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights recorded 15 airstrikes on Tuesday, also saying they were believed to be Russian. The Observatory and other local networks said at least one civilian was killed in Kansafra village.

Meanwhile, Syrian state media said government forces repelled an offensive by the insurgents, and that a soldier was killed.

Russia is a main backer of Syrian President Bashar Assad, while Turkey backs opposition fighters trying to remove him from power. Russia and Turkey have become the main power brokers in the war-torn country.

Rasheed said the insurgent offensive was led by the al-Qaida-linked Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, now the dominant group in the rebel-held northwest.

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Yemen

Coronavirus: World powers must speak up for Yemen's most vulnerable civilians (Middle Eastern Eye) By Tasnim Nazeer

June 14, 2020

The coronavirus pandemic has struck one of the world's most vulnerable countries, amid a brutal war that has been raging for more than five years.

Millions of Yemeni civilians are in dire need of humanitarian aid, and renewed fighting in the country's north has left hundreds of thousands of displaced people at heightened risk of contracting Covid-19, rights groups warn.

Decimated healthcare system

The intensifying conflict between Houthi forces and a Saudi-led coalition has moved nearer to these overcrowded camps, presenting a significant risk. The onslaught is driven by Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, who has not let up, even as the pandemic threatens catastrophic consequences in a country whose healthcare capacity has been decimated by years of war.

The restrictions on critical international aid and lifesaving items must be lifted, so that civilians can fulfil their basic needs

The northern Marib governorate has been hit hard in recent months by coalition air strikes, while both the Houthis and the Saudi-backed Yemeni government have placed constraints on humanitarian aid operations in the city, Human Rights Watch has noted. Amid the renewed fighting, civilians are struggling to access needed healthcare and humanitarian aid.

It is incumbent upon Saudi Arabia and the Houthis to collectively act with immediate effect to protect those who have been displaced within the country's most insecure areas.

It is vital that civilians in Yemen get access to the humanitarian aid that they desperately need, especially as experts predict that nearly half of the population, or 16 million people, could ultimately become infected with Covid-19.

Accountability for war crimes

Bin Salman has the authority to implement needed changes to protect civilians, but he has thus far failed to do so. The war itself goes against the very tenets of Islam, which calls to protect civilians and to look after your neighbours.

Saudi Arabia should be held accountable for the millions of people affected by this tragedy, along with the war crimes committed on Yemeni soil, including unlawful air strikes on homes, schools and marketplaces.

At the same time, while fighting has increased in the country's north in recent months, the Houthis' obstruction of access to international aid, showing a total disregard for the lives of civilians, presents a breach of international humanitarian law. This must come to an end.

With hospitals bombed, the healthcare system destroyed and Yemen's economy at an all-time low, the situation is set to deteriorate further now that civilians must also try to protect themselves from the Covid-19 pandemic. Those in power in the West and in the Muslim world must speak up to protect displaced Yemeni civilians and try to avoid a deeper catastrophe.

The right to a better future Authorities, human rights organisations and NGOs must call on Saudi Arabia to implement a total ceasefire, halting the destruction and bloodshed in Yemen. The restrictions on critical international aid and lifesaving items must be lifted, so that civilians can fulfil their basic needs.

Political prisoners must be released under emergency provisions, as their unsanitary living conditions could fuel the spread of Covid-19. The people of Yemen are entitled to justice, peace and a better future; it is long past time that they are given this chance.

Saudi-led Coalition Denies Targeting Civilians In Yemen Raid (Barron's)

June 17, 2020

The Saudi-led coalition on Wednesday denied targeting Yemeni civilians in air strikes that Iran-linked Huthi rebels and medical sources said left 13 people dead, including children.

The Huthis' Al-Masirah TV said four children were among those killed late Monday in coalition air strikes on a vehicle in the rebel stronghold of Saada.

Medical sources separately confirmed to AFP that four children had died.

Releasing a video of the raid, the coalition rejected the allegation as "false and unfounded", insisting that it targeted armed Huthi combatants.

"The video highlights the reality and circumstances of the targeting," a coalition statement said.

"A group of Huthi armed militants are shown carrying weapons in a military logistics operation, within the area of operations in close proximity to the Saudi-Yemeni border."

The incident occurred as the war-ravaged country, already reeling from what the UN calls the world's worst humanitarian crisis, grapples with the fast-spreading coronavirus pandemic.

It comes on the heels of UN chief Antonio Guterres's decision to remove the Saudi-led coalition from a list of groups violating children's rights.

The UN's newly published annual report on children in conflict zones said the toll had fallen since an agreement signed in March 2019.

Both the coalition and the rebels have been accused by the UN and rights groups of committing violations in Yemen that could amount to war crimes.

International aid organisations, including Oxfam, Save the Children and the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), have condemned the latest air strikes.

"We share our deepest condolences with the bereaved families and loved ones of those who have lost their lives in this terrible, unjustified attack," said Lise Grande, the UN humanitarian coordinator for Yemen.

"Yemen is desperate for peace. Humanitarian agencies are running out of money and COVID is spreading."

Mohamed Abdi, NRC's country director, said "an investigation must take place, and warring parties responsible for their deaths must be held accountable".

The strikes come after the coalition claimed it has recently intercepted a number of Huthi ballistic missiles and drones targeting Saudi cities near the Yemeni border.

The coalition intervened in Yemen in 2015, shortly after the Huthis seized the capital Sanaa. Tens of thousands of people, many of them civilians, have since been killed.

As war and COVID-19 ravage Yemen, \$1.35 billion in international aid isn't nearly enough. Here's why. (CBS News) By Amjad Tadros

June 17, 2020

United Nations' humanitarian chief Mark Lowcock promised during a virtual donors conference this month that the U.N. would "not abandon the people of Yemen." But the ever-expanding need for help in Yemen, as the war-torn country grapples with a spiralling coronavirus outbreak, cholera and widespread malnutrition, is quickly outpacing the charity from abroad.

The conference saw international donors pledge \$1.35 billion, far short of the \$2.41 billion target and only half of what was raised last year, as donor nations struggle to keep their own economies afloat amid pandemic shutdowns.

Aid agencies say the funding shortfall, combined with the country's virtually immeasurable COVID-19 epidemic, will make a grim situation even more dire, and they're sounding the alarm.

"Failing to keep up"

"Donors' pledges to Yemen are failing to keep up with the growing need in the country," Jose Maria Vera, Executive Director of the international aid group Oxfam, said in a statement, noting that Yemen was "already the world's biggest humanitarian crisis after more than five years of conflict."

Vera warned that Yemen is facing a coronavirus outbreak with "barely half" of the health facilities in the country even functioning.

Oxfam noted also that the COVID-19 pandemic's economic impact in Yemen — already one of the poorest countries in the world — has been multiplied because Yemenis rely so heavily on cash transfers from friends and relatives abroad.

The global health crisis has ushered an "unprecedented decline in the flow of remittances to Yemen — a vital source of money for millions." The World Bank estimates that one in ten people in Yemen rely entirely on such money transfers to meet their

basic needs.

Saudi Arabia co-hosted the U.N. donors conference and pledged \$500 million itself. But \$200 million of that donation was to be delivered to the kingdom's own government-run relief agency, rather than NGOs that work on the ground in Yemen.

The United States pledged \$225 million during the conference, and U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs David Schenker said Washington would be, "working to provide additional funding in the coming weeks."

But more than two dozen international aid agencies have now joined together to warn the U.S. that "the window of opportunity to help mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is closing." A joint open letter, sent to Acting Administrator of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) John Barsa, warned that delays in funding aid projects in Yemen would be "devastating."

The U.N.'s World Food Program (WFP) is the biggest aid organization providing support to the Yemeni people. It provides general food assistance to more than 12 million people at an estimated cost of \$837 million for six months (March 2020-August 2020). Faced with funding shortages, in April the WFP began providing families with food every other month instead of monthly.

"This allows us to stretch resources and to maintain a safety net for as long as possible for the vulnerable Yemeni families who rely on WFP food assistance," Abeer Etefa, the WFP's senior spokeswoman for the Middle East and North Africa, told CBS News. "We hope that more contributions will be coming through the year, because the needs are growing in Yemen."

Etefa said that while the international community has provided an unprecedented level of support for Yemen over the last five years, it's still not enough, and its work has been complicated by the "problematic operating environment in areas controlled by the Sanaa-based authorities."

"Complicated place to operate"

Like all aid organizations in Yemen, WFP must navigate between the warring factions that control different parts of the country to keep its work going.

"Yemen is an incredibly complicated place to operate," Etefa said, noting constantly "shifting frontlines, poor infrastructure — now a pandemic," and on top of all that, "an environment of bureaucratic interference."

In the country's south, the separatist Southern Transitional Council (STC) seized a cash consignment estimated at around \$85 million intended for the central bank in Aden on Saturday.

The rebels claimed the seizure was "part of several measures to end sources of corruption and to prevent the use of public money in supporting terrorism."

Meanwhile, the Iranian-backed Houthi rebels who control much of the north of Yemen, where 70% of the WFP's work is done, are demanding direct access to international donor money.

"We asked the U.N. to pay us in cash instead of the expired and corrupt assistance that they give to the Yemeni people," Houthi leader Mohammed Ali al-Houthi told the BBC on Sunday.

While there's broad consensus among aid organizations and the leaders of the various political factions in Yemen that the only lasting solution is a ceasefire, few are able — or willing — to name those responsible for the country's suffering.

Yemen's civil war is also a proxy war: The Iranian-backed Houthis who control the northern, most populous part of the country, including the capital Sanaa, are pitted against the government recognized by the U.S. and the United Nations. That government, which still controls a significant swath in the south, is being defended with devastating military power by a Saudi-led coalition.

"The Saudis are constantly demanding praise from the aid agencies for providing money for food and plastic sheeting so displaced Yemenis can build tents," one international aid official told CBS News on the condition of anonymity, "yet they get upset if we dare to discuss why the Yemeni homes were destroyed in the first place."

Yemeni official: UN recent decision undermines its reputation of international bodies (Iran Press)
June 17, 2020

Zaifullah al-Shami blamed the UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres and international organizations for the crimes the Saudi coalition committed against Yemeni children.

Al-Shami added that Guterres' decision in fact turned Yemeni children into targets for the Saudi coalition's attack and that international organizations were involved in the crime.

"The removal of Saudi Arabia from the list of violators of Yemeni children will give the green light to the Saudi coalition for more war crimes against Yemeni children," he said.

The United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres removed on Monday the Saudi coalition from the organization's blacklist for involvement in child molestation and human rights abuses.

In October 2017, the United Nations blacklisted the Saudi coalition for killing and injuring 683 children in Yemen and attacking dozens of schools and hospitals.

Children among 13 killed in Yemen air strikes (Dawn)

June 17, 2020

Thirteen people, including children, were killed in air strikes in Yemen's northern province of Saada, the rebels and medical sources said on Tuesday, as international aid groups condemned the raids.

Iran-backed Houthi rebels and Yemen's internationally-recognised government — supported by a Saudi-led military coalition — have been at war since 2014, creating what the United Nations calls the world's worst humanitarian crisis.

The Houthis' Al-Masirah TV said 13 people, including four children, were killed late on Monday in coalition air strikes on their vehicle in the rebel stronghold of Saada.

Medical sources confirmed said that four children were among those killed.

"We're horrified to learn of the deaths of 13 civilians, including four children, today in Yemen," said the country director for Save the Children, Xavier Joubert.

This comes on the heels of UN chief Antonio Guterres's decision to remove the Saudi-led coalition from a list of groups violating children's rights.

The UN's newly-published annual report on children in conflict zones said the toll had fallen since an agreement signed in March 2019.

Both the coalition and the rebels have been accused by the UN and rights groups of committing violations in Yemen that could amount to war crimes.

"It's a very sad irony that this attack happened on the day that the annual UN report on Children and Armed Conflict is coming out," said Joubert.

Oxfam and other international organisations, including the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), also condemned the raids.

"We condemn all violence by all parties to the conflict," said Muhsin Siddiquey, Oxfam country director in Yemen.

Mohamed Abdi, NRC's country director, said "an investigation must take place, and warring parties responsible for their deaths must be held accountable".

The Saudi-led coalition, for its part, said it intercepted on Tuesday a ballistic missile launched by the rebels from Saada towards the border region of Najran.

The launch came a day after the coalition destroyed a number of "bomb-laden" drones targeting the southern Saudi city of Khamis Mushait, according to the official Saudi Press Agency. The coalition intervened in Yemen in 2015, shortly after the Houthis seized the capital Sanaa. Tens of thousands of people, many of them civilians, have since been killed.

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Israel and Palestine

ICC Prosecutor: Israel war crimes probe can go on despite Oslo Accords (The Jerusalem Post) By
Yonah Jeremy Bob
June 8, 2020

International Criminal Court Prosecutor Fatou Bensouda has told the ICC's Pretrial Chamber that a war crimes probe against Israelis can proceed despite the continued application of the Oslo Accords.

Israel and its allies have claimed that the Oslo Accords prevent the PA from seeking ICC involvement in a potential criminal issue and from seeking statehood absent a deal between the parties. Bensouda's decision on Monday was a rejection of Israel's legal argument.

Bensouda further expressed concern about the impact of annexation on the combustible Israeli-Palestinian conflict and said that any annexation by Israel of any part of the West Bank would not have legal validity.

The ICC chief prosecutor's statement came in response to a May 27 request from the ICC Pretrial Chamber to clarify the status of the Oslo Accords and their impact on a war crimes probe against Israel.

The ICC asked the Palestinian Authority to declare whether the Oslo Accords are still legally binding. The request came after PA President Mahmoud Abbas declared on May 19 that the PA no longer viewed itself as bound by the Oslo Accords due to Israel's intention to annex parts of the West Bank.

Responding to this question, the PA said that Abbas's May 19 declaration was not part of the legal record of the war crimes case regarding Israel.

The PA explained that its position was that the ICC could probe Israelis for war crimes even if the Oslo Accords were still in effect – clearly implying that the PA has not abandoned the Oslo process on a formal legal level despite pronouncements claiming the opposite. It added that if Israel annexed the West Bank, however, this would officially cancel the Oslo Accords.

Now that Bensouda has replied, it remains to be seen if Israel will respond, and if it does, what position it will take.

Israel has until June 24 to reply, but may also choose not to so as not to give recognition to the ICC's investigation.

Overall, the answers which the parties give could have implications for whether a war crimes case is brought against Israelis over the 2014 Gaza War, the settlement enterprise and the 2018-2019 Gaza border conflict.

In a brief filed by the Czech Republic supporting Israel, the argument was that the Oslo Accords give Israel exclusive jurisdiction over criminal issues in the West Bank relating to Israel, proving that there is no "State of Palestine" to send a case to the ICC.

Only a state can usually refer a case to the ICC.

Responding to these arguments, Bensouda, who supports opening a full war crimes probe of Israel and Hamas, has said that: "State practice demonstrates that Oslo provisions derogating from the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination do not apply."

In other words, Bensouda – and the PA for that matter – had previously argued that even if the Oslo Accords were not

nullified, the ICC can move forward with the war crimes case.

But it is a dicey and vague area of law and a potential winning argument for Israel which could knock the war crimes case out before it even comes to interrogations let alone indictments.

In contrast, if the Oslo Accords do not apply, the PA can say that Israel has lost one of its best defenses to ICC involvement.

There are many other potential Israeli defenses, but the Oslo Accords have always been held up as the most important because the PA voluntarily entered the deal in the 1990s – long after the Six Day War.

The Foreign Ministry has kept quiet on the issue to date.

Bensouda announced her intent to move forward against Israel and Hamas on December 20, but requested an endorsement from the ICC Pretrial Chamber. Even before this latest development, it was unclear when the ICC would issue its ruling.

Hamas condemns international award to 'war criminal' Tzipi Livni (The Jerusalem Post) By Khaled Abu Toameh
June 17, 2020

Hamas on Wednesday condemned a decision by a German group to present an award to former foreign minister Tzipi Livni and accused her of "committing war crimes against Palestinians."

The Society for the Presentation of the International Bridge Prize of the European City Görlitz/Zgorzelec gives the €2,500 prize each year to personalities who have made a contribution to international understanding in Europe with their life's work.

The society said it decided to grant Livni the award "for standing for freedom of thought, democracy, openness and humanity." Livni "has made a name for herself, particularly through her freedom-oriented peace policy and as a mediator," the group said in a statement.

With her "extraordinary personality, the [Israeli] politician also stood up to vehement opposition from parts of society for dissenters and minorities, and generated international attention with her efforts," it said.

Livni is the 25th recipient of the award, which has been handed out since 1993. Livni served in the cabinets of prime ministers Ariel Sharon and Ehud Olmert from 2001-2009. As foreign minister, she led multiple rounds of peace talks with the Palestinians.

Hamas reacted to the decision by accusing Livni of "war crimes" against the Palestinians.

"It is unfortunate to grant an international award to the war criminal Tzipi Livni, who committed war crimes against our people and killed more than 1,400 martyrs, most of them civilians, especially children, women and the elderly in the 2009 war," Hamas spokesman Abdel Latif Qanou said in a statement.

The war, also known as Operation Cast Lead, began on December 27, 2008, and ended on January 18, 2009. The Israeli government's stated goal was to stop indiscriminate Palestinian fire rocket into Israel and weapons smuggling into the Gaza Strip.

"This step encourages the criminal leaders of the occupation to commit more crimes," the Hamas spokesman said, adding that granting Livni the award was a "desperate attempt to beautify her black face and clear her hand that is stained with the blood of our people."

The Geneva-based Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor (Euro-Med) organization also expressed opposition to the decision and called on the German Bridge Prize Society to withdraw its award to Livni.

In a letter to Willi Xylander, president of the Bridge Prize Society for 2020, Euro-Med said it was "seriously concerned with the decision to award the prize to Livni, who is accused of war crimes against humanity in the blockaded Gaza Strip."

"Livni has worked relentlessly during the internationally condemned operation to whitewash Israel's assault on Gaza's civilian population," Euro-Med said. "In that regard, we would like to emphasize that granting such a prize to an Israeli politician who stands accused of war crimes would essentially contribute to whitewashing the crimes of Israel's occupation, if not further incentivize Israeli politicians to escalate atrocities against Palestinians."

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Gulf Region

France Should Halt Arms Exports to Saudi Arabia, Egypt (Human Rights Watch) By Bénédicte Jeannerod
June 10, 2020

Last week, the French government published its latest report on arms exports, documenting sales and transfers throughout 2019. After Qatar, the governments of Saudi Arabia and Egypt received the greatest amounts, accounting for €1.4 billion and €1.0 billion in arms, respectively. But providing arms to countries repeatedly implicated in serious abuses, including possible war crimes, contradicts its goal to be seen as a global leader for human rights values.

These figures illustrate the profound contradictions of French diplomacy. On the one hand, the government rightly promotes respect for international humanitarian law and makes the protection of civilians in conflicts one of its top priorities; on the other, it still supplies arms to Saudi Arabia, despite the gross and widely documented violations by the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen since 2015, with disastrous human rights and humanitarian consequences for civilians in the country.

That Egypt is among the top three purchasers of French arms is just as shocking and appalling. Human Rights Watch has documented the serious abuses and war crimes committed by the Egyptian army during operations in North Sinai. Furthermore, Amnesty International has reported on the use of French equipment in the bloody repression of demonstrations by Egyptian security forces in recent years. Under President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, Egypt has been enduring the worst crackdown on basic and fundamental rights in decades.

Not only is it contrary to France's international obligations to persist in selling arms to these countries despite the clear risk they may be used to commit serious violations and war crimes, the sales give an effective green light to abusers. They undermine France's credibility in its role promoting international law and universal human rights values at a time when they face serious attacks around the world.

The French government frequently evokes its support in the fight against terrorism in the Middle East and the necessary strategic autonomy of the French arms industry to justify its arms sales to these countries. But these arguments are not tenable – neither justifies France becoming complicit in atrocities against civilian populations. If the government really wants to support security and stability in the region, it should instead promote respect for human rights values.

It is more than urgent and necessary for France to reconcile its deeds with its words, and stop fueling terrible rights abuses with its arms sales.

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ASIA

Afghanistan

ICC slams US sanctions over Afghanistan war crimes probe (Deutsche Welle)

June 12, 2020

The International Criminal Court (ICC) on Thursday accused the United States government of threats and coercion after US President Donald Trump authorized sanctions against court employees investigating suspected war crimes in Afghanistan by US troops.

Earlier in the day, Trump signed an executive order stating that the United States would block the US property or assets of anyone from The Hague-based court investigating US troops.

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said in a statement to reporters that the US would not "stand by as our people are threatened by a kangaroo court." He also implied that other allies, especially NATO countries who cooperated with US troops in Afghanistan, "could be next."

The ICC called the sanctions "unprecedented" and accused the Trump administration of attempting to "interfere with the rule of law and the Court's judicial proceedings."

"They are announced with the declared aim of influencing the actions of ICC officials in the context of the Court's independent and objective investigations and impartial judicial proceedings," the court said in a statement.

Read more: Why is the US in a rush to pull out troops from Afghanistan?

UN Torture Rapporteur: 'Trump is undermining the legal system'

The Trump administration is undermining the post-war international legal system that dates back to Nazi war crimes trials in Nuremberg by imposing sanctions on the International Criminal Court, said the UN's Special Rapporteur on Torture in an interview with DW News.

"The whole argument of the court being illegal, illegitimate and corrupt obviously is not a new argument," Nils Melzer told DW.

"The same argument has been made by the Nazis in Nuremberg — and by Slobodan Milosevic in the Yugoslavia tribunal. It has been made by Saddam Hussein in the tribunal for Iraq, and now it's being made Trump and Pompeo with regard to the ICC," Melzer added.

"The reality is that the United States does not prosecute these crimes when it's committed by its soldiers. We've seen the Senate Committee confirming a systematic policy of torture by the CIA," he said.

The United Nations human rights office added its displeasure on Friday, saying it would hurt the justice, and answers, that victims and their families have the right to.

"The independence of the ICC and its ability to operate without interference must be guaranteed so that it can decide matters without any improper influence, inducement, pressures, threats or interference, direct or indirect, from any quarter or for any reasons," UN human rights spokesman Rupert Colville told a UN briefing in Geneva.

Feuding investigations

The Trump administration has been irate over ICC probes into whether American troops committed war crimes in Afghanistan, arguing that the US has its own procedures to investigate accusations against its soldiers.

Last year, the administration revoked the American visa of the court's chief prosecutor, Gambian-born Fatou Bensouda, demanding that she end the Afghanistan investigations. However, ICC judges approved her investigation request in March after initially rejecting it.

Trump used his executive powers last year to pardon two US soldiers accused of war crimes in Afghanistan and Iraq.

The US Crusade Against the ICC Dashes Afghan Dreams of Justice (The Diplomat) By Sohrab Azad
June 16, 2020

On June 11, the Trump administration unleashed a series of punitive measures, including sanctions and visa restrictions against International Criminal Court (ICC) personnel and their families, in an attempt to curb the international tribunal's investigations into war crimes committed by U.S. military and intelligence officials, the Afghan government, and the Taliban. Under the new executive order, President

Donald Trump declared a national emergency to resolve the security threat imposed by the ICC. Asset freezes and travel bans are only some of the aspects of the sanction's broad language, which allows the Trump administration to coerce and influence ICC staff and ongoing cases. The ICC condemned the decision and said it amounted to, "an unacceptable attempt to interfere with the rule of law."

The Trump administration's move not only paralyzes but may also kill any effort from the ICC to continue with their investigations into the human rights abuses committed by all sides in the Afghan conflict. Most importantly, it destroys any hope that Afghan victims may have had in envisioning some form of justice served on the largest stage in the world for the vicious violence they have endured at the hands of the Taliban, the Afghan government, and the United States alike. This move comes as a peace process between the United States and the Taliban is being implemented, and the prospects for direct negotiations between the Taliban and the Afghan government appear increasingly likely in the next coming weeks. If a peace process is successful, the new government — comprised of some Taliban leaders and Afghan politicians responsible for war crimes — will limit an internal probe to avoid targeting and prosecuting their own.

This March, the Appeals Chamber of the ICC ruled that the court's prosecutor, Fatou Bensouda, may proceed with a formal investigation into war crimes and abuses committed in Afghanistan since 2003 — when Afghanistan entered the ICC — and criminal acts she may discover during her investigation. This overturned a Pretrial Chamber decision in April 2019 that rejected Bensouda's proposal after more than a decade of examination. The Afghan security forces are being investigated for several war crimes, torture, and sexual violence, while the Taliban's crimes are based on severe deprivation of physical liberty and persecution against identifiable groups of civilians. U.S. forces are also accused of war crimes, torture, and rape.

Although the United States is not a member of the ICC, the court's jurisdiction still applies since Afghanistan is a signatory to the Rome Statute of the organization. It is also crucial to note that the alleged crimes committed by U.S. personnel within both the Department of Defense and the Central Intelligence Agency not only occurred on Afghan soil but also in "black sites" in Lithuania, Poland, and Romania — all members of the ICC. Notably, the violations that the ICC seeks to investigate have already been confirmed by the U.S. government itself. Specifically, a congressional report in 2014 by the U.S. Senate Select Committee on Intelligence found that the U.S. military and intelligence forces tortured Afghan nationals in all four countries, clearly displaying the rightful jurisdiction over U.S. personnel by the ICC.

This is not the first time that the Trump administration has intervened to prevent soldiers who have been charged with misconduct from being brought to justice, including those who have been charged in U.S. military courts. The high-profile presidential pardon of Clint Lorance, a lieutenant who was found guilty of ordering the murder of two unarmed Afghan men who were simply riding their motorcycles, is one example of the Trump administration overlooking misconduct by American forces. Ironically, during the briefing in which the measures against the ICC were announced, U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo stated, "We hold our own accountable better than the ICC has done for the worst perpetrators of mass criminal atrocities."

Michael Kugelman, the Deputy Director of the Asia Program and Senior Associate for South Asia at the Wilson Center, contended that "the Trump administration's rash decision is an overreaction, and yet it could nonetheless badly undermine the pursuit of justice in areas where it is greatly needed."

The sanctions placed on the ICC will only embolden the other accused parties in the war to resist the investigation and continue their actions with impunity. To Kugelman, "the irony here is that the administration was reacting to an ICC investigation that largely focuses on the actions of the Taliban and the Afghan government, not the U.S." The Americans are charged with crimes against 80 victims while the Afghan security forces are being investigated for hundreds of civilian casualties and the Taliban for tens of thousands.

Besides the United States, the ICC investigations have also been criticized by current and former Afghan government officials, who claim that the government will launch an internal probe into abuses committed by Afghan security forces — despite the fact that the government has far from a successful track record in doing so over its two decades of existence.

In April, the Afghan government requested that the ICC defer the investigation until this week to allow Kabul to submit further materials regarding the over 150 active cases of war crimes committed by the Afghan security forces and Taliban militants, hoping to render an ICC investigation void. In recent years, Afghan President Ashraf Ghani has tried to keep the ICC out of Afghanistan, preferring to build his own mechanism and institutions to charge offenders. (The Trump administration has taken a similar approach to prioritize its domestic judicial review instead of an outside investigation.) Although Afghanistan is a member of the ICC, the country continues to battle its own ability to build national capacity versus allowing foreign countries and international bodies to constantly intervene.

Omar Samad, a nonresident Senior Fellow at the Atlantic Council and former Afghan ambassador, argued that the Afghan case is controversial and shows the tension between sovereign rights and international law. Samad concluded that the sanctions

“have become more political and less about justice and impartiality.”

That being said, the current cases presented by the Afghan government are not sufficient for the prosecutor to be convinced. Out of the 151 cases, 47 of them are attributed to detention centers, 33 cases are against the Taliban, 26 cases are against the Afghan security forces, and the rest are unidentified perpetrators. Fewer than 30 cases have been taken to court, much less seen convictions. The fundamental problem is not only the narrow reach of the cases but also who exactly is being targeted.

For instance, senior officials of the Afghan National Police in Kandahar have been accused of torture, but none of those cases was mentioned in the investigations of the Afghan government. The government’s record has always been poor on judicial independence, partly due to a lack of capacity but also due to a lack of political will and a desire to maintain a grip on political power. Abdul Rashid Dostum, Ghani’s former vice president and a notorious military commander who for decades has been accused of torture and rape, was promoted to the marshal of the armed forces as a necessary component of the government’s power-sharing deal with Abdullah Abdullah. This gives a sense of validity to the idea that a more powerful Afghan government will seek to prevent any investigations, be it internal or external, into their senior-level officials, pushing them to settle for a few high-profile cases and mainly mid-level offenders who carried out orders from their superiors.

The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) documented well over 10,000 civilian casualties in 2019 alone by all warring parties, implying that either the Afghan government does not have the capacity to launch a comprehensive investigation or that they are intentionally preventing investigations into those who have violated the rules of engagement that are not at the highest levels of political power in the country.

The impact of the United States and Afghanistan limiting the ICC’s ability to investigate is gravely severe, not for the American officials or Afghan elite, but for the countless ordinary Afghans who must deal with the extraordinary consequences. Without a strong and independent body genuinely investigating the crimes committed, Afghans may very well never receive the justice they deserve. A project conducted by the Bureau of Investigative Journalism, Al Jazeera, and Bellingcat tracked just 10 joint U.S.-Afghan airstrikes on family compounds in the past two years. The samples revealed that 115 people were killed, more than 70 of them children. These are just a handful of the thousands of airstrikes launched every year in Afghanistan. The United States carried out over 7,400 airstrikes last year alone.

Interestingly enough, a recent annual Pentagon report claimed that only 132 civilians were killed by the U.S. military in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, and Somalia combined in 2019. This discovery displays a massive gap between officially reported civilian deaths and the reality – a dangerous path toward the destruction of truth and reconciliation in one of the world’s deadliest conflicts. If the Afghan government does not cooperate with the ICC or expand their own investigations, an already difficult task becomes impossible.

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Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC)

Official Website of the Extraordinary Chambers [English]

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

Cambodia Tribunal Monitor

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Bangladesh International Crimes Tribunal

War Crimes Investigation in Myanmar

Local Officials in Myanmar's Rakhine State Resign, Fearing Arrest by Military (Radio Free Asia)

June 5, 2020

Dozens of village and ward administrators in a township in western Myanmar's war-scarred Rakhine state submitted their resignations on Friday out of fear of arbitrary arrest by the Myanmar military, following the recent detentions of three of their colleagues on terrorism charges.

Government soldiers have stepped up the seizure and arrest of village officials and other civilians in the state amid the 17-month armed conflict against the Arakan Army (AA), charging them under Myanmar's Counter-Terrorism Law for allegedly having ties to the outlawed rebel ethnic force.

Fifty-one village and ward administrators in Myebon township, one of several areas in northern Rakhine hit by heavy fighting, filed resignation letters at the township administration office, some of the officials told RFA. The township has 14 wards and 59 village tracts.

"We don't live in the conflict area," said one official in a section of the township, who requested anonymity out of concern for his safety. "We don't have connections to AA troops. We never interact with terrorist organizations, and we don't want them here."

"But if the authorities keep arresting us on grounds of suspicion [for having alleged links to the AA], we will not be able to perform our administrative functions," he added. "That's why we are resigning."

On Wednesday, military and police forces arrested Aung Than, a ward administrator from Myebon town, and villager Tin Tun believing them to have ties to the AA, officials said.

Four days earlier, security forces in Myebon township arrested Maung Zaw, administrator of A-ngu Thit village, and Kyaw Myint, administrator of Ywa Thit Kay village, and charged them under two sections of the Counter-Terrorism Law for allegedly having connections to Arakan forces.

Family members of the two officials, who were remanded by the Myebon Township Court on Wednesday, say the accusations against them are false.

Myebon township lawmaker Pe Than said he believes that authorities will prosecute the pair.

"Yesterday, the ward administrator from the Thae Tan area was asked to sign as witness to the discovery of two cell phones and documents as evidence from the two men," he said. "I think the authorities are working on charging them."

RFA could not reach Myebon township administrator Zarni Kyaw for comment.

Htay Maung, deputy director of Rakhine state's administrative department, said he did not know about the arrests, while Aung Than Zaw, commander of the Myebon Township Police Station, said he could not respond to media inquiries over the phone.

Rule of law weakened

Pe Than said Friday's mass resignation of administrators would weaken the rule of law and order in the region.

"So far, three administrators have been arrested, and it has intimidated other village administrators," he said. "Some are fleeing from their homes. If several administrators quit, no one will perform the administrative functions, and it will weaken the rule of law."

“We need these administrators to secure peace and stability,” he added. “Their resignations, caused by fear, are not good for the region or for the government.”

Local residents said that Myanmar soldiers who have been posted to the police station in Myebon town since May have begun interrogations of administrators and others in the area, though the military was never previously in the region.

Myanmar military spokesman Brigadier Gen Zaw Min Tun told RFA on Wednesday that the interrogations of Htay Maung and Aung Than Zaw revealed that they had links to the AA, though a spokesman from the Arakan force denied it.

Scores of administrators resigned from their positions in Rakhine’s Kyauktaw, Rathedaung, Mrauk-U, and Minbya townships in 2019, following the arrests of administrative officials amid the armed conflict.

Burma Army Shells Karen Villages – Civilians Wounded (Karen News)

June 7, 2020

The Burma Army Light Infantry Battalion #410 under the Military Operation Command #8 was fighting with a Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) unit near Wah Klo Htar and Maw Law Klo villages in LuThaw Township, Mutraw District.

A villager who witnessed the shelling told Karen News that the two injured people had to be rushed to hospital.

“The Burma Army fired two artillery shells that landed in the village. Two villagers, a father and daughter were injured by shrapnel from the shelling. They were taken to Kamamaung hospital.”

The two injured villagers were identified as Saw Phan Po Kay, 52 and his daughter, Naw Mary, 16.

A health worker at Kamamaung Hospital (speaking on condition of anonymity) confirmed to Karen News two villagers injured by artillery shells were being treated at the hospital.

“The father and his daughter were injured by shrapnel. The father was hit on his leg and his daughter was hit on her arm. Luckily the wounds were not very life threatening, they have been discharged from hospital.”

A local KNLA spokesperson from its 5th Brigade said they had yet to received information from the frontlines and couldn’t comment on the incident. Karen News was unable to contact a spokesperson from the local Burma Army unit.

Villagers said fighting between frontline troops of KNLA’s 5th Brigade and Burma Army battalions are now regular and often result in civilians casualties and forced displacement of hundreds of villagers.

A KNU statement issued on 29 May, 2020 said during April and May, has seen increases of Burma Army troop sent to the area and there has also been more military operations around border areas of the KNLA’s 5th and 7th Brigades. The KNU statement said increased militarization by the Burma Army has forced more than 130 local villagers to flee from their homes.

Chin Villagers Fleeing from the Burma Army Jet Attacks (Karen News)

June 7, 2020

FBR said despite COVID-19 pandemic the jets opened fire on villages. “The escalating conflict between the Arakan Army and Burma Army has been disastrous on local populations as civilians are caught in the crossfire. On March 15, the Burma Army dropped bombs into Wohma Village, Chin State, killing nine people and wounding 12 people.”

FBR cite a report by the “United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), that estimates “recent clashes have led to the displacement of over 61,000 persons in Arakan and Chin states since March 16, 2020. Many civilians have sought refuge in internally displaced persons (IDP) camps throughout the area, but the influx of people has depleted the resources of the camps.”

Mar Lah, from Wohma village described in an interview with FBR the attack.

“On March 15, 2020, at 3pm Burma Army jet fighters dropped bombs on our villages. Nine villagers died and twelve were wounded. It was chaos. Houses burned to the ground, we couldn’t see because of smoke, we couldn’t find each other. It was so loud I could only hear my own voice but felt like I can hear the dead cry out. We are all very afraid and fled to the jungle because the planes kept circling and dropping bombs. We had to flee in the dark and use no lights so the Burma Army could not see us moving. We fled from March 15 until the evening of March 16. We fled with our children and we had no food until we arrived at the Sami IDP Camp. Now we face trouble at the camp. We do not know who to trust and fear both the Burma

Army and Arakan Army as we think more fighting will break out. We cannot work or make money and there is not enough food at this camp. All we can do is hope and pray for donations.”

In May the Free Burma Rangers documented human rights abuses and delivered aid to people displaced by the fighting and now living in Sami IDP Camp in southern Chin State.

FBR reported Burma Army soldiers in the area restricted its aid operation. “Soldiers from Burma Army Battalion 169 occupy the [Sami] camp, blocking the movement of individuals and supplies to other villages in Paletwa District. FBR said in its report, “only Burma Army soldiers are permitted in this area and any civilian found will be killed.”

Despite the Burma Army presence and COVID-19 restrictions FBR “were still able to distribute clothes and over 150 bags of rice to IDPs in the camp. FBR medics were able to set up a medical clinic in the camp. Alongside local nurses, who are unable to move beyond the camp due to the restrictions by the Burma Army soldiers, FBR treated 480 patients with ailments including: anemia, gastritis, kidney issues and the common cold.

Critics Warn of Deception as Myanmar Military Returns to Facebook After 2018 Purge (Radio Free Asia) By

Thiha Tun

June 10, 2020

Myanmar’s military has resurfaced on Facebook nearly two years after the social media giant removed numerous army accounts for spreading hatred following a United Nations fact-finding report that accused the armed forces of war crimes for its expulsion of 740,000 Rohingya Muslims.

The army’s reappearance on the popular platform in Myanmar, which was condemned by human rights groups, came as authorities extended until August a controversial internet shutdown in parts of conflict-affected Rakhine and Chin states, citing security reasons.

The military has opened two Burmese-language Facebook accounts called “Tatmadaw True News Information Team” and “Zaw Min Tun,” military spokesman Brigadier General Zaw Min Tun told RFA on Wednesday.

The military opened the accounts on Facebook — the most popular social media platform in the country, with 33 million users — to counter what he called misinformation and fake news, he said, adding that the army would follow Facebook’s community standards.

No agreements were made between the military and Facebook prior to the creation of the two new accounts, he said.

“Facebook is popular in Myanmar, [and] media and civil society groups release information via Facebook,” Zaw Min Tun said. “We decided to use Facebook to provide timely and accurate information related to the Tatmadaw [Myanmar military] because real and fake news are being mixed together on Facebook.”

A Facebook spokesperson responded by email late Wednesday to RFA’s request for comment, saying that the company banned about 20 individuals and organizations in Myanmar from the platform in 2018 “to prevent the spread of hate and misinformation on Facebook.”

“This was part of several steps we took to keep the platform safe. If content on any Facebook page or account violates our policies, we will remove it,” Facebook’s statement said.

Facebook also said that it has made significant investments in Myanmar and updated its technology, teams, partnerships, and policies during the past two years to address the issue and to prevent the abuse of its services.

In August 2018, Facebook removed the 20 accounts and more than 50 pages associated with the military, including the account of defense forces chief Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, accused of war crimes for being the architect of a brutal military-led crackdown in 2017 that left thousands of Rohingya dead and drove hundreds of thousands of others out of the country.

At the time, Facebook had been criticized for allowing posts that spread hatred against the Rohingya, a persecuted Muslim minority in predominantly Buddhist Myanmar.

The Myanmar military turned to Russian social media service VK, available in multiple languages, following Facebook’s ban on its accounts. The army also continued to maintain websites for the military chief and its information team, as well as the defense forces-owned Myawaddy television network.

'Propaganda pages'

Rights activists have raised concern over the military's reappearance on Facebook, saying that the top brass will use the platform to try to sway public opinion as it faces international war crimes charges.

"This is more about trying to get back into the information stream that Burmese people are looking at to try to influence their opinions about what is happening in Rakhine state, Kachin state, and Shan state, and other areas where the Tatmadaw is involved in conflicts with armed insurgency groups," said Phil Robertson, deputy Asia director of Human Rights Watch (HRW).

Mark Farmaner, director of Burma Campaign UK, said the military set up the two new "propaganda pages to spread lies" as it faces legal action on genocide-related charges in three international courts, including the U.N.'s International Court of Justice (ICJ).

"They are under pressure, and obviously they want to convince people in Myanmar that the evidence against them is not true," he said. "They want to build more support for their actions."

On Wednesday, attorneys bringing a case before the ICJ accusing Myanmar of genocide against the Rohingyas asked a U.S. district court to order Facebook to release posts and communications of the country's military and police, Reuters news agency reported.

Nickey Diamond, a Myanmar human rights specialist with the Southeast Asia-based NGO Fortify Rights, said the Myanmar military can issue information to the public via other means such as news conferences.

"Using Facebook to release information appears to be a move to counter news reported by the media rather than to provide accurate information," he said.

"We can't trust the military and its capacity to provide genuine information," he added.

Internet shutdown extended

The Myanmar government, meanwhile, has extended the suspension of mobile data network services in eight townships in northern Rakhine state and in Paletwa township of neighboring Chin state until the beginning of August, said Soe Thein, permanent secretary of the Ministry of Transportation and Communications, on Tuesday.

"Since we have imposed the internet shutdown because of a situation that can harm the public interest, as defined in the Telecommunications Law, we will reopen once we are certain that it will not harm the public interest," he told reporters at a news conference in Naypyidaw.

"The shutdown will continue until Aug. 1," he said. "We will lift the shutdown depending on the situation with conflicts on the ground."

Rights groups have criticized the move, saying that the communications shutdown places civilians at risk by preventing them from accessing coronavirus information and from contacting humanitarian aid organizations amid intensified fighting between the Myanmar military and AA soldiers during the past 17 months.

The government-ordered shutdown of mobile internet traffic affects roughly 1 million people, according to HRW.

Khin Saw Wai, a lawmaker from Rathedaung township, urged the government to end the internet service block so people can use their cell phones to receive information about the COVID-19 pandemic and how to prevent its spread.

"It is not acceptable that the internet shutdown will be lifted only when the conflicts are over," she said.

"We would like to appeal to the authorities to end the internet shutdown for the sake of the local people, so they can have access to information about COVID-19 and the latest news about the armed conflicts," she said.

Captured Rakhine Villagers Forced to Work For Myanmar Army, Relatives Say (Radio Free Asia) June 16, 2020

Families of villagers from Rakhine state held by the Myanmar military since March for suspected ties to the rebel Arakan Army on Monday demanded the release of the men, telling reporters that some detained civilians are being forced to perform hard labor for the army.

The 18 captives — residents of strife-torn Kyauktaw township — were arrested in mid-March, when Myanmar soldiers entered

the region amid fighting and burned down dozens of homes in the 500-home ethnic Rakhine village tract.

Relatives of 18 detainees told a news conference in the Rakhine capital Sittwe that about 10 of the captives from Tin Ma village tract are being forced to perform hard labor in a military battalion.

Oo Than Yee, wife of a Tin Ma village tract administrator, said she confirmed that her son Nay Lin Oo is among the detainees when she sneaked into the Taung Shay mountain area near Tin Ma Gyi village. Her son, who has hearing and speech impairments, was working in a military camp with others.

“I recognized my son there,” she said. “I saw other villagers, too. They were forced to work. Some were shoveling dirt, and others were carrying bags of soil on their shoulders.”

Win May Oo, wife of detained villager Maung Kyi Linn, appealed to the authorities to release her husband, who is the family’s breadwinner.

“I rely on my husband’s earnings. I don’t have a job. I am gravely concerned about his safety,” she said.

Aye Yee, mother of 14-year-old Tun Tun Wai who is being detained, said she filed a complaint with police and education officials, but nothing has been done to help free her son.

“I have reported it to the education officials, but they said they don’t have any ‘weapons’ to take on a fight,” she told RFA. “They said the authorities who detained the villagers are too powerful to touch.”

The police also said they can do nothing but will inform us when the military has transferred the detainees to them, she added.

Ma Hla Aye, wife of one of the detained residents from Tin Ma Thit village, said she does not want to see others like her husband detained.

“We’ve got three children. Every day they ask when their dad will be home. I’ve got no answers,” she said.

“I want to appeal to the authorities not to treat Rakhine civilians cruelly,” she added.

Myanmar military spokesman Brigadier General Zaw Min Tun was not available Monday for comment on the 18 detained villagers.

When RFA asked him about the fate of the residents on June 10, he said he did not have specific information on the case but would review the status of the detained men.

No martial law in Rakhine

Despite ongoing fighting and an increasing number of civilians caught up in the hostilities, Myint Than, director general of the General Administration Department in Naypyidaw, told RFA Monday that the situation in northern Rakhine state is not severe enough to be placed under martial law.

“People are talking about martial law out of fear based on the resignation of 51 village administrators last week,” he said, referring to dozens of local officials in Myebon township, one of several areas in northern Rakhine hit by heavy fighting.

The village and ward administrators filed resignation letters on June 5, fearing arbitrary arrest by the Myanmar military after the recent detention of three of their colleagues on terrorism charges.

“The Rakhine state government is working on getting peace and having a smooth administration in the region,” Myint Than said.

RFA could not reach Major General Tun Tun Nyi, vice chairman of the military’s True News Information Team, for comment.

Myint Than’s comments came after political analysts predicted that the 18-month-old war between the government military and the AA would spread to urban areas following a knife attack on a military officer and the abduction of his colleague by assailants believed to be Arakan fighters in a Ponnagyun town market on June 11.

The atmosphere of lawlessness hit home again when four unknown men robbed a Kanbawza Bank branch in Rakhine’s capital Sittwe on June 10, with the government military and AA blaming the other side for the theft.

In another brazen daytime attack, a police officer was stabbed to death by two people on motorcycles in downtown Kyauktaw on June 13, striking fear in local residents who remained indoors, the online journal The Irrawaddy reported.

Clashes continue in rural areas of Rakhine as well, with fighting in Ann township on June 13 forcing about 100 predominantly ethnic China residents from Mingalardon village to flee to Myatheintan monastery in Dalet Chaung Anauk village.

Villager Maung Pe said the residents left Mingalardon because they faced a food shortage with land and water routes blocked by Myanmar forces preventing them from getting to markets.

“[We] can’t go anywhere, [and] we have no food to eat, so we came to this monastery because of a lack of food and because we faced bombs and bullets,” he told RFA.

Weak controls

Rule of law in Rakhine is under stress where fighting is taking place, said Khin Saw Wai, a lawmaker from Rathedaung township about the recent incidents.

“The current government and security officials have also been weak on controlling the situation in Rakhine,” she said.

AA spokesman Khine Thukha noted that Rakhine had been under martial law in the past and that it is under a military administration now.

“The military has forced the government to run an official military administration in Rakhine in order to cover up its actions in this region,” he said. “We will have peace in Rakhine only if Rakhine people can govern it.”

The AA, branded an outlawed organization and terrorist group by the Myanmar government, demanded on May 29 that all government administrative offices and the military immediately leave Rakhine state, where the predominantly Buddhist force seeks greater autonomy for ethnic Rakhine people.

The fighting, most of which has taken place near villages outside urban areas, left 260 civilians dead and injured about 570 others during the period from December 2018 to June 11 of this year, according to figures compiled by RFA’s Myanmar Service.

The armed conflict also has displaced more than 160,000 civilians, according to the Rakhine Ethnic Congress, a local relief group.

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AMERICAS

North & Central America

Trump authorizes sanctions on International Criminal Court officials (NBC News) By Saphora Smith and Abigail Williams
June 12, 2020

The Trump administration launched an attack Thursday on the International Criminal Court, which is set up to prosecute war crimes and genocide, authorizing economic sanctions against officials investigating or prosecuting U.S. personnel without Washington’s consent.

The decision to slap sanctions on court officials comes after ICC appeals judges authorized an investigation in March into allegations of war crimes by U.S. military and intelligence personnel, Afghan forces and the Taliban in Afghanistan.

President Donald Trump also authorized the expansion of visa restrictions against ICC officials and their family members.

“The International Criminal Court’s actions are an attack on the rights of the American people and threaten to infringe upon our national sovereignty,” the White House said in a statement.

In order to place economic sanctions on these officials, the president had to declare a national emergency, using authorities more often reserved for pursuing terrorists or actions against North Korea and Iran.

The administration said it had “strong reason to believe” that there is “corruption and misconduct” at the highest levels of the prosecutor’s office, but provided no evidence to back up this claim.

In a statement, the ICC said that the U.S. move marked the latest “in a series of unprecedented attacks” on the ICC that constitute an “unacceptable attempt to interfere with the rule of law and the court's judicial proceedings.”

“An attack on the ICC also represents an attack against the interests of victims of atrocity crimes, for many of whom the court represents the last hope for justice,” it added.

The decision on the war crimes investigation by the Hague-based court in March overturned a ruling by a lower chamber last year that blocked the probe concluding, among other reasons, that its chances of success and prosecution were “extremely limited.”

The Trump administration has repeatedly lambasted the court.

In April last year, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced that the U.S. would repeal or deny visas to International Criminal Court staff seeking to investigate Americans for crimes in Afghanistan or elsewhere.

The White House pointed out Thursday that the United States is not a member of the ICC and accused it of pursuing “politically-motivated” investigations against Washington and its allies, including Israel.

The White House added that it was concerned that “adversary nations” were manipulating the court by “encouraging these allegations” against American personnel.

Attorney General William Barr later specifically named Russia without providing details or evidence to substantiate the claims.

About U.S. forces, ICC chief prosecutor Fatou Bensouda’s office has said it has determined that there is a reasonable basis to believe that war crimes were committed by members of the U.S. armed forces in Afghanistan and by members of the CIA in secret detention facilities in Afghanistan and in other countries, particularly between the period 2003-2004.

It also determined that there is a reasonable basis to believe that crimes against humanity and war crimes have been committed by the Taliban and their Haqqani network and that war crimes were committed by the Afghan National Security Forces.

America’s war in Afghanistan — its longest — has raged for more than 18 years, costing the lives of around 2,300 U.S. troops and wounding many thousands of others.

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South America

US monitors urge Colombia to accelerate slowed down peace process (Colombia Reports) By Adriaan Alsema
June 17, 2020

Scholars monitoring Colombia’s peace process urged the government of President Ivan Duque to accelerate the country’s peace process that has slowed down under his watch.

The Kroc Institute of the US University of Notre Dame has quantified the level of progress of the implementation of a 2016

peace deal with now-demobilized FARC rebels.

In their latest report, the researchers concluded that the implementation has slowed down over the past year as “with many short-term stipulations already completed, implementation shifted in 2019 towards the medium- and long-term commitments, especially those focused on the territories most affected by the armed conflict.”

According to the Kroc Institute, “this new phase requires greater interinstitutional coordination and intense deployment at the local level. Therefore, more time is needed to finalize their implementation.”

The researchers called on the government to accelerate the implementation of social and economic reforms to prevent that the ongoing coronavirus pandemic worsens conditions that previously led to violence in war-torn areas.

Particularly promised land reform that sought to narrow the economic inequality “made little progress in the last year,” while this traditionally has fueled violence in the countryside.

Another point where the Kroc Institute registered little progress was the implementation of the counternarcotics policy due to resistance by both the government and drug traffickers.

“The killings of participants and both male and female leaders of the Program continued, generating great fear in their communities. Point 4 also proposes general reforms to the anti-drug policy with the participation of civil society, which was limited in the last year. There is an opportunity to include its participation when planning meetings at the regional level that have not yet been held. Kroc Institute

Most progress was registered in regard to victims, mainly because of advances by the transitional justice system, which contains a war crimes tribunal and a truth commission.

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Venezuela

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TOPICS

Truth and Reconciliation Commission

How a Truth and Reconciliation Commission could work in the US (San Francisco Chronicle) By Adam Kochanski
June 15, 2020

The extraordinary Black Lives Matter protests against police brutality and racial injustice in more than 100 U.S. cities come on the heels of the 25th anniversary of South Africa’s historic Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

That commission was the pillar of South African Prime Minister Nelson Mandela’s approach to healing a deeply divided nation

after apartheid. Now, prompted by these protests as well as centuries of inequality for African American communities, some U.S. lawmakers are seeking the establishment of a truth commission here.

Rep. Barbara Lee, D-Oakland, has drafted legislation for a U.S. Commission on Truth, Racial Healing, and Transformation. Lee's legislation is ambitious and shows considerable promise. The commission would explore "the effects of slavery, institutional racism, and discrimination against people of color, and how (U.S.) history impacts laws and policies today."

Does the U.S. need a commission? If so, what lessons can it learn from other countries' experiences?

Truth commissions are temporary investigative bodies that attempt to uncover the facts about a pattern of past human rights abuse and its causes. They're usually created by the government to signal a break from the past and a message of "never again." More than 60 truth commissions have been established worldwide, mostly in countries transitioning from armed conflict or dictatorship, but also in democracies such as Canada.

The U.S. has actually had several similar commissions. Congress established the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians in 1980, which resulted in an official government apology and reparations to the survivors of Japanese Americans who were interned during World War II.

There have also been state-level truth commissions in Maine and Maryland (the latter investigating racial terror lynchings). There have been several local efforts to address racial injustice, including community-based truth commissions in Greensboro, N.C., and Charlottesville, Va., to investigate racially motivated incidents involving the Ku Klux Klan.

Given these historical precedents, it appears the U.S. is ripe for a national truth commission about the dark legacy of slavery and the past 400 years of racial inequality.

There are three important lessons about what such a process might look like.

First, the South Africa model is but one approach. Many types of truth commissions have been set up over the years, and not all have emphasized forgiveness and reconciliation. In fact, many truth commissions, such as those in Latin America, have prioritized other aims ranging from institutional reforms, to reparations, to supporting criminal cases, to clarifying the historical sources of violence.

The U.S. should consider the full range of options.

Second, if a truth commission is to be effective, it can't be imposed from above.

The commission must be designed to center the needs and priorities of survivors and their affected communities, or the entire process risks disappointing or even retraumatizing participants.

This is especially true if the commission's final recommendations are ignored or acted on slowly — a criticism that has befallen many commissions including South Africa's.

If a U.S. truth commission is to be meaningful, it must begin by listening. It requires engaging African American civil society at the design stage and throughout the entire process. It needs to hear the demands of today's activists. It means being open to the possibility that a truly victim-centered approach might yield a very different model including reparations for descendants of slavery, or reforms to key institutions such as the police, rather than reconciliation.

Finally, political will matters.

The record of truth commissions is imperfect. They've been used instrumentally by governments of all stripes for political gain rather than to promote meaningful change.

Given the way the Trump administration has inflamed protests over the past few weeks, it's unimaginable that it can lead a reconciliation process that would not become politicized. Given this reality, it's plausible the truth should not come in the form of a national-level commission, but rather through grassroots, activist-led truth commissions that seek the change they want themselves. Another approach would be to work through congressional channels until the political will is there at the executive level.

Truth commissions are imperfect, but they can be an important beginning. It's time for the U.S. to begin the slow process of reckoning with its past and acknowledging how historical injustices continue to fuel structural and everyday violence today.

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Terrorism

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Piracy

Nigeria hands over vessel, crew suspected of piracy to Ghana (Premium Times)

June 7, 2020

The Nigerian government has handed over the fishing vessel, Marine 707, suspected to be carrying out illegal activities in the Gulf of Guinea to the Ghanaian authorities for further investigation and possible prosecution. Nigeria also handed over 51 crew members including 48 Ghanaians and three south Korea nationals to the government of Ghana and Korea respectively.

The vessel which had authorisation to fish in Ghana and Benin waters was arrested by the Nigerian Navy on May 18, 2020 around the southwest of Lagos waters with her Automatic Identification System (AIS) switched off after being suspected to be used for piracy or being used as a mother ship to conduct piracy in the Gulf of Guinea was handed over to the Nigerian Maritime Administration and Safety Agency (NIMASA) after preliminary investigations by the Navy.

While speaking during the official hand over of the Ghanaian flagged vessel and the crew to the respective authorities, the Director General of the Nigerian Maritime Administration and Safety Agency, Bashir Jamoh, said that the Navy, NIMASA partnership which is now hinged on intelligence has put Nigeria on a pedestal of winning the war against piracy and other illegal acts at sea.

Mr Jamoh who was represented by the agency's commander, Maritime Guard Command, Commodore Aniete Ibok, disclosed that though preliminary investigations could not establish that the vessel and her crew were directly linked to piracy, however the vessel still ran foul of international laws for shutting down its Automatic Identification System (AIS) 36 times in the last 6 months, 3 of which were done in the Nigerian waters.

According to him "we are handing over this vessel to the Ghanaian authorities in the spirit of bilateral cooperation both countries enjoy. We have done our preliminary investigations and we are yet to establish any concrete evidence against the vessel but again, we would not know what she would be doing whenever she turns off her AIS which occurred 36 times without being logged in her record book in line with international protocols and three of these were in our domain. However in the spirit of brotherhood that Ghana and Nigeria enjoys we are handing over the vessel to Ghana for further investigations."

The NIMASA DG further warned that individuals or organisations thinking of perpetuating any form of illegalities in the Gulf of Guinea should be ready to face the full wrath of the law with the antipiracy law in place along with the NAVY, NIMASA partnership that is waxing stronger with major focus on security in the Nigerian maritime domain and the entire Gulf of Guinea.

"We will not condone any act of illegalities in our maritime space, we have improved our intelligence sharing with relevant agencies and with what we are doing now in no distant time piracy will be a thing of the past in the Gulf of Guinea because we have a robust antipiracy law that will deal with perpetrators of illegalities in our waters."

While receiving the vessel and the crew on behalf of the Ghana Maritime Authority, the Second Secretary Consular of Ghana in Nigeria, David Ako Sowah, commended the Nigerian authorities for being professional in handling the case. He said what Nigeria is doing is for the benefit of the entire countries in the Gulf Guinea.

In his words "As the big brother in this region, Nigeria has done well in showing a lot of maturity in handling this case and I want to assure you that Ghana would also look into more collaborations in Nigeria to ensure that the Gulf of Guinea remains safe for maritime activities".

Equally speaking during the handover, the Consular General of the Republic of Korea in Nigeria Kim Ln-taek, commended the party involved in handling the case. He said his findings from the captain of the ship who is a Korean informs that the AIS was

bad. He noted that the vessel and her crew erred by not following the protocols of logging it in the record books when the AIS was down but he was happy that the case has been resolved up till this point.

The Ghana flagged vessel with International Maritime Organisation's (IMO) number 7419755 and registration number 316880 is owned and operated by World Marine Company Limited, Japan and as at the time of arrest it had 51 crew on board with all being Ghanians except 3 who are from the Republic of Korea.

This case also brings to the fore the efforts of NIMASA and the Nigerian Navy in the battle against piracy in the Gulf of Guinea. It would be recalled that the Navy recently arrested 10 pirates on a Chinese fishing vessel and handed them over for prosecution under the newly signed anti-piracy law.

Six kidnapped fishing crew released in Nigeria: Seoul (Sowetan Live)

June 9, 2020

Six fishing boat crewmen abducted by pirates off the coast of Gabon have been released after more than a month in captivity, South Korea's foreign ministry said Tuesday.

A South Korean in his 50s, two Senegalese, and three Indonesians were released in southern Nigeria on Monday, the ministry said in a statement.

They were transferred to the diplomatic missions of their respective nations, it said.

The six were kidnapped by unidentified pirates in early May.

A source close to the Gabonese government told AFP last month that the crew members were seized from two fishing vessels near Libreville.

It was the second pirate attack since off the Gabonese coast this year.

The Gulf of Guinea, which stretches some 5,700 kilometres (3,500 miles) from Senegal to Angola, has become a new world epicentre for piracy, marine theft and kidnappings for ransom.

A spokesman for the South Korean foreign ministry in Seoul declined to comment when asked by AFP whether a ransom had been paid for the release.

Nigeria: UN Agency Lauds Nigeria's Commitment to Battle Pirates (AllAfrica) By Abiodun Eromosele

June 10, 2020

International Maritime Organisation (IMO), a specialised agency of the United Nations responsible for regulating shipping, has lauded Nigeria's efforts to stem piracy in its waters and the Gulf of Guinea.

In a letter to the Director General of the Nigerian Maritime Administration and Safety Agency (NIMASA), Dr. Bashir Jamoh, IMO Secretary General, Kitack Lim, said with the ongoing prosecution of arrested pirates, the first under the country's new anti-piracy law, Nigeria was sending a "strong and valuable message" to the global community about its determination to rid its waters and the Gulf of Guinea of crimes.

Lim said he was impressed by Nigeria's efforts "to address maritime security threats in the region," adding that Jamoh's "leadership and proactive response" to maritime security issues were laudable.

"I would also like to reiterate my congratulations to the Nigerian Navy on the successful capture and arrest of pirates from the fishing trawler Hailufeng II, and more recently on the rescue of the crew members of the containership Tommi Ritscher.

"Those actions, together with all the other initiatives you highlighted in our meeting, including progress with the Deep Blue Project, send a strong and valuable message to the international community with respect to the considerable efforts your government is making to curb piracy and armed robbery against ships in the Gulf of Guinea," he added.

The secretary general had, in a recent virtual meeting with the NIMASA boss, reiterated the organisation's readiness to assist the agency in the training of personnel and technical assistance.

Lim also declared his willingness to talk to other member countries to assist in achieving the objective.

He said IMO would help to deal with the issue of synergy in laws regarding piracy with other neighbouring countries.

Jamoh told Lim at the virtual meeting, following the arrest of some pirates by the Nigerian Navy, in partnership with NIMASA, that piracy in the region was being sustained by powerful foreign collaboration.

He appealed for support from the international community to complement the steps being taken by Nigeria towards ridding the country's waters of maritime crimes.

Jamoh said: "The recent arrests of pirates have opened our eyes to a new and even more dangerous dimension to the issue of piracy and armed robbery in our waters, and that is the issue of foreign collaboration.

"The arrests involved Nigerians and other nationalities, whose identities I cannot disclose because the cases are under investigation.

"Piracy is taking an international dimension. We now know that pirates and other maritime criminals in our waters and the Gulf of Guinea operate with strong backing from powerful international collaborators.

"So, we earnestly desire the cooperation of the international community, individual countries, organisations, and individuals to stem the ugly tide of insecurity in our waters.

"We will continue to do our best and update IMO as we make progress with our strategies."

NIMASA recently improved its collaboration with the navy and other stakeholders in an effort to tackle piracy in its maritime domain and the Gulf of Guinea.

The new collaborative arrangement involves information sharing between NIMASA's Command, Control, Communication, Computers, and Intelligence Centre (C4i Centre) of the Deep Blue Project, which commenced operations on a 24-hour basis since last year, and the Nigerian Navy's Falcon Eye to help track and combat criminals in the country's maritime domain.

The Deep Blue Project, also known as the Integrated National Security and Waterways Protection Infrastructure, aims to comprehensively tackle insecurity on Nigeria's territorial waters and exclusive economic zone, up to the Gulf of Guinea.

On the back of the new partnership between NIMASA and the navy, the country has made record arrests of pirates, with some already facing prosecution.

The Nigerian Navy recently arrested a vessel, MFV Marine 707, which was engaged in illegal fishing in the country's waters.

Ten pirates, who had on May 15 attacked and boarded a Chinese vessel, MV HAILUFANG II, off the coast of Côte d'Ivoire and directed it towards Nigerian waters, were also arrested by the navy.

Six pirates killed in raid off Cameroon (CGTN) By Nyawira Mwangi
June 14, 2020

The Cameroon army said Saturday evening that its rapid intervention battalion and navy have shot dead six armed pirates off the southern Cameroonian town of Idabato.

The pirates were aboard a flying boat Friday night in the Gulf of Guinea located in the northeasternmost part of the tropical Atlantic Ocean when Cameroonian forces on patrol opened fire at them.

Weapons, marijuana and money in Nigerian and Cameroonian currencies were recovered from the pirates, the army said.

It said that the "elimination" of the pirates was a significant step in fighting piracy that has become rampant in the Gulf of Guinea.

Cameroonian businessmen sailing to Nigeria to buy goods are "regularly" attacked by pirates in the international waters, according to security reports.

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Gender-Based Violence

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WORTH READING

A Bridge Too Far? Attacks against Cultural Property used as Military Objectives as War Crimes: The Prlić et al. case and the Mostar Bridge

Luke Moffett

International Criminal Law Review, 2020

June 11, 2020

The destruction of the cultural property in conflict zones around the world has captured international attention on the need to prevent its destruction and prosecute those responsible. This article examines the current legal protection and international criminal framework on the criminalisation of the destruction of cultural property and in particular the exception to such destruction amounting to a war crime where they have become military objectives. This article discusses the recent decision in the Prlić et al. case involving the Mostar bridge, in light of its being justified to be attacked as a military objective. This article argues that considerations of proportionality are still required in such circumstances. This is vital to minimise the cost to communities and peoples whose cultural identity is bound up with such cultural objects. The article also suggests that the perfidious use of cultural property by parties to a conflict should be criminalised.

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