Case School of Law Logo

FREDERICK K. COX
INTERNATIONAL LAW CENTER

Founder/Advisor
Michael P. Scharf

Faculty Advisor
Jim Johnson

War Crimes
Prosecution
Watch

Volume 20 -
Issue 1
March 6, 2024

PILPG Logo

Editor-in-Chief
Anna Buczek

Technical Editor-in-Chief
Jacqueline Quander

Managing Editors
Xi Chen

Aris Witty

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

Opinions expressed in the articles herein represent the views of their authors and are not necessarily those of the War Crimes Prosecution Watch staff, the Case Western Reserve University School of Law or Public International Law & Policy Group.

Contents

AFRICA

NORTH AFRICA

Libya

- UN envoy says Libya will slide into `disintegration' if politicians don't move toward elections (AP News)

CENTRAL AFRICA

Central African Republic

- Central African Republic says 10,000 children are still fighting alongside armed groups there (ABC News)
- Wagner in Africa: How the Russian mercenary group has rebranded (BBC News)

WEST AFRICA

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

- Cameroon Rebels Abduct Government Officials in Fresh Wave of Attacks (Voice of America)
- Nigeria police repel attack by gunmen, one officer dies (Reuters)

Mali

- Tuareg Separatists Lift Road Blockades in Northern Mali (Voice of America)
- Mali's Tuareg Separatists Accuse Army, Wagner Of 7 Civilian Deaths (Barron's)
- Three dead as bus carrying B2Gold employees attacked in Mali (Reuters)

EAST AFRICA

Uganda

- War Crimes Trial Continues in Uganda After Long Delays (Human Rights Watch)
- The trial of Kwoyelo: Fate of LRA rebel commander divides northern Uganda (Al Jazeera)

Kenya

- In Kenya, women hold 'Dark Valentine' vigils to press for end to femicides (Al Jazeera)

Rwanda

- Rwanda genocide suspect Kayishema due back in Cape Town court (Eyewitness News)
- Rwanda rejects US calls for withdrawal of missiles and troops from eastern Congo (Washington Post)
- Eastern Congo Residents Scramble for Food and Safety as Conflict Intensifies (US News)

Somalia

- Somalia-Ethiopia tensions only serve to embolden Al Shabaab (The East African)

Ethiopia

- US calls for investigation into alleged civilian killings in Ethiopia's Amhara region (Africa News)
- Dozens of civilians killed by Ethiopian state troops in Amhara region, say reports (The Guardian)

EUROPE

International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia

- Coric completes his Sentence on conditional early release under the Supervision of the Mechanism (Sarajevo Times)

Turkey

- HRW: Turkey's deliberate targeting of civilian infrastructure in northeast Syria constitutes war crime (Medya News)
- Two YPJ commanders killed in Turkish drone attack in Qamishlo (ANF News)
- Critics slam ICC prosecutor for meeting with Turkish FM accused of crimes against humanity (Turkish Minute)
- Turkey sentences 15 Kurdish politicians to more than 100 years in prison (Stockholm Center for Freedom)

Kosovo Specialist Chambers

- Kosovo Begins Two War Crime Trials of Serbs in Absentia (Balkan Insight)

Azerbaijan

- Military escalation on the border of Armenia and Azerbaijan raising concerns (SBS News)
- Armenia prepares to sue Azerbaijan for war crimes at ICC (Arka News Agency)
- Russia releases Azerbaijani national wanted by Armenia after brief arrest (ArmenPress)

Russia

- Bulgaria is going to prosecute Russian war crimes in Ukraine (Yahoo News)
- More than 100 journalists victims of Russian crimes during two years of covering war in Ukraine (Reporters Without Borders)
- Putin signs law to confiscate assets of those convicted of discrediting the Russian army (CTV News)
- Major Archbishop Shevchuk: War crimes in Ukraine must be condemned (Vatican News)
- Two years on, thousands of Ukrainian children still forcibly displaced by Russia (The Hill)

MIDDLE-EAST

Iraq

- US Strikes in Iraq and Syria Kill About 40, Including Civilians (Scheerpost)

Syria

- Two dead after Israeli missiles 'hit residential area' in Syria (Irish Examiner)

Yemen

- Yemen's Houthi rebels fire missiles at ship bound for Iran, their main supporter (AP News)
- Yemen warns Israel against possible ground offensive on Rafah (Mehr News Agency)
- UN envoy warns of 'dangerous' escalation cycle in war-wracked Yemen (Al Jazeera)
- Houthis vow to continue attacks in solidarity with Palestinians (SaltWire)
- Yemen at War (The Glasgow Guardian)
- Attacks on ships and US drones show Yemen's Houthis can still fight despite US-led airstrikes (ABC News)

Special Tribunal for Lebanon

Israel & Palestine

- ICC prosecutor 'deeply concerned' by situation in Gaza's Rafah (Reuters)
- ICJ holds hearings on Israel's occupation of Palestinian territories (Reuters)
- World Court to Review 57-Year Israeli Occupation (Human Rights Watch)

ASIA

Afghanistan

- Concerns raised after alleged war criminals escape overseas (The New Daily)
- Pakistan's Asif Durrani to attend Doha meeting on Afghanistan (The Khaama Press News Agency)
- Minister says Ben Wallace and future head of the army failed to properly investigate alleged SAS Afghan crimes (The Independent)

Bangladesh International Crimes Tribunal

- Three Convicted War Criminals Sentenced to Life Imprisonment for 1971 Liberation War Crimes (Bangladesh News Network)

War Crimes Investigations in Myanmar

- Myanmar: Military air strikes that killed 17 civilians 'must be investigated as war crimes' (Amnesty International)
- Myanmar Journalist Shot, Killed While in Military Custody (Voice of America)

AMERICAS

South America

- Paraguayan policeman on trial for torture meted out decades ago (Yahoo News)

Venezuela

- Venezuela I situation: ICC Appeals Chamber to deliver judgment on appeal against authorisation to resume investigations on 1 March 2024 — Practical information (ICC)

TOPICS

Truth and Reconciliation Commission

- Tamil Diaspora Organizations contend that Sri Lanka's TRC Commission will not deliver justice for Tamils (WPRI 12 News)
- NPA's apartheid case shame: State prosecutors have 'failed' to investigate crimes exposed by the TRC (Daily Maverick)

Terrorism

Piracy

- Fears that pirates are returning to seas off Somalia (Macau Business)
- UN shipping agency working 'tirelessly' to solve Red Sea crisis (Hellenic Shipping News)

Gender-Based Violence

- Hillary Clinton and Sheryl Sandberg decry sexual violence as a war tactic (CNN)

Commentary and Perspectives

WORTH READING

AFRICA

NORTH AFRICA

Libya

UN envoy says Libya will slide into `disintegration' if politicians don't move toward elections (AP News) By Edith M. Lederer
February 15, 2024

> **UNITED NATIONS (AP) — The U.N. special envoy for Libya warned the country's feuding political actors Thursday that if they don't urgently form a unified government and move toward elections the oil-rich North African nation will slide into "disintegration."**

Abdoulaye Bathily told the U.N. Security Council there are numerous alarming signs of such a slide and urged all political leaders to put aside "their self-interests" and come together to negotiate and reach a compromise "to restore the dignity of their motherland."

"Reluctance to do so calls into question not only their commitment to the elections, but to the unity and future of their country for which they should be held accountable," he said.

Libya plunged into chaos after a NATO-backed uprising toppled and killed longtime dictator Moammar Gadhafi in 2011. In the chaos that followed, the country split, with rival administrations in the east and west backed by rogue militias and foreign governments.

Tunisian group accuses authorities of mass expulsions of migrants from sub-Saharan Africa The country's current political crisis stems from the failure to hold elections on Dec. 24, 2021, and the refusal of Prime Minister Abdul Hamid Dbeibah — who led a transitional government in the capital of Tripoli — to step down.

In response, Libya's east-based parliament appointed a rival prime minister, Fathy Bashagha, but suspended him last May. The powerful military commander Khalifa Hifter continues to hold sway in the east.

Bathily told the council that in his latest engagements with the major players, none have moved from their initial positions and each has set preconditions for participating in negotiations to resolve outstanding contested issues that would clear a path to the long-awaited elections.

He pointed to intransigence by Dbeibah, Hifter, speaker of the eastern-based House of Representatives Agila Saleh and by Mohamed Takala, president of the High Council of State which has played a key role over the country's election laws.

The U.N. envoy urged the rival players to lift bans on activities of the High National Elections Commission so local elections in 97 municipalities across the country can take place this year.

Bathily also said the Security Council and the broader international community have "a critical role to play to press the Libyan parties to engage constructively" and urged them to come up with a coordinated and unified approach to press for presidential and legislative elections.

Throughout Libya, he said, people are frustrated at the status quo and failure of the key political players to "do what is needed to set the country on the path to sustainable peace and progress."

He also expressed increasing concern about rivalries between "security actors" seeking control of more territory in the capital, Tripoli, and about the human rights and humanitarian situation of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers. And he said: "I remain alarmed at continued collective expulsions of migrants and refugees across the borders between Libya and neighboring countries."

Robert Wood, U.S. deputy ambassador, said the United States is "alarmed by the activities of armed groups in Libya, which operate with impunity and have persistent influence over Libyan security and politics."

These groups are violating human rights and international humanitarian law, which include causing deaths, injuries, and displacement of hundreds of civilians, he said. He added there are also "allegations of unlawful detentions to suppress perceived civil dissent and attacks against civil society."

Wood said the United States urges steps to reunify the country's divided military which could help "reduce criminality in the south, secure the country's borders, and prevent spillover of regional turmoil."

The U.S. also calls on Libyan political leaders to name representatives to U.N.-facilitated preparatory talks "aimed at addressing the core issues still standing in the way of elections," he said.

Regionally, Wood said, the United States is monitoring the destabilizing implications for Libya of the situations in Niger, Chad, Sudan and Mali – "including the movement of foreign fighters and rampant arms trafficking."

He singled out "the destabilizing activities" of Russia's Wagner Group which he called "a transnational criminal organization." It is reportedly operating in all those countries as well as the Central African Republic.

Russia's deputy ambassador Dmitry Polyansky expressed hope that the rival political parties will soon reach agreements on organizing elections, telling the council "the status quo has gone on for far too long" and it's time the country had a genuinely inclusive government.

[**back to contents**]

CENTRAL AFRICA

Central African Republic

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

Central African Republic says 10,000 children are still fighting alongside armed groups there (ABC News) By Jean Fernand Koena
February 12, 2024

> **BANGUI, Central African Republic -- About 10,000 children are still fighting alongside armed groups in Central African Republic more than a decade after civil war broke out, the government said Monday.**

Marthe Kirima, the minister for family and gender, said in a statement that children are still being recruited as fighters, spies, messengers, cooks and even used as sex slaves. While 15,000 children have escaped from rebel forces, she said, many are traumatized and find it difficult to return to normal life.

The mineral-rich but impoverished nation has had conflict since 2013, when predominantly Muslim Seleka rebels seized power and forced then-President Francois Bozize from office. Mostly Christian militias fought back, also targeting civilians.

The United Nations, which has a peacekeeping mission in the country, estimates the fighting has killed thousands and displaced over a million people, or one-fifth of the population. In 2019, a peace deal was reached between the government and 14 armed groups, but fighting continues.

The U.N. is trying to prevent children from joining armed groups and make it easier for those released to reintegrate into society. It has created training programs for them to become mechanics, masons, carpenters or take up other professions.

Some former child soldiers told The Associated Press that their harrowing experiences had pushed them to become peace ambassadors.

"I took up arms because Seleka killed by mother and father," said Arsene, who insisted on only his first name due to the sensitivity of the situation. He said a Christian rebel group recruited him when he was 14. After three years of fighting, he now tells young people not to join rebel groups.

Ousmane, another former child soldier, said that joining the rebels ruined his life and that of those around him. "What we did is indescribable," he said.

The Dany Ngarasso Foundation, a local civil society group, called on the government to accelerate the peace process to protect child soldiers.

"They may have fought yesterday, but they can still campaign for peace today," foundation head Ngarasso said.

Wagner in Africa: How the Russian mercenary group has rebranded (BBC News) By Joe Inwood and Jake Tacchi
February 20, 2024

> **Russia is offering governments in Africa a "regime survival package" in exchange for access to strategically important natural resources, a major new report has found.**

Internal Russian government documents, seen by the BBC, also detail how it is working to change mining laws in West Africa, with the ambition of dislodging Western companies from an area of strategic importance.

This is part of the process of the Russian government taking over the businesses of the Wagner mercenary group, broken up after a failed coup in June 2023.

The multibillion-dollar operations are now mostly being run as the Russian "Expeditionary Corps", managed by the man accused of being behind the attempt to murder Sergei Skripal using the Novichok nerve agent on the streets of the UK - a charge Russia has denied.

"This is the Russian state coming out of the shadows in its Africa policy," says Jack Watling, land warfare specialist at the Royal United Services Institute (Rusi) and one of the report's authors.

Back in June 2023, Yevgeny Prigozhin was probably the most feared and famous mercenary in the world. His Wagner Group was in control of billions of dollars' worth of companies and projects, while his fighters were central to Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Then, he decided to march on Moscow, ostensibly calling for the removal of the defence minister and head of the general staff, but in reality threatening President Vladimir Putin in a way no-one had before.

Within weeks he had died in a highly suspicious plane crash, along with much of the Wagner leadership. There was widespread speculation at the time about what would happen to the Wagner Group. Now, we have the answer.

According to Dr Watling, "there was a meeting in the Kremlin fairly shortly after Prigozhin's mutiny, in which it was decided that Wagner's Africa operations would fall directly under the control of Russian military intelligence, the GRU".

Control was to be handed to Gen Andrey Averyanov, head of Unit 29155, a secretive operation specialising in targeting killings and destabilising foreign governments.

But it seems Gen Averyanov's new business was not destabilising governments, but rather securing their future, as long as they paid by signing away their mineral rights.

In early September, accompanied by deputy Defence Minister Yunus-Bek Yevkurov, Gen Averyanov began a tour of former Wagner operations in Africa.

They started in Libya, meeting warlord Gen Khalifa Haftar. Their next stop was Burkina Faso where they were greeted by 35-year-old coup leader Ibrahim Traoré.

After that, they landed in the Central African Republic, possibly the most well-established Wagner operation on the continent, before heading to Mali to meet the leaders of the junta there.

On a subsequent trip they also met General Salifou Modi, one of the military men who seized power in Niger last year.

Readouts of the various meetings demonstrate that the two men were reassuring Wagner's partners on the continent that the demise of Prigozhin did not mean the end of his business deals. Reports of the meeting with Capt Traoré of Burkina Faso confirmed cooperation would continue in "the military domain, including the training of Burkinabe officer cadets and officers at all levels, including pilots in Russia".

In short, the death of Prigozhin did not mean the end for the junta's relationship with Russia. In some ways, it would become deeper still.

The three West African states with close links to Wagner - Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso - have all experienced military takeovers in recent years. They have since announced their withdrawal from the regional bloc Ecowas, and the creation of their own "Alliance of Sahel States".

Maybe the most entwined with the mercenaries was Mali, where an ongoing Islamist insurgency, combined with multiple coups, had left an essentially failed state.

Previously, security assistance had come in the form of the UN mission known as Minusma, alongside the French military's long-running counter-insurgency operation.

But there was no particular fondness for France, the former colonial power, and so when the Wagner group offered to replace their security operations with Russian backing, the offer was accepted.

"The French were tolerated, rather than welcomed," says Edwige Sorgho-Depagne, an analyst of African politics who works for Amber Advisers.

"The French mandate to help in the terror crisis in the Sahel was always regarded as limited in time. So, the fact that the French stayed for that long - over 10 years - without finding a way to end the crisis didn't help".

Beyond pragmatism, there was also nostalgia. "In these countries, Russia is not a new ally. Russia was there before in the 1970s and 1980s."

"There's this dream of getting back to a better time, which is often associated with the relationship with Russia."

But for the military juntas running these countries, Russia's military presence has obvious benefits.

"Initially, these juntas were transitional leaders. They were supposed to organise elections and bring about a return to democratic institutions."

"But now Russian paramilitaries are brought in to protect the military junta, allowing them to stay as long as they want."

The junta ordered the French forces to leave and Mali is now largely dependent on Wagner for its internal security, a change that is having an immediate impact on ordinary Malians.

"What the Russians have provided is a strike force, with helicopters with advanced capabilities and a lot of firepower," says Dr Watling. "They are using pretty traditional Soviet anti-partisan methods. You see fighters who were executed, as well as civilians targeted for enabling or being associated with fighters."

There have been multiple claims that Wagner forces carried out human rights abuses on the African continent, as well as in Ukraine and Syria, where Prigozhin's organisation previously held a commanding presence.

One of the most well-documented incidents took place in the central Malian town of Moura where, according to a UN report, at least 500 people are believed to have been summarily executed by Malian troops and "armed white men", who eyewitnesses described as speaking an "unknown language".

While independent verification has not been possible, Human Rights Watch identified the unknown white attackers as Russian mercenaries.

In exchange for considerable, if brutal, security assistance, Wagner required something in return. Mali, like many African nations, is rich in natural resources - from timber and gold to uranium and lithium. Some are simply valuable, while others have strategic importance as well.

According to Dr Watling, Wagner was operating in a well-established tradition: "There is a standard Russian modus operandi, which is that you cover the operational costs with parallel business activity. In Africa, that is primarily through mining concessions."

In every country in which it operates, Wagner was reported to have secured valuable natural resources using these to not only cover costs, but also extract significant revenue. Russia has extracted $2.5bn (£2bn) worth of gold from Africa in the past two years, which is likely to have helped fund its war in Ukraine, according to the Blood Gold Report.

This month, Russian fighters - formerly Wagner mercenaries - took control of Mali's Intahaka gold mine, close to the border with Burkina Faso. The artisanal mine, the largest in northern Mali, had been disputed for many years by various armed groups active in the region. But there is something else, with potential geopolitical significance.

"We are now observing the Russians attempting to strategically displace Western control of access to critical minerals and resources," says Dr Watling.

In Mali, the mining code was recently re-written to give the junta greater control over natural resources. That process has already seen an Australian lithium mine suspend trading on its shares, citing uncertainty over the implementation of the code.

While lithium and gold mines are clearly important, according to Dr Watling there is possibly an even greater strategic headache around the corner: "In Niger the Russians are endeavouring to gain a similar set of concessions that would strip French access to the uranium mines in the country."

The report details internal Russian memos focussed on trying to achieve in Niger what was done in Mali. If Russia managed to gain control of West Africa's uranium mines, Europe could be left exposed once again to what has often been called Russian "energy blackmail".

France is more dependent on nuclear power than any other country in the world, with 56 reactors producing almost two-thirds of the country's energy. About a fifth of its uranium is imported from Niger. There have previously been complaints about the terms of trade, with suggestions that the former colonial power exploits nations like Niger.

"The narrative that Russia is pushing is that Western states remain fundamentally colonial in their attitude," says Dr Watling. "It's very ironic because the Russian approach, which is to isolate these regimes, capture their elites and to extract their natural resources, is quite colonial."

In reality, the "Expeditionary Corps" appears more as "Wagner 2.0", than a radical departure for Russian foreign policy. Prigozhin had built deep political, economic and military ties on the African continent - dismantling this complex web would have been difficult and ultimately counter-productive.

The "Expeditionary Corps" is operating in the same countries, with the same equipment and - it seems - with the same ultimate goal.

According to Dr Watling, the fundamental change lies in "the overtness with which Russia is pursuing its policy". Prigozhin's Wagner Group had always provided Russia with a level of plausible deniability in operations and influence abroad.

Following the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, many in the Western security apparatus say that Russia's mask has slipped.

"What they are looking to do is to exacerbate our crises internationally. They are trying to start fires elsewhere, and expand those that already exist, making a less safe world," Dr Watling.

"Ultimately, it weakens us in the global competition that we are currently facing. So the impact is not immediately felt, but over time, it is a serious threat."

[**back to contents**]

Sudan & South Sudan

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

[**back to contents**]

Democratic Republic of the Congo

Official Website of the International Criminal Court
ICC Public Documents - Situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

[**back to contents**]

WEST AFRICA

Côte d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast)

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

[**back to contents**]

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

Cameroon Rebels Abduct Government Officials in Fresh Wave of Attacks (Voice of America) By Moki Edwin Kindzeka
February 8, 2024

> **Cameroon separatist fighters Wednesday claimed responsibility for the killing of four government workers, including a policeman abducted Tuesday in the country's restive English-speaking North-West region. Government officials say two of the hostages, including a government official the military freed, are responding to treatment in a hospital. The abduction and killing followed renewed separatist attacks that have claimed several dozen civilians within two weeks.**

Cameroon on Wednesday said one of its officials who had been abducted Tuesday evening in the restive English-speaking North-West region bordering Nigeria has been freed by government troops.

Nicholas Nkongho Manchang, the divisional officer for the region's Bamenda Second District was kidnapped at gunpoint with five others, including a policeman, on their way to an official ceremony in Nkambe town, the government said.

Deben Tchoffo, governor of the North-West region, told a crowd in Nkambe Wednesday that Manchang and another captive were freed after a swift military operation.

"The head of state [president Paul Biya] instructed the security services to set free the hostages," Tchoffo said. "Four hours later, the said administrative authority was freed thanks to the bravery of our military as well as the bravery of the abducted victims. Authorities, living forces (should) continue providing the military with all information to free the hostages that are not yet released."

Tchoffo said the divisional officer known locally as the D.O and the other freed captive are responding to treatment in a hospital in Bamenda, where they were rushed to by government troops.

Christopher Achobang is the spokesperson for the Ambazonia Governing Council, fighting for independence for Cameroon's English-speaking regions from the French majority country.

Achobang said Manchang saved his life by escaping.

"The D.O staged an escape because he fell into a ravine and the fighters were not so ready to get into the ravine to rescue him so they left him there wounded and dying," Achobang said. "He escaped and walked for a long distance where the Cameroon military then found him and took him to a helicopter which evacuated the D.O to Bamenda."

Achobang said separatist fighters should have killed the D.O if he did escape.

English speaking separatists say they consider divisional officers, who are heads of districts, to be government troops because they undergo military training and as such constitute a legitimate target to fighters.

But Cameroon government officials say divisional officers are civil administrators who represent the Yaounde central government and work for the development of their districts.

Government troops say Manchang drove past the military-led convoy of government officials travelling to Nkambe and fell into an ambush mounted by fighters. Manchang has not explained why he left the convoy.

Separatists say after Manchang escaped, four companions, including a police officer were killed.

The Ambazonia Governing Council said that separatist forces killed the captives to send a message to government troops that claims that separatists fighting for an independent English-speaking have been defeated are unfounded.

The government and military have not commented on the alleged killing of the four captives but on Wednesday night separatists shared pictures of four dead bodies on social media including Facebook and WhatsApp. VOA could not independently verify the authenticity of the pictures.

Civilians, however, say the pictures appear to be those of the abducted government workers.

Cameroon has within the past two weeks reported that separatists killed several dozen people in northwestern towns including Bamenda, Kumbo and Ndop.

The government says at least eleven separatists were killed in military raids in Kumbo and Oku, both northwestern towns.

Separatists acknowledge their fighters were killed and say several governments troops also died in fighting.

Edward Nfor is a member of the Cameroon Civil Society Group and a road contractor working in the Northwest region. He says the current wave of abductions and killings is either unreported or underreported by local media that fear persecution from rebels and the Cameroon government.

"Killings are on the rise, kidnapping is on the rise. If heavily guarded government officials are kidnapped, then what about the ordinary civilian. People are moving but they can't move freely," Nfor said. "These boys [separatist fighters] will go out to the village[es]. get out people and say that they are supporting the military and execute them in public. Let the government try to do something and get this thing [crisis] to an end."

Nfor said several dozen people have either been abducted or killed since fresh attacks began in January.

Separatists on social media say they will not spare anyone who reports fighters hiding in towns and villages to government troops.

The separatist conflict broke out in 2016 when Anglophone Cameroonians protested discrimination by the Francophone majority.

The United Nations says more than 6,000 people have been killed and the unrest has deprived 600,000 children of education.

Nigeria police repel attack by gunmen, one officer dies (Reuters) By Ahmed Kingimi
February 19, 2024

> **A group of armed men attacked a police division in Zurmi town, in Nigeria's northwest Zamfara state, but were repelled by officers with casualties recorded on both sides, the police said on Monday.**

Gangs of heavily armed men referred to as bandits by locals have wreaked havoc across Nigeria's northwest in the past three years, kidnapping thousands, killings hundreds, and making it unsafe to travel by road or to farm in some areas.

Zamfara police spokesperson Yazid Abubakar said suspected bandits wielding sophisticated weapons attacked the division late on Sunday, killing a senior officer and wounding two others.

"The policemen on duty retaliated and repelled the attack after a serious gun duel in which many of the bandits were killed and some took to their heels with possible gunshot wounds," Abubakar said in a statement.

Abubakar said the police have begun an investigation and have deployed more men to fortify the town and arrest fleeing culprits.

Residents said at least seven people were killed during the shootout, including the divisional crime officer.

Ibrahim Mohammed, a resident of Zurmi who witnessed the attack, told Reuters by phone that an unspecified number of people were kidnapped and the police division was set ablaze.

"They ransacked the place and set ablaze some shops and cars near the police station," Mohammed said.

Another resident Usman Abubakar said, "as I speak with you, they also abducted some people whose numbers cannot be immediately ascertained."

Nigeria, Africa's largest economy, is grappling with a multifaceted security crisis, including kidnappings for ransom, which has reached alarming proportions.

The widespread insecurity is exacerbating a cost-of-living crisis caused in part by the reforms of President Bola Tinubu who has yet to detail how he plans to the tackle the situation.

[**back to contents**]

Mali

Tuareg Separatists Lift Road Blockades in Northern Mali (Voice of America) By Agence France-Presse
February 10, 2024

> **Tuareg separatists announced Saturday the lifting of blockades they'd set up in December on main roads throughout northern Mali after the national army took back several towns.**

"All blockades on the routes from the Algerian border to the towns of Timbuktu and Gao have been lifted," the Permanent Strategic Framework, an alliance of rebel forces, told Agence France-Presse, without giving more details.

The Taureg-dominated rebel groups lost control of several localities in the north of the country after an army offensive in late 2023 that culminated with the taking of Kidal, a bastion of the separatist movement.

Hostilities had resumed last August — after eight years of relative calm — as both sides fought to take possession of military camps abandoned by United Nations troops who left under orders of the Mali government.

The military junta that seized power in a 2020 coup largely won those exchanges, but the rebels didn't surrender and retreated into remote desert and mountainous areas.

Mali's army was backed by mercenaries from Russia's Wagner Group, according to the rebels and local elected officials, but the regime denies the presence of the controversial private security group.

In December, the rebels blocked all products and types of vehicles in the sparsely populated north.

There also have been accusations of atrocities committed against civilians during the recent offensive by Mali's army and the Russian force, which again the authorities have repeatedly denied.

Mali's Tuareg Separatists Accuse Army, Wagner Of 7 Civilian Deaths (Barron's) By Agence France Presse
February 14, 2024

> **Taureg separatists in northern Mali on Wednesday accused the army and Russian paramilitary group Wagner of having killed seven Chadian and Nigerien civilians in drone strikes on the Algerian border.**

The Malian army did not respond to requests for comment from AFP about the allegations posed in a statement from the Permanent Strategic Framework (CSP), an alliance of predominantly Taureg armed rebel groups.

Overnight Tuesday to Wednesday, "a Wagner-FAMA (Malian armed forces) terrorist coalition carried out drone strikes on a fuel sales outlet in Talhandak", a crossroads village in the vast desert expanse of Mali's far north close to the shared border with Algeria and Niger, the alliance said in its statement.

"This umpteenth attack on innocent people resulted in the deaths of seven people of Chadian and Nigerien nationality, as well as other victims who are still under the rubble."

The CSP condemned "with the utmost rigour these repeated acts of terrorism by the Bamako junta, which targets only innocent people and civilian infrastructure".

Fighting between the separatists and Mali government troops broke out in August after eight years of calm, as both sides scrambled to fill the vacuum left by the withdrawal of United Nations peacekeepers (MINUSMA), ordered to leave by the ruling junta in Bamako.

The military leaders who seized power in 2020 had achieved a symbolic success widely hailed in Mali, but the rebel groups in the northern desert region did not lay down their arms.

Malian forces were supported by Wagner mercenaries, according to the rebels and local officials, although the junta denies the presence of the private Russian security group in the country.

The offensive in northern Mali has been marked by numerous allegations of exactions against civilians by Malian forces and their Russian allies, which the Malian authorities systematically deny.

Three dead as bus carrying B2Gold employees attacked in Mali (Reuters) February 16, 2024

> **B2Gold Corp, on Thursday said that three of its employees died after sustaining injuries in an attack on an employee transport convoy in Mali.**

A bus transporting B2Gold employees from the Fekola Mine to Bamako was attacked approximately 75 kilometres west of Bamako, the Canadian miner said.

Mining and processing activities at the Fekola mine have not been impacted by the incident, B2Gold said, adding that it is working with the Malian government to understand further details of the attack.

Initial reports indicate several other employees travelling on the bus were wounded, all of whom have been transported to a local hospital, the company said.

[**back to contents**]

EAST AFRICA

Uganda

ICC to Announce Reparations for Victims of Dominic Ongwen's War Crimes (BNN) February 14, 2024

> **A pivotal moment is approaching for the victims of Dominic Ongwen, a former senior commander of the notorious Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). The International Criminal Court (ICC) has set February 28 as the date to announce reparations for those who suffered under Ongwen's reign of terror.**

The Crimes of Dominic Ongwen Ongwen, once a feared figure in Northern Uganda, was convicted by the ICC on 61 counts of war crimes and crimes against humanity. These heinous acts, committed between 2002 and 2005, included murder, torture, sexual enslavement, and the use of child soldiers.

The ICC's decision to uphold his 25-year sentence in 2023 marked a significant milestone in the pursuit of justice for the countless lives shattered by the LRA's brutal insurgency. Ongwen, who was transferred to an undisclosed prison facility on December 18, 2023, now faces the consequences of his actions.

The Road to Reparations The upcoming reparations hearing at the ICC in The Hague will see Ongwen, his defense team, and legal representatives of the victims come together. This public event will serve as a platform for the court to deliver its order on the financial compensation due to those who suffered abuse and injuries at the hands of Ongwen and his troops.

While no amount of money can ever truly compensate for the trauma inflicted, these reparations represent a crucial step towards acknowledging and addressing the suffering endured by the victims. They also underscore the ICC's commitment to ensuring that perpetrators of such egregious crimes are held accountable.

A Glimmer of Hope For the survivors of Ongwen's atrocities, the reparations announcement offers a glimmer of hope. It is a testament to their resilience and determination to seek justice, despite the odds being stacked against them.

As we approach February 28, the world watches with bated breath. The ICC's decision will not only set a precedent for future cases but also send a clear message that even in the face of unspeakable horrors, justice will prevail.

In the cacophony of war cries and the chaos of conflict, the stories of human endurance and hope often go unheard. But as the Dominic Ongwen case demonstrates, these narratives are what truly matter. They remind us of our shared humanity and serve as a beacon of light in the darkest of times.

The trial of Kwoyelo: Fate of LRA rebel commander divides northern Uganda (Al Jazeera) By Sophie Neiman
February 17, 2024

> **At a market in Gulu, northern Uganda, women spread tropical fruit on plastic sheets, calling out to passing customers. The sun is blinding, and the air is thick with the chatter of bargaining shoppers.**

Distant are the days when children used to sleep under the same market stall awnings, after marching grimly from the surrounding villages to this small city each night to avoid capture by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA).

Fearsome rebels commanded by Joseph Kony, the LRA dominated the region, capturing young children to serve as soldiers and sex slaves, between 1987 and 2006 before being pushed out of Uganda and into the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and the Central African Republic (CAR).

Not far from this lively market is Gulu's High Court, which will soon play host to the trial of Thomas Kwoyelo, now in his 50s, the first LRA commander to be tried for his crimes in Uganda.

Kwoyelo was abducted as a teenager walking to school in the early years of conflict. He went on to serve in the LRA for some 20 years. Taking on the alias Latoni, the boy soldier became a senior commander and was responsible for treating wounded fighters.

He was captured during a battle in DRC in 2009. Brought home nursing a bullet wound in his stomach and without shoes, he spent the next 14 years in detention as attempts to try him dragged on.

In April 2023, more than a decade after he was jailed, the prosecution wrapped up its argument against Kwoyelo, with the defence now gearing up to make its case.

But his controversial trial has raised alarm among human rights and monitoring organisations, who say his lengthy detention has made it impossible for him to get justice.

Meanwhile, survivors of the conflict in northern Uganda assert that Kwoyelo, the first person from the armed group to be tried in the country, should not be on trial at all. They want him forgiven and allowed to come home as other LRA captives, and commanders who allegedly held higher ranks, were allowed to do so.

Rebel uprising Kony, a former altar boy, crafted his fighting force from the remnants of another rebel group, hoping to topple President Yoweri Museveni and rule the country according to the Ten Commandments.

Clashes between the rebels and the Ugandan army killed some 10,000 people, with the LRA often turning their weapons on civilians and forcing children to become fighters.

Among them was Margret, who spoke to Al Jazeera using only her first name. Before the war, she enjoyed going to school, helping out on the family farm, and fishing in a nearby river.

In 1991, she was taken along with 15 girls from her village in an attack that killed her father and the men of their village. The new recruits were tied together with ropes and forced to carry looted goods. Margret, only 12 years old at the time, was immediately made the wife of an LRA commander.

The girl was taught to handle a weapon and transformed into a fighter. After two years with the rebels, she tried to escape, only to be taken again.

"There were terrible beatings and no one to turn to," Margret said of her time in captivity.

These mass abductions pushed leaders from northern Uganda's Acholi ethnic group to advocate for an amnesty policy that would allow LRA fighters who gave up their weapons to return home, free from repercussions. This policy was signed into law in 2000.

"Our children are innocent because they were forcefully conscripted into combat," said Okello Okuna, a spokesperson for Ker Kwaro Acholi, a traditional kingdom for northern Uganda, headquartered in Gulu.

"A number of them returned home and they're living now peacefully amidst us without any reprisal, without any reprimand [and] without any arrest," he added.

On the local radio station Mega FM, John "Lacambel" Oryema spent the war interviewing repatriated LRA fighters and playing peace songs, urging the remaining rebels to lay down their weapons and come home again.

"I used to say, brothers, sisters, let us all unite and make sure we forgive and forget," Oryema told Al Jazeera.

This approach ran in contrast to international interest in seeing LRA leaders tried for their crimes.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights decried Uganda's Amnesty Act as a violation of international law, standing in the way of accountability for war crimes.

In 2003, a year after the International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague was founded, Uganda referred the cases of five high-ranking LRA commanders to the court, making them the first people it indicted.

Kony, the LRA leader, has remained at large. Cases against another of his top three commanders at the ICC have been closed down, with the accused presumed dead. But in 2021, Domonic Ongwen, another boy soldier, was convicted by the court in the Hague and sentenced to 25 years in prison.

Tenuous peace Margret gave birth to two children while in LRA captivity, and rose to the rank of sergeant. But when Uganda launched an operation against the rebels in 2004, she took her chances, fleeing into the hills with other women. In Gulu, she received amnesty and began, slowly, to rebuild her life.

Senior commanders also benefitted from the same law, renouncing rebellion, and returning home.

Charles, who like other ex-LRA recruits spoke using only his first name, was captured at a young age.

He gave few details about his time in the LRA, other than confirming he held a high rank and pointing to visible marks of conflict on his body, including an amputated leg.

"I have undergone all categories of military training," Charles, who once hoped to become a lawyer, said bluntly. "That is how my dream was diverted and all of a sudden, I became a soldier."

Like Margret, he received amnesty and was able to return home after 17 years of war.

Kwoyelo tried and failed to benefit from the same amnesty policy after being captured in 2009. It was originally granted by the constitutional court, but an appeal went all the way up to Uganda's Supreme Court, which denied Kwoyelo's request for clemency and sent his case back to the International Crimes Division (ICD) of Uganda's High Court.

The ICD was established in 2006 as a condition of peace talks held with the LRA in Juba with the intent of trying the rebel's top brass in Uganda. So far, Kwoyelo is the only one to face charges.

Former abductees have contended he shouldn't be on trial at all.

"There are so many people I know that have done serious bad things that are here at home that have never been tried," Margret told Al Jazeera. "Kwoyelo should be given amnesty so that he can be reintegrated with his family, so he has a normal life just like any of us who came back.

Agnes, who also spoke using her first name, agreed.

She was abducted by the LRA as a girl and forced to marry a commander in captivity. She recalled Kwoyelo nursing the gunshots she sustained in battle and working to gather food for the sick.

Seeing him on trial is unfair and he looked old and depressed, she told Al Jazeera.

"After all the good things that Kwoyelo did to support us … he's not in a position to support his family or go back to his mother and his siblings," she said.

Charles, the ex-LRA officer, was reluctant to give an opinion about a case currently before court, but eager to paint Kwoyelo – whom he referred to as his junior – in a neutral light.

"He is a normal person," Charles said simply.

He hasn't bothered to attend trial sessions as Agnes has, but tunes his radio to listen for news of Kwoyelo.

Others who returned from captivity or lived through the war told a different story, describing Kwoyelo as a cruel man who must answer for his crimes.

"He was a rude person and a fighter," said Jackline, who is also being identified by only her first name. She was born in LRA captivity and accused Kwoyelo of killing her father as punishment for failing to follow orders.

Even Oryema, who spoke about forgiveness on the radio, told Al Jazeera that Kwoyelo should suffer some retribution for his crimes.

"He had very little peace in his mind," Oryema said of a visit he made to Kwoyelo, while trying to persuade LRA recruits to return home. "He was full of revenge."

Child soldier in court It is amid these tensions over peace, and accountability that the Kwoyelo trial is taking place.

After 14 years, judges confirmed 78 (PDF) of the prosecution's charges against Kwoyelo in December, including rape, murder, and the forcible recruitment of other child soldiers.

The defence plans to argue his innocence, asserting he was a victim of the war himself.

"He was abducted as a child and trained," said Charles Dalton Opwonya, one of Kwoyelo's lawyers. "The government failed to protect him."

Long delays in the case – including the closure of the courts during COVID-19 – have caused funding shortages, with the court only putting on sessions when there is money to hold them, observers said.

The International Crimes Division of the High Court, where Kwoyelo is being tried, is intended to act as an equivalent to the ICC under the court's doctrine of complementarity, which declares cases should be sent to the ICC only when the national court system is lacking.

Building that capacity is difficult and the wait is particularly hard on victims, who have spent more than a decade in limbo.

"People are tired. People are fatigued. People are anxious. People are even giving up," said Henry Komakech Kilama. He acts as a lawyer for the victims, in a position modelled after the ICC.

The next session in Kwoyelo's case is expected to take place on February 19, and lawyers like Kilama hope the case will be wrapped up before the end of the year.

But prior postponements have also raised concerns from human rights experts, who worry about the accused as much as his alleged victims.

"If you look at it objectively, justice delayed is justice denied. When you put someone on trial for over a decade, whatever the outcome of that trial is, it doesn't [have] meaning," said Irene Anying, director of Avocats Sans Frontières in Uganda, which has monitored the trial since it began.

In a January statement, Human Rights Watch also urged Uganda to bring the trial to a speedy conclusion.

Hunting Kony With the defence now preparing its arguments in the Kwoyelo case in Uganda, the ICC has simultaneously moved forward with a separate confirmation of charges against Kony in absentia in the Hague.

"It brings confidence to the victims who have been waiting for justice, which Joseph Kony has evaded for over 18 years," Maria Kamara, an outreach coordinator for the ICC, said from the Ugandan capital of Kampala.

Karim Khan, the ICC prosecutor, has also asserted that confirming the charges against Kony will make it easier and quicker to hold a trial in the Hague should he be caught.

The United States Department of State has offered a five million dollar reward for information that might lead to Kony's arrest. But past attempts to hunt him down have failed.

The administration of Barack Obama funnelled eight million dollars into efforts to capture Kony between 2011 and 2017, providing logistical support to Ugandan troops, before Donald Trump shut down the mission shortly after entering office.

The LRA is now weakened and divided, expected to number about 100 to 2,000 soldiers, hiding out in jungles between the DRC and the CAR, struggling to survive.

Starting over In Gulu, and across northern Uganda, life in once war-torn areas continues.

Coming back from the LRA was difficult, Margret said. Most of her family had died and she was not sure how to make a life for herself.

"There [was] no one to go to, no source of livelihood or income whatsoever," she told Al Jazeera.

Despite receiving amnesty, many former LRA members face discrimination.

Margret has since joined support groups comprising other women who survived LRA captivity, but she said it is difficult to make enough money to send her children to school.

Charles also scrapes by operating a village savings organisation whose membership includes former rebels and civilians, in the hopes of fighting stigma and poverty at once.

Uganda's parliament passed a transitional justice policy to support survivors of the war in 2019, but has yet to implement its key tenets.

Kilima, the victims' lawyer, hoped that both a court process and more traditional methods could help bring permanent peace and stability to Uganda.

"We must look for more than one solution – not the ICC alone, not amnesty alone, not transitional justice alone," he said. "We must look at different options. Everyone must try to contribute to the dialogue about peace.

[**back to contents**]

Kenya

In Kenya, women hold 'Dark Valentine' vigils to press for end to femicides (Al Jazeera)

By Jacky Habib
February 14, 2024

> **As people around the world mark Valentine's Day with flowers and chocolate, Kenyan women are mourning. Hundreds of them donned black outfits and held lit candles and red roses at a vigil in honour of more than 30 women who have been murdered in the country in 2024.**

Wednesday's vigil in Nairobi – which featured impassioned calls to action and musical performances – was organised by the End Femicide Kenya Movement, a collective of more than 1,000 organisations and individuals. "Dark Valentine" vigils were also held in six other cities amid rising cases of femicide, which have captured national attention.

"Flowers are not beautiful on a casket," says a message in Swahili on a shirt worn by many of the mourners in Nairobi.

The vigils aim to pressure the government to address the demands of the movement, which include declaring femicide and violence against women as a national emergency and establishing a commission to eliminate both.

Organisers say they planned the events on Valentine's Day to draw attention to "the dark realities" of gender-based violence and women being killed by those they love.

"The tragic toll of women killed by their partners or family members [are] turned into sensationalised media headlines," a statement from the movement reads.

According to End Femicide Kenya, responses to these murders by authorities and politicians "focus [on] victim blaming" and are "filled with misinformed advice urging women to be careful not to meet with strangers".

Figures from the Africa Data Hub reveal that husbands and boyfriends – not strangers – are the perpetrators of two-thirds of murders of women in Kenya.

"It leaves many of us asking, 'Where do we go when home is where we … could be killed?'" the End Femicide Kenya Movement statement reads.

The vigils follow nationwide marches in January in which 20,000 Kenyans took part to demand government action on preventing and prosecuting cases of sexual and gender-based violence and femicide, which they say are often neglected. Advocates continue to raise awareness and lobby for legislative change and in light of what they say are challenges in navigating the criminal justice system.

A tedious process According to Njeri Migwi, executive director of Usikimye, an organisation that rescues survivors of gender-based violence, they often cannot access justice because of various barriers, including lack of awareness of their rights. Survivors also face frequent refusal of police officers to investigate intimate partner violence, which "they consider to be a nuisance", she tells Al Jazeera.

For individuals living in poverty, pursuing justice can be costly too, Migwi explains. These costs include taking public transportation, obtaining medical paperwork and potentially paying bribes to obtain a police report (about 200 shillings, or $1.25).

As part of filing a police report, survivors of sexual assault must obtain a physical examination from a doctor and a form confirming they have been assaulted. This form costs either 1,500 or 2,000 shillings ($9.80 or $13) to obtain, depending on the survivor's location. According to Usikimye, many survivors are unable to afford this fee and thus cannot document their cases.

These costs worsen an already cumbersome process that requires survivors to go back and forth multiple times between a police station and approved gender-based violence clinics or hospitals to fill out paperwork before police may open a file to begin an investigation.

"The process is very tedious … especially for people in low-income areas and informal settlements. Most people don't know what justice looks like," Migwi says.

The first step, however, requires police cooperation, according to Tracey Lichuma, legal counsel at the Federation of Women Lawyers in Kenya, which provides legal aid services to women and trains authorities on how to respond appropriately to gender-based violence.

"I ask [clients] if they reported to police, and they say, 'I went to the police, and they refused to give me a form or [case] number.' Without a police abstract, there is nothing that can be done, even if we [lawyers] want to move heaven and hell," Lichuma tells Al Jazeera.

Her clients report that police often invalidate and dissuade them from filing reports in cases of sexual and gender-based violence. "You're pregnant now. How will you expect this man [the accused] to support your child if he's in jail?" an officer may ask.

A police spokesperson did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Once survivors obtain a police report, they must navigate Kenya's criminal justice system, which, according to Lichuma, is underresourced, resulting in backlogs. During this time, she says, survivors lose hope and, together with witnesses, are routinely intimidated, blamed and shamed by the accused and other community members, so the survivors refuse to testify in court or drop the charges.

In 2023, Kenya commissioned 12 sexual and gender-based violence courthouses, which exclusively deal with these criminal cases. While this move has been widely hailed, activists like Migwi say the courts are already overwhelmed and they are not gender-sensitive and trauma-informed, which can harm survivors.

A representative for the newly commissioned courthouses was unavailable for comment. However, their website states that judicial officers at the court have been trained "on the intricacies related to SGBV [sexual and gender-based violence], including survivors' needs and are equipped to handle the complexities of such cases with utmost sensitivity".

According to Lichuma, many survivors are unaware of reporting requirements, such as needing to be medically examined immediately following an assault and proving their case "beyond a reasonable doubt". Additionally, numerous survivors say perpetrators bribe their way out of criminal charges.

"There are those who get headway with the justice system, and there are those who are failed," Lichuma says.

'We know the system' There are multiple examples of a pattern of neglect and denial of justice to victims and survivors of sexual and gender-based violence, activists and analysts say.

In 2013, a 16-year-old girl walking home from her grandfather's funeral was gang-raped by six men, severely beaten and left for dead after being thrown into a 3.5-metre (12ft) latrine.

The rapists were ordered to mow a lawn for a few weeks, triggering widespread outrage, protests and international condemnation, which eventually led to 15-year prison sentences for three of the men. However, the verdict and sentences were both successfully appealed, and the men did not serve prison time.

Connie Muuru has little trust in authorities after spending years seeking justice for the 2016 murder of her 29-year-old daughter, Julie Sharon Muthoni.

According to Muura and numerous media reports, Muthoni was taken to the hospital as she was on the brink of death by her boyfriend, who had allegedly beaten her beyond recognition. Muura rushed to the hospital, but when she arrived, her daughter was already in the mortuary.

Since then, Muura has sought justice, following up with police relentlessly after officers told her the boyfriend had fled the country.

"I suspected that the police perhaps helped him escape," she says. "He didn't have time to reach that place [Uganda, where authorities claim he is] because I reported it within hours."

Battling severe depression, Muura prioritised her health and stopped following up with the police. She heard about cases in which survivors of gender-based violence or their family members die by suicide due to hopelessness. In response, she started a support group of 10 other women, all mothers of murdered children.

"We know the system," Muura says. "We see that police always ignore cases when it comes to women and girls abuse and murders."

Famous women are also part of the saddening statistics. When world-renowned Olympic runner Agnes Tirop was stabbed and beaten to death in 2021, her partner was the only suspect. While awaiting trial after two years in prison, he was released on bail in late 2023 due to good behaviour.

With cases such as these and on the heels of marches, memorials, and media attention surrounding femicide, advocates are hoping to leverage momentum to enact change.

Migwi is one of them. She says Usikimye is currently seeking a lawmaker willing to introduce a bill that, according to the movement, would help tackle the "institutional tolerance that is allowing femicide to take root".

[**back to contents**]

Rwanda genocide suspect Kayishema due back in Cape Town court (Eyewitness News)

By Ntuthuzelo Nene
February 16, 2024

> **Rwandan genocide suspect Fulgence Kayishema is expected to hear whether his case will be moved from the Cape Town Magistrates Court to a higher court on Friday.**

During his last court appearance in December, the case was postponed to 16 February to determine which court the matter will be heard in.

Kayishema is facing 56 charges, all related to immigration-related offences.

He was allegedly living in South Africa under a false name for years before he was tracked down and arrested in Paarl in May last year.

During the 62-year-old Rwandan national's last appearance, the State had told the court that all its investigations were completed and ready to proceed with the case.

Kayishema, who is believed to be the most wanted remaining fugitives of the Rwandan genocide in 1994, is also facing an extradition case at the Western Cape High Court.

Authorities there are seeking to transfer him to a UN court in Arusha, Tanzania, to answer for his alleged involvement in the genocide.

The former police officer is accused of ordering the killing of 2,000 Tutsi people hiding inside a church and has been on the run for more than two decades.

Rwanda rejects US calls for withdrawal of missiles and troops from eastern Congo (Washington Post)

By Rodney Muhumuza
February 19, 2024

> **Authorities in Rwanda on Monday rejected U.S. calls for the withdrawal of troops and missile systems from eastern Congo, saying they are defending Rwandan territory as Congo carries out a "dramatic military build-up" near the border.**

Rwanda's Foreign Ministry in a statement spoke of threats to Rwandan national security stemming from the presence in Congo of an armed group whose members include alleged perpetrators of the 1994 genocide.

The rebel group, known by its initials FDLR, "is fully integrated into" the Congolese army, the statement said.

Although Rwanda has long cited a threat posed by FLDR, authorities there had never admitted to a military presence in eastern Congo, whose authorities accuse the tiny central African country of actively supporting the violent armed group known as M23.

The U.S. State Department in a statement Saturday criticized the worsening violence caused by M23, describing it as a "Rwanda-backed" armed group. That statement also urged Rwanda "to immediately withdraw all Rwanda Defense Force personnel from the (Congo) and remove its surface-to-air missile systems."

The U.S. statement represented "an abrupt shift in policy, or simply a lack of internal coordination," causing Rwanda to "question the ability of the United States to serve as a credible mediator" in Africa's Great Lakes region, the Rwandan Foreign Ministry said.

U.N. experts previously said they had "solid evidence" that members of Rwanda's armed forces were conducting operations there in support of M23.

M23's rebellion has caused the displacement of hundreds of thousands of people in Congo's North Kivu's province in recent years.

Fighting near Goma, the region's largest city, has intensified in recent days as the rebels threatened to take over the metropolis. Residents of the nearby town of Sake have been fleeing fierce fighting between Congolese government troops and the group.

Many M23 fighters, including Congolese Tutsis, were once members of Congo's army. M23 is one of more than 100 armed groups active in eastern Congo, seeking a share of the region's gold and other resources as they carry out mass killings.

The rebel group rose to prominence just over a decade ago when its fighters seized Goma, which borders Rwanda. It derives its name from a March 23, 2009, peace deal it accuses the Congo government of not implementing. After being largely dormant for a decade, M23 resurfaced in late 2021 and has since captured wide parts of eastern Congo.

Eastern Congo Residents Scramble for Food and Safety as Conflict Intensifies (US News)

By Djaffar Al Katanty
February 19, 2024

> **An intensifying conflict between Democratic Republic of Congo's (DRC) army and the Tutsi-led M23 rebels, allegedly backed by Rwanda, has disrupted food supplies to the eastern city of Goma, affecting over two million residents and displaced individuals.**

Clashes have escalated since the start of the year in towns and villages around the provincial capital as rebels seized territory, forcing thousands to seek refuge in the city.

The use of heavy artillery and shelling has killed dozens, and hospitals in Goma have struggled to cope with the influx of injured civilians.

The United Nations and other aid agencies have warned that the fighting risks worsening the humanitarian crisis in the eastern Congo region, where more than 5 million people have been displaced in the four provinces of the region due to conflicts.

The government of Congo, United Nations officials and Western powers have accused Rwanda of supporting the resurgent rebels who claim to defend ethnic Tutsi interests against Hutu militias whose leaders participated in the 1994 Rwandan genocide of more than 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus.

Rwanda has refuted the claims.

The U.S. urged Rwanda on Saturday to immediately withdraw all of its military personnel from Congo and remove surface-to-air missile systems, saying these threatened the lives of civilians, U.N. and other regional peacekeepers, humanitarian workers, and commercial flights in eastern Congo.

With the rebels advancing towards the town of Sake, approximately 25 km (15.5 miles) west of Goma, the city now relies on scant food supplies brought in by canoes from villages around Lake Kivu.

The Kituku market, on the lake's banks, has become a critical source of food for Goma.

CONCERN OVER FOOD SHORTAGES Esperance Nyota, a banana seller, warned of an impending famine if the conflict persists and the routes supplying Goma from surrounding farmlands remain cut off.

"The entire city of Goma depends on this small market for supplies of cassava, corn, and bananas," Nyota said.

Approximately 135,000 internally displaced people have fled Sake in the past week, according to the United Nations refugee agency. They join the hundreds of thousands already displaced around Goma since 2022 due to the ongoing conflict.

The UN agency has warned that the conflict, including indiscriminate bombing, risks exacerbating the strain on limited resources to cater for more than 800,000 internally displaced people, and 2.5 million already displaced in the North Kivu province.

The Norwegian Refugee Council said on Thursday that the advance of the armed groups towards Sake, a crucial link to Goma, posed an imminent threat to the entire aid system in eastern Congo, with potentially devastating consequences for the civilian population.

The Kyeshero hospital in Goma, which provides free treatment to conflict victims, has seen an influx of patients injured by gunfire and bombings, doctors said.

Kasalemba Akilimali, a displaced 20-year-old, was injured on his left leg by bomb shrapnel while fleeing his village. He said seven people were killed on the spot and many others injured when the bomb hit his group.

In the same ward on the bed next to Akilimali, medical staff helped bandaged and bruised Chance Mwishuko, a 38-year-old motor-bike taxi driver, to sit up.

Chance said he was injured when shelling from rebel-held positions hit a residential area in Sake.

"I am here because from their high positions in the mountains, the M23 had dropped bombs on the civilian population. Many of us were injured," he said.

[**back to contents**]

Somalia

[**back to contents**]

Ethiopia

US calls for investigation into alleged civilian killings in Ethiopia's Amhara region (Africa News)

February 9, 2024

> **The U.S. is calling for an investigation into an alleged massacre of civilians in Ethiopia's Amhara region, where a local rights group says more than 80 people were killed last week following clashes between soldiers and armed groups.**

The U.S. ambassador to Ethiopia, Ervin Massinga, said Friday that the "U.S. government is deeply concerned" by the reports from the town of Merawi and called for "unfettered access by independent human rights monitors as well as an impartial investigation to ensure the perpetrators are brought to justice."

Massinga said in a statement that the reported killings of civilians in Merawi followed "disturbing reports of other violations" in Amhara and elsewhere in Ethiopia, which is gripped by several internal conflicts.

A rebellion broke out in Amhara last April when the government moved to dissolve regional forces and absorb them into the federal army. A militia group known as the Fano launched a surprise assault in August in which they captured towns across Amhara over several days before retreating to the countryside.

Rights monitors have documented a range of human rights abuses by government forces during the conflict, including alleged extra-judicial killings.

On Tuesday, the Ethiopia Human Rights Council said it had received information "showing that massive human rights violations were committed" during fighting in Merawi on Jan. 29. It said more than 80 civilians were killed, mostly men.

The rights group said the killings "were conducted by moving from house to house" during searches. However, it stopped short of laying blame for the shootings, saying it was unable to visit the site, and called for a further investigation.

Until recently, the Fano were allied with the federal military in the war against the Tigray People's Liberation Front in the neighbouring region of Tigray, but the relationship was always uneasy. The two sides began fighting even before the Tigray conflict ended in November 2022 with a peace deal.

Last week, Ethiopia's parliament voted to extend a state of emergency in the Amhara region in an attempt to quash the Fano rebellion.

Dozens of civilians killed by Ethiopian state troops in Amhara region, say reports (The Guardian)

February 12, 2024

> **Ethiopian government troops went door-to-door killing dozens of civilians last month in a town in the country's Amhara region, according to residents, who said the bloodshed took place after clashes with local militia.**

The killings in Merawi appear to be one of the deadliest episodes in Amhara since a rebellion by Fano, an armed Amhara group, erupted last year over a disputed plan to disarm regional forces.

The Fano fought alongside Ethiopia's federal military in the two-year civil war against the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), which ended in November 2022. However, the government came to see it and other regional forces as a threat to its authority.

Ethiopia's government bans journalists from travelling to the increasingly lawless Amhara region and has cut its internet. The Guardian spoke to people in Merawi by phone. Everyone interviewed spoke on condition of anonymity, for fear of retribution.

The bloodshed started on 29 January, after several hours of fighting between federal forces and Fano militiamen, witnesses said. When the militia retreated, soldiers went into houses targeting civilians, accusing them of being fighters, they said.

One witness said he spent that day cowering at home as "the constant sound" of gunfire rang through the town. He added that artillery hit civilian areas.

The next day he went outside and saw "at least 34 bodies" in the street, which were collected by townspeople. Some had gunshot wounds to the head with "their faces completely blown out", he said.

Another witness, an Orthodox priest who arrived in Merawi on 30 January, said he saw "around 50 bodies lying on the main road" of the city. Many victims "seem to have been killed execution-style, with a bullet wound to their heads", the priest said.

The priest's brother was killed during the violence, shot several times on his doorstep by soldiers who stole money and his phone, the priest said.

A third resident said he knew of at least 45 people who were killed, including his brother, who he discovered "with bullets lodged in his head". He said the violence happened over two days, with soldiers "barging into homes [and] smashing doors".

The Ethiopian Human Rights Council, the country's oldest civil society group, put the total death toll at more than 80 civilians. It released a statement on Tuesday calling for further investigations. It did not say who it believed carried out the killings, but called on the government to "hold the responsible parties legally accountable".

The US ambassador to Ethiopia, Ervin Massinga, called for a full investigation, saying the US government was deeply concerned about the reports.

On Friday, Ethiopia's parliament extended a state of emergency introduced in August to quell the unrest. Daniel Bekele, head of the country's state-appointed human rights body, said he was gravely concerned by the extension of the emergency, citing mounting civilian casualties, pre-trial detentions and humanitarian needs.

Daniel told the Guardian that his organisation had not yet completed its investigation into the Merawi killings, and that it had documented a range of abuses in Amhara since August. These included the shelling of civilian areas, ethnically motivated arrests and killings. In November, Human Rights Watch said: "The authorities have resorted to past repressive tactics to limit access to real-time information and independent scrutiny."

On Tuesday, the prime minister, Abiy Ahmed, called on "extremists operating in the Amhara region" and rebels in the neighbouring state of Oromia "to lay down their arms and take part in peaceful political struggle". Thousands of people arrested under the state of emergency have been re-educated and released, he added.

Abiy's government announced a plan to integrate regional forces into the federal military and police in April 2023, sparking clashes. In August, Fano militiamen, who enjoy widespread support in Amhara, briefly took over several towns and airports in the region, amid fierce street battles and mass protests.

Since then, they have retreated into the mountainous countryside, waging a guerrilla campaign of hit-and-run attacks and regularly raiding police stations in towns for weapons. The US and the UK advise against all travel to Amhara, which is home to several of Ethiopia's best known tourist attractions.

Yet the government is determined to press on with plans to hold a high-level peace and security summit, involving heads of state, in the regional capital of Bahir Dar in April, despite objections by some of those invited, according to a western diplomat. Bahir Dar is just 18 miles north of Merawi. The summit was supposed to take place in October, but was postponed by the organisers who cited unforeseen circumstances.

Aid workers say the insecurity is impeding the delivery of humanitarian food in the region, where the federal ombudsman says dozens of people have starved to death recently amid a heavy drought and the after-effects of the Tigray war, which spilled into Amhara. Hundreds more starvation deaths have been reported in Tigray.

Regional Amhara forces including the Fano are themselves accused of waging a bloody ethnic cleansing campaign since November 2020 in western Tigray, an area they claim as their own and moved to annex during the war against the TPLF.

The Ethiopian government could not be reached for comment.

[**back to contents**]

EUROPE

International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY)

Coric completes his Sentence on conditional early release under the Supervision of the Mechanism (Sarajevo Times)

February 16, 2024

> **Valentin Ćorić, one of the six convicted persons in the Prosecutor v. Prlić et al. case yesterday completed his 16-year sentence, handed down by a Trial Chamber of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) on 29 May 2013 and affirmed on appeal by the ICTY Appeals Chamber on 29 November 2017.**

Ćorić was granted conditional early release on 16 January 2019, pursuant to a Decision by the then-President of the Mechanism, after having served two-thirds of his sentence. His early release was subject to a number of conditions outlined in the Decision.

Between 1992 and 1994, Ćorić was the Chief of the Military Police Administration and Minister of Interior of the former wartime Croatian entity of Herceg-Bosna in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). He was convicted of war crimes and crimes against humanity committed on the territory of BiH under the control of the Bosnian Croat forces, including murder, persecution, deportation, rape, imprisonment, unlawful labor, and inhumane treatment.

With Ćorić no longer under Mechanism jurisdiction, the list of convicted persons by the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR), ICTY, or the Mechanism whose sentences are still being enforced currently stands at 49 individuals, with 42 persons serving their sentences across 12 enforcement States, four persons temporarily housed at the United Nations Detention Unit awaiting transfer to an enforcement State, and three persons having been granted conditional early release.

The Mechanism is responsible for carrying out a number of essential functions of the ICTR and the ICTY, which closed in 2015 and 2017, respectively. These include the supervision of enforcement of sentences, tracking and prosecution of remaining fugitives, protection of victims and witnesses, assistance to national jurisdictions, and preservation and management of the archives.

[**back to contents**]

Turkey

HRW: Turkey's deliberate targeting of civilian infrastructure in northeast Syria constitutes war crime (Medya News)

February 10, 2024

> **Turkish airstrikes targeting critical infrastructure in northeast Syria deliberately harms civilians and constitutes war crimes, Human Rights Watch (HRW) reported on Friday.**

The HRW detailed how Turkish forces have systematically attacked power stations, water facilities, medical centres and vital access roads in recent months. These actions constitute war crimes under international law, as they deliberately inflict harm on civilians and civilian objects, the HRW emphasised.

Over one million people lack electricity and more than two million struggle with limited access to safe water due to the strikes in northeast Syria, according to the HRW. Damaged hospitals face oxygen shortages, jeopardising healthcare for countless individuals. The attacks have also disrupted essential services like bakeries and water purification plants, raising concerns about waterborne diseases.

HRW noted the warnings of humanitarian organisations that the scale of the damage surpasses their capacity to respond effectively. HRW also noted that this crisis is unfolding amid the ongoing conflict in Gaza, urging the international community to address the dire situation in northeast Syria despite competing headlines.

Turkey has justified its actions by targeting the People's Protection Units (YPG), which it views as an extension of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). However, the HRW report emphasised the indiscriminate nature of the strikes and their devastating impact on civilians, raising serious concerns about Turkey's adherence to international law and its stated objectives.

The report called for immediate action to avert further catastrophe, saying:

— Turkey must cease targeting civilian infrastructure and uphold international humanitarian law. — Those responsible for violations must be held accountable. — The international community must step up its efforts to alleviate the suffering of millions of civilians caught in the crossfire. Two YPJ commanders killed in Turkish drone attack in Qamishlo (ANF News) February 12, 2024 https://anfenglish.com/news/two-ypj-commanders-killed-in-turkish-drone-attack-in-qamishlo-71742

The drone attack by the Turkish state on a facility of the Federation of the War-Disabled in Qamishlo on 11 February resulted in the death of two senior members of the Women's Defence Units (YPJ) as well as several injuries.

In a statement on Monday, the YPJ Command announced that the victims were Sorxwîn Rojhilat and Azadî Dêrik, who were among the commanders of the YPJ in North and East Syria. YPJ condemned their killing in harsh terms and vowed retaliation, expressing its condolences to the relatives of the martyrs, the peoples of North and East Syria and all revolutionary women and fighters.

According to the statement, Sorxwîn Rojhilat was one of more than 20,000 people wounded in the fight against ISIS in northern and eastern Syria. She was born in 1985 in Makû, a city in eastern Kurdistan (western Iran), and her family belongs to the Celalî tribe - a family confederation that, according to the YPJ, has always "rebelled under the banner of resistance against the occupying forces and has not wasted a thought on surrender". Sorxwîn Rojhilat was thus inherently in the tradition of women such as Shirin Elemhuli and Zeinab Jalalian. The latter has been imprisoned by the Iranian regime for 16 years and is the only prisoner in the country with a life sentence. Elemhuli was an activist in the Kurdish women's movement when she was executed in 2010 after more than two years in prison.

Sorxwîn Rojhilat came to Rojava in 2014, when thousands of people from many different countries flocked to Kobanê to take part in the defence of the city besieged by ISIS. In the course of the offensive, she became part of the YPJ Command and played an important role in the Kobanê resistance. She was seriously injured in an attack by the jihadist militia and lost most of her sight. After a long period of recovery, she helped to set up structures for the war-disabled and was also a co-founder of the Federation of the War-Disabled. According to the YPJ, Sorxwîn Rojhilat did not limit her work to helping the war-disabled, but also devoted herself to solving social problems and was involved in projects to promote the equal participation and development of women and girls.

Azadî Dêrik was born in 1982 in Dêrika Hemko in Rojava. She grew up in a family close to the Kurdish liberation struggle and joined the YPJ with the emergence of the Rojava Revolution. "From the first moment of the revolution to the last moment of her life, Azadî Dêrik took the line of self-defence as the basis of the struggle to which she dedicated herself according to the principles of the revolutionary people's war. She was a fighter for freedom and a pioneer at command level. With her humble attitude and dedication to the revolution, she was seen by many as an example of the militancy of a free woman," said the YPJ.

YPJ stated that Azadî Dêrik worked at the centre for the war-disabled at her own request. She made sure that the war-disabled were provided with physiotherapy treatments, wheelchairs or prostheses and that people with amputations received sustainable help. "She improved the living conditions of her comrades and coordinated the public relations work of the federation, which she had co-founded. She was also responsible for coordinating international aid projects that benefit those wounded and disabled in the war in North and East Syria."

YPJ emphasized that attacks by the Turkish state such as the one on Sunday in Qamishlo serve to support ISIS. By bombing the facility, Turkey is guilty of another war crime, the association declared, and called on the international community to break its silence in the face of Ankara's "genocidally motivated crimes". "Sorxwîn Rojhilat and Azadî Dêrik carried out their resistance against ISIS terror not only for our peoples, but for all nations of the world, but first and foremost for all women. This is why our appeal is primarily directed at the women's liberation movements. They are called upon to take a clear political stance against the attacks of the Turkish state. We promise our people and all emancipated women revenge. The AKP/MHP fascism should know that the YPJ is a force of retaliation. We will keep the fire of freedom that our comrades Sorxwîn and Azadî have ignited with the slogan 'Jin, Jiyan, Azadî' burning until we have destroyed the hegemony of male domination everywhere. We reaffirm our solidarity with the martyrs and promise to realize their ideals."

Critics slam ICC prosecutor for meeting with Turkish FM accused of crimes against humanity (Turkish Minute)

February 21, 2024

> **The International Criminal Court's (ICC) prosecutor, Karim Khan, is under fire for meeting with Turkey's foreign minister, Hakan Fidan, on the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference this weekend.**

Fidan, the former head of Turkey's intelligence agency (MİT), is accused of involvement in crimes against humanity in a communication sent to the ICC.

The communication sent to the ICC by a law firm, an NGO and a European judges association in 2023 alleges widespread and systematic human rights abuses committed by the Turkish government against its opponents and seeks an ICC investigation into these alleged crimes.

It includes details of torture, enforced disappearances, arbitrary imprisonment and persecution, claiming these acts meet the ICC's definition of crimes against humanity.

The communication details abductions from several countries, school closures in 13 signatory states to the Rome Statute that recognize the ICC and discriminatory passport and ID practices in 29 states.

While Turkey is not an ICC member state, the communication cites a precedent where the court investigated alleged crimes committed by officials of a non-member state with implications for member states.

MİT was the organization behind most of the crimes against humanity alleged against the Turkish government in the communication to the ICC.

Fidan headed MİT between 2010 and 2023, until he was appointed foreign minister by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in June.

According to Turkey's state-run Anadolu news agency, Khan briefed Fidan on the ICC's ongoing investigation into alleged crimes committed by Israel in Gaza.

Meeting sparks indignation The Turkey Tribunal VZW, an NGO dedicated to investigating rights abuses in Turkey, which was one of the parties that sent the communication detailing Turkish officials' alleged crimes against humanity to the ICC, condemned Khan's meeting with Fidan on X.

The organization questioned why the prosecutor didn't urge Turkey to uphold European Court of Human Rights rulings that found systemic issues with Turkey's justice system.

Turkey Tribunal VZW is a Belgian-based NGO that set up a civil society-led tribunal to adjudicate recent human rights violations in Turkey including torture, abductions and the right to a fair trial. The tribunal convened in Geneva on September 21, 2021. After four days of hearing victims the panel of judges announced their verdict, saying that the torture and abductions perpetrated by Turkish state officials since July 2016 could amount to crimes against humanity in an application lodged with an appropriate international body.

Following up on that lead, Belgian-based law firm Van Steenbrugge Advocaten (VSA), acting in the name of 40 victims; MEDEL, an association of 18,000 judges and public prosecutors from 16 European countries; and Turkey Tribunal VZW sent a communication addressed to the Office of the Prosecutor of the ICC, claiming that crimes against humanity have been and are being committed in Turkey.

The communication alleges that Turkish officials have committed crimes of "torture," "enforced disappearances," "imprisonment in violation of fundamental rules of international law" and "persecution," which are crimes against humanity as defined by Article 7 of the Rome Statute.

Saying that between 2015 and 2021 the Turkish government launched investigations into 2,217,000 persons on accusations of terrorism and that courts convicted 374,000 persons based on those investigations, the communication claims the imprisonments these convictions led to constitute the crime of imprisonment in violation of fundamental rules of international law.

According to MEDEL, VSA and the Turkey Tribunal's communication to the ICC, the mass firing of civil servants and private sector staff after a coup attempt in 2016, the withdrawal of passports and consular services from certain Turkish nationals overseas and the closure of schools outside Turkey with ties to the Gülen movement constitute the crime of "persecution."

At its peak the Gülen movement, a worldwide civic initiative inspired by the ideas of Turkish cleric Fethullah Gülen, operated schools in 160 countries, from Afghanistan to the United States. Since a coup attempt in 2016, Turkey has pressured allies to shut down Gülen-run institutions.

President Erdoğan's Justice and Development Party (AKP) government launched a war against the Gülen movement following corruption investigations in late 2013 that implicated then-prime minister Erdoğan's close circle.

The war against the movement increased after an attempted coup in Turkey on July 15, 2016, because Erdoğan and his AKP government accused the movement of masterminding the abortive putsch and initiated a widespread purge aimed at cleansing sympathizers of the movement from within state institutions, dehumanizing its popular figures and putting them in custody.

A former Turkish judge, who spoke on condition of anonymity, shared with Turkish Minute the letter he had sent to the prosecutor to protest.

"The Turkey Tribunal has submitted a detailed criminal complaint to your office, outlining these grave abuses and identifying likely perpetrators within the Turkish government. Disconcertingly, despite the overwhelming evidence and public nature of these crimes, the ICC has made no visible progress in initiating an investigation," the judge wrote to Khan.

"Furthermore, your recent discussions and shared photographs with Hakan Fidan, former head of MİT and a potential key figure in the alleged abductions, have caused profound alarm among victims of the Turkish government's oppression. Trust in the ICC's commitment to justice is diminishing," he said.

"I implore you to take swift and decisive action. The credibility of the ICC is at stake. Victims of this far-reaching persecution deserve justice, and the world needs a clear message that human rights violations will not be tolerated."

Turkey sentences 15 Kurdish politicians to more than 100 years in prison (Stockholm Center for Freedom)

February 21, 2024

> **A court in southeast Turkey has announced its verdict in the trial of 15 local Kurdish politicians accused of terrorism, handing down sentences totaling close to 104 years in prison in total, the Evrensel newspaper reported on Wednesday.**

The defendants, including former member of parliament Gülser Yıldırım, received prison sentences ranging from six years, three months to seven years, six months on charges of membership in a terrorist organization.

They were put on trial over their connection to parallel city councils organized by the Democratic Regions' Party (DBP) in 2014, which the court considered as evidence of active involvement in a terrorist organization.

It is common for Kurdish politicians in Turkey to face prosecution on terrorism-related charges due to their alleged affiliation with or propaganda on behalf of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK).

An armed separatist group waging war against the Turkish state for decades, the PKK has been designated as a terrorist organization by Turkey and much of the international community.

However, the trials of Kurdish politicians are criticized by human rights groups for being politically motivated as they are typically based on speeches, commentary and attendance at peaceful gatherings as opposed to active involvement in armed violence.

Turkey's anti-terror laws are often criticized for being overly broad and vague, allowing too much room for interpretation.

The country's justice system is also described as operating under political control, particularly since the mass disbarment of more than 4,000 judges and prosecutors as part of the government's response to a failed military coup in July 2016.

In a development that confirmed the erosion of the Turkish judiciary, Turkey was ranked 117th among 142 countries in the 2023 Rule of Law Index published by the World Justice Project (WJP) in late October, dropping one place in comparison to the previous year.

After the abortive putsch, the government also increased its crackdown on Kurdish politicians, unleashed following the breakdown in mid-2015 of peace talks between Ankara and the PKK.

Since then, scores of elected Kurdish mayors were summarily ousted by the Interior Ministry and hundreds of politicians were put on trial on terrorism charges, most notably Selahattin Demirtaş and Figen Yüksekdağ, who have been behind bars since late 2016.

[**back to contents**]

Kosovo Specialist Chambers

Kosovo Begins Two War Crime Trials of Serbs in Absentia (Balkan Insight)

By Xhorxhina Bami & Aulona Alaj
February 21, 2024

> **Milovan Jovanovic and Dejan Racic went on trial in their absence on war crimes charges in two separate trials that opened at Pristina Basic Court on Wednesday.**

According to the indictment, read in court by special prosecutor Ilir Morina, Jovanovic sexually assaulted against an ethnic Albanian woman during the Kosovo war, using violence and other inhumane methods.

The indictment alleges that Jovanovic, in collaboration with other unidentified members of the Serbian police, paramilitary and military forces, participated in a systematic attack on the Albanian civilian population.

As Jovanovic was indicted in absentia and will not be present in court, he will be represented a lawyer appointed by the Kosovo Bar Association, Ljubinko Todorovic.

Racic, a member of the Serbia's military reserves, is accused of participating in the sexual assault of an ethnic Albanian woman, using violence and other inhumane methods.

The indictment alleges that the crime was committed during a systematic attack by Serbian military, paramilitary and police forces on the civilian population across the entire territory of Kosovo.

Racic will be represented by Kosovo Bar Association lawyer Osman Mehmeti.

Wednesday's hearing was a closed session on the request of special prosecutor Morina.

In 2019, in an attempt to boost prosecutions of war crimes, the Kosovo Assembly adopted an amendment to the Criminal Procedure Code to allow trials in absentia in cases involving offences against international humanitarian law and international criminal law that were committed between January 1990 and June 1999.

In December last year, Kosovo's special prosecutor Drita Hajdari said that since 2018, the prosecution filed 33 war crimes indictments, charging a total of 89 suspects.

[**back to contents**]

Azerbaijan

Military escalation on the border of Armenia and Azerbaijan raising concerns (SBS News)

By Sydney Lang
February 14, 2024

> **A military flare-up along the border of Armenia and Azerbaijan is stoking tensions between the long-time rivals, with concerns the escalation is threatening to thwart peace talks.**

Four Armenian soldiers were killed on Tuesday ((13/02)) and one was left injured in a border skirmish that both countries accuse each other of provoking.

This is the first fatal incident since the two countries commenced peace talks last year, working to bring an end to a thirty year conflict.

A member of Armenia's National Assembly, Hayk Mamijanyan, says the attacks were inside Armenian territory.

"The Armenian soldiers, who were killed by Azerbaijani armed forces, were (killed) from the Azerbaijani military position that is located inside of Armenia. These are the territories that were invaded by the armed forces of Azerbaijan, this is a part of Azerbaijan's continued systemic policy. Azerbaijan has always been creating artificial grounds for aggression and for attacks, for crimes against Armenia and Armenian people."

Azerbaijan's Foreign Ministry Head of Press, Aykhan Hajizada says Azerbaijan was launching a 'revenge' operation against Armenia, accusing them of opening fire along a militarised border further north.

"As you know, Armenian armed forces yesterday took military provocations against Azerbaijan armed forces. That resulted in injury of one Azerbaijan serviceman. Today Armenian foreign ministry claimed that the measures taken by Azerbaijan as retaliatory measures against armed forces of Armenia as a results of yesterday's attacks is an intended escalation, which is not true. Azerbaijan took these measures as a result of a provocation by the Armenian side. Azerbaijan is committed to the peace process."

It's the biggest flare up of tensions between the neighbouring countries since the exodus of Nagorno-Karabakh [[nuh-gawr-noh-kahr-uh-bahk]] in September 2023.

The exodus saw Azerbaijani forces blockade the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh, which, while internationally recognised as Azerbaijan, was home to over 120,000 Armenians who won independence after fighting a lengthy war during the collapse of the Soviet Union.

After nine months of military blockades, fears of starvation and ethnic cleansing drove out 99 percent of the Armenian population in Nagorno-Karabakh [[nuh-gawr-noh-kahr-uh-bahk]], prompting a refugee crisis in Armenia.

Mr Mamijanyan says Azerbaijan's attempts at resolution are not genuine.

"All the intentions, so-called intentions for peace that Azerbaijan is expressing are fake and these are to mislead the international community. In reality Azerbaijan continues its hostile and Armenophobic policies having the target to destroy Armenians and Armenia in its entirety."

Meanwhile, during the fifth meeting of the Armenia-E-U Partnership Council, E-U High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borrell, condemned the aggression from both sides.

"Armenian shooting of Azerbaijan soldier yesterday was deplorable, but Azerbaijan's response seems to be disproportionate, ignoring the announcement by the Armenian ministry of defence that this incident will be fully investigated."

The attacks come less than a week after Armenia was officially welcomed as the 124th State Party to the International Criminal Court's Rome Statute, a move its traditional ally Russia says is a snub to Moscow.

Armenia's Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan told reporters from the Public Radio of Armenia that the country can no longer rely on Russia as its main defence partner following Moscow's failure to defend Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh.

He says Armenia's ratification of the Rome Statute is not aimed at Moscow but is instead addressing alleged war crimes committed by neighbour Azerbaijan.

Armenia's Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan spoke about the concerns at a ceremony welcoming Armenia's ratification of the Rome Statute.

"Unfortunately, in our region, we were confronted not only by complete unwillingness to resolve the issue by peaceful means, but also with a clear intent to proliferate war, hatred and terror, continued aggressions against the Republic of Armenia and occupation of our sovereign territories. Heinous atrocity crimes perpetrated against Armenians."

He says that by ratifying the Rome Statute, Armenia hopes to strengthen the rule of international law.

"Ethnic cleansing of Nagorno-Karabakh as a result of which over 100,000 Armenians had to escape their homes to find shelter in Armenia had devastating humanitarian consequences and continue to pose imminent risks for our region. In this context, we are convinced that the Rome Statute, among other mechanisms, has a real potential to prevent any further escalation and atrocities, becoming a milestone towards stability and sustainable peace in our region."

Both Russia and Iran are now calling on Azerbaijan and Armenia to show restraint moving forward.

Iran and Russia both share interests in the southern Caucasus [core-cay-suss]] and have been previously involved in attempted mediation between the neighbours.

Spokesperson for the U.S. State Department, Matthew Miller, says the recent clash undermines negotiations for peace.

"So we are concerned by the reports of deadly military-to-military clashes which resulted in several casualties. We offer our heartfelt condolences to the families of those killed and injured. The use of force undermines negotiations. The only way to a sustainable peace is at the negotiating table. Any ceasefire violations should be investigated and properly addressed. As the Secretary continually emphasises, the United States is committed to Armenia-Azerbaijan peace negotiations."

Armenia and Azerbaijan have been left largely on their own to conduct peace negotiations, as the international community holds focus on Gaza and Ukraine.

Fears remain among many Armenians, who say without mediators, they are at a disadvantage during peace negotiations, and that Azerbaijan intends on claiming more territory along its southern border with Iran.

Azerbaijani officials argue that outside mediators like the European Union and the United States cannot effectively mediate the issue, as they are not neutral.

Armenia prepares to sue Azerbaijan for war crimes at ICC (Arka News Agency) February 14, 2024

> **Armenia is carrying out preparatory work for filing lawsuits against Azerbaijan at the International Criminal Court (ICC), Armenian Representative for International and Legal Affairs Yeghishe Kirakosyan told Armenian Public Television on Tuesday.**

Kirakosyan explained that the lawsuits refer, in particular, to the forced displacement of Armenians from Nagorno-Karabakh, as well as the war crimes committed by Azerbaijan in September 2022.

At the same time, he refrained from presenting details and timelines of the first lawsuits. "There is quite a large body of evidence that is being evaluated," he added.

On October 3, 2023, the National Assembly of Armenia voted to ratify the Rome Statute of the ICC. On February 1, 2024, Armenia officially became a full member of the ICC.

Russia releases Azerbaijani national wanted by Armenia after brief arrest (ArmenPress) February 21, 2024

> **Russian authorities have released Azerbaijani national Kamil Zeynalli after briefly detaining him at a Moscow airport pursuant to an Armenian international arrest warrant, his lawyer has said.**

Kamil Zeynalli's lawyer Alekber Garayev told Azeri media that his client is wanted by Armenia under Article 135 (crimes against humanity), 147 (mercenaryism) and 149 (aggression) of the Armenian Criminal Code. Other media reports said Zeynalli is also wanted under Article 140 (war crimes committed through prohibited methods of warfare). The general prosecution of Armenia, however, told Armenpress that they don't have any official information about Zeynalli's arrest in Moscow. Zeynalli is on Armenia's interstate wanted list, Ministry of Internal Affairs spokesperson Narek Sargsyan told Armenpress. He did not elaborate. "The mentioned individual is on the interstate wanted list on a murder charge," he said.

[**back to contents**]

Russia

Bulgaria is going to prosecute Russian war crimes in Ukraine (Yahoo News) By Ukrainska Pravda
February 8, 2024

> **The Bulgarian authorities are preparing amendments to the country's criminal code that will allow the Kremlin regime to be prosecuted for its war of aggression against Ukraine.**

Source: Bulgarian Justice Minister Atanas Slavov in an interview with Euractiv, reported by European Pravda

Quote: "Our goal is for Bulgaria to be able to launch criminal proceedings, exercising universal jurisdiction, for the committed war crimes and crimes against peace and humanity in Ukraine. This will be an act of support for international efforts to investigate Russian aggression in Ukraine."

Details: According to documents seen by Euractiv and discussed at Coreper II meetings last year, Bulgaria is among the minority of EU countries that have not initiated criminal proceedings for war crimes in Ukraine or for evading EU sanctions against Russia.

"It is crucial that Bulgaria can initiate proceedings for war crimes in Ukraine, exercising universal jurisdiction, given the large number of Ukrainian refugees in the country. They can testify," Slavov said.

There are almost 100,000 Ukrainian refugees in Bulgaria, many of them from areas where combat actions are taking place, such as Kherson Oblast. The Bulgarian minority in Ukraine numbers 200,000 people, many of whom may also be able to contribute to war crimes investigations following the outbreak of Russian aggression.

Once the data is collected from all European countries, this evidence could be invaluable in the establishment of a future war crimes tribunal in Ukraine.

Quote: "I would be very happy if such a step would help the future international investigation by an international tribunal, and Bulgaria would actively participate in the efforts of the international community."

More details: Many European countries have already launched investigations, some of which are questioning hundreds of thousands of people, with the Baltic republics being the most active, according to documents seen by Euractiv.

Slavov said that the future inclusion of the offence of "aggression" in Bulgaria's Criminal Code "will allow the prosecution of the military-political leadership that issued the orders for the relevant military actions in Ukraine."

"Because the evidence of war crimes on the ground often reaches a medium level. While the crime of 'aggression' is for the high management level. At the European level, there is the International Centre for the Prosecution of the Crime of Aggression against Ukraine. Our idea is for Bulgaria to actively contribute to European efforts because we have committed to this."

Background:

It was revealed earlier that Bulgaria had searched the premises of the General Directorate Combating Organized Crime of the Ministry of the Interior in connection with suspicions of spying for Russia.

The Bulgarian media reported that the suspect supposedly passed classified information to a former diplomat of the Russian Embassy in Sofia, who was recently declared persona non grata.

In the second half of 2023, Bulgaria ordered that Archimandrite Vassian, a representative of the Russian Orthodox Church, and Alexander Gatsak, a propagandist from the official Rossiyskaya Gazeta newspaper, leave the country.

More than 100 journalists victims of Russian crimes during two years of covering war in Ukraine (Reporters Without Borders) February 12, 2024

> **Thousands of Ukrainian and accredited international journalists have continued to cover the war since February 2022 despite a degraded security environment throughout the country, as a result of targeted fire or indiscriminate bombardment by the Russian armed forces. According to RSF, more than a hundred journalists have been victims of violence in the past two years. Among them, 11 reporters have lost their lives during their work. Others have been the victims of bombardments on their editorial offices, and some have been injured or have disappeared. In the Ukrainian territories occupied by Russia, local independent voices have been reduced to nothing, forced to cease all activity.**

11 journalists killed

Two journalists have been killed while reporting near the front line in Ukraine in 2023, following the nine killed the year before. Arman Soldin, a journalist with French and Bosnian dual nationality working for Agence France-Presse, was killed in a hail of rocket-fire on 9 May while covering the situation near Bakhmut, in the Donetsk region. Two weeks before that, Ukrainian journalist and fixer Bohdan Bitik was fatally shot by a Russian sniper while accompanying an Italian reporter for the newspaper La Repubblica near the southeastern city of Kherson.

At least 35 journalists wounded

Since February 2022, 35 Ukrainian and foreign reporters have been wounded while reporting in the field, especially near the front. They were either the targets of deliberate gunfire or were the victims of attacks on TV towers, media outlets #8212 recently in Kyiv and Kharkiv #8212 or places frequented by civilians and journalists, including two hotels in Kharkiv in January.

At least 12 journalists detained

In the occupied Ukrainian territories, Russia hunts down journalists who refuse to collaborate. In two years, at least 12 local journalists have been detained by the Russian occupying forces, and some have been sentenced. The persecution of independent journalists has also intensified in Crimea. Iryna Danilovych, a Crimea-based freelance journalist reporting for several local media outlets, was abducted by Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB) in April 2022 and was transferred to a prison in Russia in July 2023. In the occupied city of Melitopol, in southeastern Ukraine, several journalists working for a Telegram news channel operated by the Ukrainian news site RIA-Melitopol were arrested in August 2023 for "spying" and have been imprisoned ever since.

2 journalists currently missing

Two Ukrainian journalists are currently missing in Russia. There has been no news of Victoria Roshchyna, a freelancer working for the Ukrainska Pravda news site, since 4 August 2023, when she was heading to the occupied territories via Russia. She was previously abducted and held by Russian forces for several days in March 2022 while reporting in the occupied city of Melitopol for the independent Ukrainian news site Hromadske. According to an RSF investigation, Dmytro Khyliuk, a journalist with the Ukrainian online news agency Unian is the victim of an enforced disappearance. RSF was able to prove that he was alive, that he had been arrested by Russian forces and detained in Russia.

RSF has filed 18 war crimes complaints

In two years, RSF has filed eight war crimes complaints simultaneously with the International Criminal Court (ICC) and the Ukrainian Prosecutor General, as well as two complaints with the French courts. As part of these complaints, RSF has documented more than 50 attacks on more than 100 journalists, who have been killed, injured, kidnapped, taken hostage, tortured or caught up in bombings.

233 media closed

As a result of the Russian occupation, the advertising market's collapse, a lack of personnel due to media personnel being mobilised, and the destruction of equipment and resources in bombardments, a total of 233 Ukrainian media outlets have had to close since 24 February 2022, according to the Institute of Mass Information (IMI), RSF's local partner. They include Sho, the national online literary magazine, which had to close for economic reasons.

Putin signs law to confiscate assets of those convicted of discrediting the Russian army (CTV News) February 14, 2024

> **Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a law Wednesday that will allow authorities to confiscate money, valuables and other assets from people convicted of spreading "deliberately false information" about the country's military.**

The bill sailed through the lower and upper houses of the Russian parliament, and was unanimously endorsed by the upper house last week.

The speaker of the lower house, Vyacheslav Volodin, said the measure includes harsher punishment for "traitors who sling mud at our country and our troops" and would "strip those scoundrels of honorary titles, confiscate their assets, money and other valuables."

Russian officials have used the existing law against "discrediting" the military that covers offenses such as "justifying terrorism" and spreading "fake news" about the armed forces to silence Putin's critics. Multiple activists, bloggers and ordinary Russians have received long prison terms.

The new confiscation law would also apply to those convicted of publicly inciting "extremist activities" and calling for actions harmful to state security or "discrediting" the armed forces. Discrediting the Russian military became a criminal offense under a law adopted as part of a sweeping government crackdown on dissent after Moscow sent troops into Ukraine in February 2022.

Russian state news agency Tass said that if someone is convicted under the new law, only money, assets and property "gained through criminal means" or used for activities against Russia's national security could be confiscated. Draconian Soviet-era legislation authorized the seizure of housing for a variety of criminal offenses.

Major Archbishop Shevchuk: War crimes in Ukraine must be condemned (Vatican News)
By Deborah Castellano Lubov
February 14, 2024

> **February 24 will mark the second anniversary of the war in Ukraine with Russia's full-scale invasion of its neighbour in 2022. The number of deaths continues to rise, as does the level of destruction in the conflict that actually goes back ten years, with Russia's annexation of Crimea.**

Pope Francis' appeals for the beleaguered nation are too many to count, and include his latest appeal at the Wednesday General Audience, where he called, once again, for an end to the suffering.

Reflecting on the current situation during a press conference organized by the Pontifical Foundation Aid to the Church in Need, Major Archbishop Sviatoslav Shevchuk, head of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church, lamented the tragedy that continues to harm his people and country.

The conference was organized to mark the 10th anniversary of the beginning of the armed conflict in Ukraine, which began with the invasion of Crimea and parts of Eastern Ukraine, on February 20, 2014, as well as two years of the full-scale invasion of 2022. The Foundation, which has dedicated its 2024 Lent Campaign to Ukraine, hosted the event to learn more about the situation Christians face in the country.

Suffering, deaths continue

In the almost two years since Russia's full-scale invasion, the number of military casualties has climbed to an estimated half a million, according to unofficial agency estimates.

Nearly 22,000 civilian casualties have been inflicted by fighting and air strikes, and some 17.6 million Ukrainians are in great need of humanitarian assistance.

Some 6.2 million people have fled Ukraine, and more than 5 million others are internally displaced, as bombardments continue every day.

Condemnation of war crimes

During the Conference, His Beatitude said "It is very important to condemn war crimes," as he recalled for instance the massacre in Bucha, warning that if they go unnoticed, war crimes will be replicated around the world.

This condemnation, the Major Archbishop insisted, means stating a firm no to war.

"People in Ukraine," the head of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church continued, "are being killed because they are Ukrainians."

His Beatitude Shevchuk decried in particular that children and families are dying and he recalled the more than 500 children who have died and the over 1,200 who have been injured since the start of the war. He also decried the fact that numerous Ukrainian children have been deported to Russia and the many families who have been separated.

He also discussed how in the most devastated areas of the nation, the presence of his Church, is prohibited, noting that in Eastern Ukraine, there are no priests and people cannot go into the churches, whose doors have been sealed shut.

Despite the immense suffering, he noted, that as a Church, "We are bringing hope to our people," as he expressed gratitude for the fact that through worldwide solidarity, "no one in Ukraine has died from humanitarian causes," such as from hunger or thirst.

'Too traumatized to speak'

Also speaking at the event was the Apostolic Nuncio to Ukraine, Archbishop Visvaldas Kulbokas, who pointed out that those who have visited Ukraine return home "unable to speak," because "they are so traumatized by what they have seen."

Archbishop Kulbokas also warned against the education crisis in the country, outlining that already, for four years, "in a great part of the country, between the pandemic at first, and then the full-scale invasion, "there are no schools in presence.'"

In addition, he highlighted the great work of humanitarian organizations, especially ACN, but lamented that smaller charitable entities "have had to give up" because they often ran out of funds, and had issues crossing borders or delivering supplies.

The Nuncio, in a special way, remembered the Ukrainian Greek Catholic priests who have been kept in captivity after the war that started ten years ago, saying "We are with them, and we start our day, praying for them."

Attacks on children and families

According to the UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine (HRMMU), which monitors and publicly reports on the human rights situation in the country, at least 641 civilians were killed or injured in Ukraine in January 2024, continuing a trend from December 2023 of increasing civilian casualties.

The UN statistics also show that civilian casualties in January were 37 per cent higher than in November 2023, mainly due to intensified attacks by Russian armed forces across the country with missiles and loitering munitions.

Given these attacks affecting areas far from the frontline, there was an increase in the number of children killed and injured.

Families too constitute a larger proportion of casualties far from the frontlines because many families with their children have been evacuated from the frontline communities.

The UN mission verified that 40 children were killed or injured in January, up from 18 in November.

Aid to the Church in Need's support to Ukraine

Two years after the full-scale invasion on 24 February 22, ACN has approved 630 projects, including 117 Mass stipend projects, amounting to over €16.5 million to support the Catholic Church of both rites all over Ukraine.

Thanks to the generosity, prayers and sacrifice of ACN benefactors, both in 2022 and 2023, Ukraine has been the country most supported worldwide by ACN.

More than 2,200 displaced people have benefited from direct humanitarian aid thanks to ACN's benefactors.

Two years on, thousands of Ukrainian children still forcibly displaced by Russia (The Hill)
By Mark Temnycky
February 20, 2024

> **Feb. 24 will mark the second anniversary of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Throughout the war, thousands of Ukrainian civilians have been killed. One-fourth of the country remains displaced. Numerous cities and villages have been destroyed, and experts predict it will take over one trillion dollars to rebuild the country.**

Beyond this death and destruction, others have suffered. As coverage of the war becomes more publicly available, the international community has become more aware of Russia's atrocities and crimes. Throughout the invasion, there have been numerous accounts of Russians terrorizing, torturing, and raping Ukrainian men, women, and children. Russian forces have also mutilated several Ukrainians. Others were executed by their Russian occupiers.

These discoveries were most apparent when Ukrainian forces liberated parts of northern and eastern Ukraine from the Russians. These atrocities came to light in places such as Bucha and Izyum. It is unknown what other crimes against humanity have been committed by Russians against the Ukrainians in the remaining occupied regions of the country.

Throughout the war, the United Nations has investigated and concluded that Russia has committed numerous crimes against humanity. Legislative bodies are determining how Russia can be punished for these acts. Despite this, the Russian Federation has chosen to continue its invasion, and there is no apparent end to the war in sight.

One group that has suffered greatly from the war is Ukrainian children. To date, hundreds of thousands of families across Ukraine have been torn apart. Children have been forcibly and unlawfully taken by Russian soldiers. These Ukrainians are then brought back to Russia, thousands of miles from their families, where they are forced to live with strangers. During this process, Russian families that adopt these forcibly displaced children then begin the process of Russifying them.

According to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, there is "evidence that deported [Ukrainian] children had faced a process of 'russification' through re-education." Through this process, these Ukrainians are told to abandon their Ukrainian language, heritage, and culture. They are then forced to learn Russian and adopt Russian traditions. They are told to identify themselves as Russian.

There are also programs within Russia that are overseeing these efforts. According to a report published by the Yale University School of Public Health, the re-education programs in Russia are seen to forcibly integrate "children from Ukraine into the Russian government's vision of national culture, history, and society." How this is occurring suggests that it has been "planned and organized in a systemic way," further evidence to suggest that Russia is trying to do away with the Ukrainian people altogether.

Despite these detailed reports, thousands of Ukrainian children remain in Russian captivity. One wonders how and when they will be able to return home. To make matters worse, several of these children have not been documented. Thus, it is unclear how many Ukrainian children are forcibly displaced.

Some of these Ukrainian children in captivity have escaped and spoken out about their situation. They are urging countries and organizations to help their compatriots. Although international organizations are receptive to the statements made by these Ukrainian children, these organizations are still trying to determine how others can return home. This delay only prolongs the captivity of Ukrainian children in Russia.

Still, the international community is finally starting to bring some pressure to the Russians. Earlier this month, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child discussed the forced abduction of Ukrainian children. During the session, the committee urged the Russian Federation to end its policy of deporting Ukrainians. Meanwhile, the International Criminal Court has issued an arrest warrant for "Russia's President Vladimir Putin and Children Rights Commissioner Maria Lvova-Belova on war crimes." The Russian Federation has nonetheless refused to stop forcibly displacing Ukrainian children.

Overall, Russia has committed a wide range of crimes and acts against the Ukrainians since the invasion began in February 2022. Children are one of the groups most affected by Russia's war, and their voices are being ignored.

The international community must aid those who have been forcibly taken and displaced by Russia. Furthermore, the Russian Federation must be punished for separating families and ruining these relationships. Otherwise, if the Russians do not face consequences for their actions, they will continue to conduct these illegal acts. This will only lead to greater hardships for Ukrainians and their country.

[**back to contents**]

MIDDLE-EAST

Syria

Two dead after Israeli missiles 'hit residential area' in Syria (Irish Examiner) February 21, 2024

> **Israeli airstrikes have hit a residential area located in the Syrian capital of Damascus, killing two people, the country's state media has said.**

State TV reported that several missiles hit the Kfar Sousseh area, in the western part of the city, on Wednesday morning.

The pro-government Sham FM radio station said the alleged strike hit a building near an Iranian school and caused casualties.

Rami Abdurrahman, who heads the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, an opposition war monitor, said two people were killed in the strike which he branded "an assassination".

Mr Abdurrahman said the two people killed were inside an apartment but did not give any clues about their identities.

Israel has not yet commented on the alleged strike.

The country has carried out hundreds of attacks on targets inside government-controlled parts of war-torn Syria in recent years.

Israel rarely acknowledges its actions in Syria, but it has previously said that it targets bases of Iran-allied militant groups, such as Lebanon's Hezbollah, which has sent thousands of fighters to support Syrian President Bashar Assad's forces.

Last month, an Israeli strike on the area of Mazzeh, also in Damascus, destroyed a building used by the Iranian paramilitary Revolutionary Guard, killing at least five Iranians.

In December, an Israeli airstrike on a Damascus suburb killed Iranian general Seyed Razi Mousavi, a long-time adviser of the Iranian paramilitary Revolutionary Guard in Syria.

Israel has also targeted Palestinian and Lebanese operatives in Syria over the past years.

[**back to contents**]

Yemen

Yemen's Houthi rebels fire missiles at ship bound for Iran, their main supporter (AP News) By Jon Gambrell
February 12, 2024

> **Yemen's Houthi rebels fired two missiles at a ship carrying corn bound for a port in Iran on Monday, causing minor damage but no injuries to its crew, authorities said.**

The attack on the Marshall Islands-flagged, Greek-operated bulk carrier Star Iris shows just how widely the Houthis now target ships traveling through the Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden and the Bab el-Mandeb Strait connecting the two waterways.

The Star Iris had been heading from Brazil to Bandar Khomeini in Iran, the main backer and armer of the Houthis in Yemen's yearslong war.

"The group owner and operator regularly trade bulk cargo with Iran, so this was assessed to be the likely destination," said Ambrey, a private security firm. Ambrey added that the Star Iris sustained damage to its starboard side in the attack.

The Houthis sought to describe the Star Iris as an "American" vessel, and said they targeted the ship with multiple missiles. The Star Iris' ultimate owner, Star Bulk Carriers Corp. of Athens, Greece, is traded on the Nasdaq Stock Market in New York. It did not respond to a request for comment.

Days earlier, another ship owned by Star Bulk, the Star Nasia, came under attack from the Houthis.

The Houthis' military "will not hesitate to carry out more operations in retaliation to the Zionist crimes against our brothers in the Gaza Strip, as well as in response to the ongoing American-British aggression against our dear country," Houthi military spokesman Brig. Gen. Yahya Saree said in a statement after the attack.

Iran did not acknowledge the Star Iris' destination, though the U.S. military's Central Command did in a statement early Tuesday. Central Command identified its cargo as Brazilian corn bound for Iran. Corn is a major Brazilian export to Iran, likely used in animal feed.

The British military's United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations center, which oversees Mideast waters, reported the attack, saying it happened while the Star Iris was traveling south through the Bab el-Mandeb Strait that separates East Africa from the Arabian Peninsula.

The ship's captain "reports his vessel was attacked by two missiles and reports minor damage," the UKMTO said. "Vessel and crew are safe. Vessel proceeding to next port of call."

The attack on the Star Iris follows days in which no Houthi attacks on ships were reported. It's unclear what caused the pause, though the U.S. and British militaries have conducted multiple rounds of airstrikes targeting the Houthis' missile arsenals and launch sites in territory they hold.

Since November, the rebels have repeatedly targeted ships in the Red Sea over Israel's offensive in Gaza. They have frequently targeted vessels with tenuous or no clear links to Israel, imperiling shipping in a key route for trade among Asia, the Mideast and Europe.

Yemen warns Israel against possible ground offensive on Rafah (Mehr News Agency)
February 12, 2024

> **Mohammed Ali al-Houthi, a member of Yemen's Supreme Political Council, said on Saturday that the Yemeni Armed Forces will continue their attacks to pressure Israel to completely halt its aggression on Palestinians in Gaza, lift its blockade there, and allow the unrestricted entry of food, medicine, and basic commodities into the coastal territory.**

He cautioned Israeli officials against any ground offensive on Rafah, stating that any escalatory measure against the Palestinian population in Gaza would prompt the Yemeni army to up the ante and carry out more operations against the occupying regime's interests.

Houthi noted that the Yemeni Armed Forces' retaliatory strikes entail lofty humanitarian, religious and fraternal goals, and are meant to stop the Israeli genocidal war against ordinary people, particularly women, children and the elderly, in Gaza.

"Our operations will continue at times and places of our choosing," the senior Yemeni official declared.

Houthi also stressed that all US and British assets became legitimate targets in the aftermath of their joint military strikes in Yemen.

He roundly dismissed as flat-out lies Washington and London's claims about the insecurity of the Red Sea for international shipping and mariners.

The top Yemeni official stated that the leader of the Ansarullah resistance movement, Abdul-Malik al-Houthi, has ensured all countries that their respective commercial vessels can easily pass through the Red Sea as long as they are not linked to Israel.

The Gaza-based Hamas resistance movement has warned that a ground offensive on Rafah city will scupper any possibility of captive exchange negotiations.

Speaking to the al-Aqsa television channel, a senior Hamas leader said an Israeli military invasion of Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip would "blow up" the talks.

UNICEF Executive Director Catherine Russell has said that civilians in Rafah must be protected as they have nowhere to go.

UN envoy warns of 'dangerous' escalation cycle in war-wracked Yemen (Al Jazeera)
February 14, 2024

> **The United Nations special envoy for Yemen has called for immediate action to end the "dangerous escalatory cycle" in the war-wracked country, as Houthi rebels continue their attacks in the Red Sea and Western powers retaliate with strikes on Yemen.**

"I am engaging the Yemeni parties and relevant regional actors to support de-escalation in the Red Sea to protect the mediation space in Yemen," Hans Grundberg told the UN Security Council on Wednesday.

"Three things need to happen in the immediate term to create an off-ramp to this dangerous escalatory cycle," Grundberg said, calling for regional de-escalation; for all parties to refrain from "military opportunism"; and for progress towards a mediated agreement to be protected.

Yemen's Houthis have been launching attacks in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden against ships they said were linked to Israel. The attacks are in solidarity with Palestinians and will not cease until Israel stops its war on Gaza, the rebels said.

But the provocations have prompted the United States and United Kingdom to intervene, launching a series of air raids on targets in Yemen in the hope of deterring the Houthis.

'Path to peace'

The Iran-backed rebels have been fighting a Saudi-led coalition since 2015, months after they seized the capital Sanaa and most of Yemen's population centres, forcing the internationally recognised government south to Aden.

As recently as December, painstaking negotiations were gaining ground and the UN said the warring parties had agreed to work towards "the resumption of an inclusive political process".

The recent Houthi attacks, in addition to Western retaliation, have thrown the peace process up in the air.

However, "in my latest exchanges, I have received assurances that all parties prefer the path to peace," Grundberg said.

Hundreds of thousands of people in Yemen have died in the fighting and from indirect causes, such as disease and malnutrition. More than 18 million Yemenis need "urgent support", according to the UN's humanitarian agency OCHA.

"Yemen is not a footnote to a wider regional story," Grundberg warned. "The regional escalation does not negate the urgent needs in Yemen for a nationwide ceasefire."

Al Jazeera's Gabriel Elizondo, reporting from the UN headquarters in New York, said this was the first time in nearly five months that the Security Council has held an "open" meeting on Yemen.

"Last year, the internationally recognised government and the Houthis were inching closer to some peace agreement, but … it's certainly much more complicated now," Elizondo said.

Grundberg is right now focused on trying to keep the parameters of the Yemen ceasefire in place, our correspondent added, but current developments around the war on Gaza are making things more difficult.

'Terrorist' designation

Among the complications is the US's move to return the Houthis to a list of "terrorist" groups – a decision the UN fears could harm Yemen's economy, particularly commercial imports of essential items, UN aid operations director Edem Wosornu said.

The US move, announced last month, takes effect on Friday and hits the Houthis with harsh sanctions in response to the attacks on cargo ships.

The Houthi attacks have prompted some major shipping companies to detour around southern Africa to avoid the Red Sea, a vital route that normally carries about 12 percent of global maritime trade.

Wosornu said that while the humanitarian community was concerned about "any potential adverse effects" of the US designation, she noted that Washington had issued exemptions aimed at lessening the impact on civilians in Yemen.

"Nevertheless, we fear there may be an effect on the economy, including commercial imports of essential items on which the people of Yemen depend on more than ever," Wosornu told the Security Council.

"Humanitarian aid cannot make up for gaps in the supply of commercial goods. Such effects may reverberate across the country. Yemen's already fragile economy cannot handle any further major shocks," she said.

Houthis vow to continue attacks in solidarity with Palestinians (SaltWire) February 15, 2024

> **Yemen's Iran-backed Houthis will press on with attacks on Red Sea shipping in solidarity with the Palestinians as long as Israel continues to commit "crimes" against them, their leader said on Thursday.**

"Our operations have a big impact on the enemy which constitute a great success and a real triumph", Abdulmalik al-Houthi said in a televised speech.

He said the group would continue to support the Palestinians despite U.S. and British strikes on Houthi targets in Yemen in retaliation for the Houthi attacks on international shipping in the Red Sea.

The Red Sea attacks have disrupted global shipping and forced firms to re-route to longer and more expensive journeys around southern Africa, and stoked fears that the Israel-Hamas war could spread and destabilise the wider Middle East.

Yemen at War (The Glasgow Guardian) By Nicholas Gardner
February 16, 2024

> **The Glasgow Guardian looks at who Yemen's Houthis are and why the United States and Britain are bombing Yemen.**

On Sunday 19 November, military soldiers known as Houthis – or more officially, Ansar Allah (translating literally to Supporters of God) – hijacked an Israeli-controlled commercial vessel and brought it to port on the west coast of Yemen. Since then, Houthis have attacked more than 30 vessels in the Red Sea, a pivotal trade passage accounting for 12% of global trade, with the stated military objective of "[compelling] Israel to cease its crimes against humanity in Gaza and allow entry of food, medicine, and fuel to its people."

In response, the four largest shipping companies in the world rerouted all traffic from the Red Sea to a longer and more costly journey around Africa. In response, the Israeli-allied US and Britain deployed Naval forces to Yemen, before eight rounds of bombings.

The Houthi (translating literally to The Believing Youth) movement began in the 1990s as a grassroots Zaydi Shia revivalist movement, formed with the aim of preventing the spread of Sunni Salafism from Saudi Arabia. In 2004, their leader and parliamentarian, Hussien al-Houthi, was killed by government forces under the Saudi-aligned and long-standing president Saleh, which provoked six wars between Houthis and the State. In 2011, during the Arab spring revolts, Houthis disarmed and joined mass peaceful protests calling for Saleh's resignation, leading to his replacement by his deputy Abd Rabbuh Mansour Hadi in the 'Gulf Initiative' referendum, which featured him as the only candidate.

Hadi would later be expelled to Saudi Arabia after Houthis launched a coup in 2014 against Hadi's provisional government, forcing him into exile. Hadi would act as a Saudi Puppet ruler, "authorising" a US-Saudi coalition war against Yemen in a bid to destroy the anti-Zionist, Iranian-aligned faction, to restore the Initiative government.

The Saudis, with almost all their weapons and essential logistics support from the US and Britain, plunged Yemen into the "world's worst humanitarian crisis", according to the United Nations. The extensive use of heavy weaponry and a total blockade of Yemen lead to starvation and insufficiencies in medical resources, causing more than 377,000 deaths. The Saudis deliberately targeted health and water facilities on average every 10 days according to Oxfam, along with marketplaces, school buses, and funeral halls. According to the UN Development Program, Yemen is now becoming one of the world's poorest countries, with 70% of Yemen's population relying on humanitarian aid for survival. Unfortunately, Yemen still hasn't recovered from the war with Saudi Arabia despite the recent truce – why, then, are the Houthis taking such a bold action by declaring war on the US and potentially derailing the fragile truce with Saudi Arabia?

Houthis are a member of the 'Axis of resistance', a coalition led by Iran with participating armed groups in Iraq and Syria, as well as the Lebanon-based Hezbollah (Party of God), and Hamas in the Gaza strip. The coalition's aim is to fight against American power projection in their region, such as in the heavily militarised Israel, and vows for the restoration of the rights and land of the Palestinians. They see the task of restoring Palestinian rights as the collective responsibility of the Islamic Ummah, or the Muslim community. Spokesman and senior Houthi political official Mohammed al-Bukhaiti stated that the Red Sea attacks are to "pressure Israel" to cease its assault on Gaza and lift the siege.

However, the Houthis have also discovered a political goldmine in attacking shipping. Even if the political class in Jordan, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia are friendly to the US and Israel, the Zionist project remains a wound on the popular conscience of many Arabs, who see it as an injustice. Yemen has been especially vocal about its support for Palestine, and the Red Sea attacks have been overwhelmingly popular in the region. Houthis have reported an increase in recruitment since the attacks, and have deployed 50,000 soldiers around Marib, the last stronghold of the coalition government. The Red Sea attacks could therefore give them popular support to unify Yemen under 'Houthi' rule.

Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia seems anxious about the possibility of restarting war with Yemen, and refused to join the US-led response to the Houthis. This is likely due to them being unwilling to risk more damage to oil refineries they incurred during the previous war, or perhaps due to fear of a wider regional war which could be costly. This cautious stance was expressed by halting the normalisation deal with Israel after October 7. As a result, it is suggested that Egypt could be moved to act, as the diverted shipping from the Red Sea is costing them hundreds of millions of dollars, as the toll for each commercial vessel rerouted is around 500,000 USD.

The US State Department recently rebranded Houthis as a terrorist group. Secretary of State Anthony Blinken said in the press release that "the recent escalation in reckless Houthi attacks originating from Yemen threatens the free flow of commerce, endangers innocent mariners, and violates international law".

Neither US-led airstrikes nor a terrorist label have deterred Houthis from their campaign in the Red Sea. They have continued their attacks, and likely believe it to be vital for them to continue, even if it is to the detriment of the wellbeing of Yemen's 33 million people. In a poll of the West Bank and Gaza strip conducted by the Palestinian Centre for Policy and Survey Research, Yemen had the highest approval rating of all regional actors (and world actors) at 80%.

If the US and Britain intensify their war in Yemen, it seems unlikely or even impossible that they would be able to defeat Houthis, given their surge in popularity and political strength since the Red Sea campaign. Eight years of proxy war through Saudi Arabia didn't achieve this, so it is unlikely that another would work, especially due to Saudi Arabian apathy and the already overstretched US war machine.

Attacks on ships and US drones show Yemen's Houthis can still fight despite US-led airstrikes (ABC News) By Jon Gambrell
February 20, 2024

> **Despite a month of U.S.-led airstrikes, Yemen's Iran-backed Houthi rebels remain capable of launching significant attacks. This week, they seriously damaged a ship in a crucial strait and downed an American drone worth tens of millions of dollars.**

The continued assaults by the Houthis on shipping through the crucial Red Sea corridor — the Bab el-Mandeb Strait — against the backdrop of Israel's war on Hamas in the Gaza Strip underscore the challenges in trying to stop the guerrilla-style attacks they have used to hold onto Yemen's capital and much of the war-ravaged country's north since 2014.

The campaign has boosted the rebels' standing in the Arab world, despite their human rights abuses in a yearslong stalemated war with several of America's allies in the region. Analysts warn that the longer the Houthis' attacks go on, the greater the risk that disruptions to international shipping will begin to weigh on the global economy.

On Monday, both the Houthis and Western officials acknowledged one of the most serious attacks on shipping launched by the rebels. The Houthis targeted the Belize-flagged bulk carrier Rubymar with two anti-ship ballistic missiles, and one struck the vessel, the U.S. military's Central Command said.

The Rubymar, which reported problems with its propulsion in November, apparently became inoperable, forcing her crew to abandon the vessel.

Houthi military spokesman Brig. Gen. Yahya Saree claimed on Monday night that the Rubymar sank. However, satellite images from Planet Labs PBC analyzed by The Associated Press showed the Rubymar still afloat at 2 p.m. local time Tuesday just north of the Bab el-Mandeb. A large oil slick trailed the vessel.

The Rubymar attack marked one of a few direct, serious hits by the Houthi rebels on shipping. In late January, another direct hit set a Marshall Islands-flagged tanker ablaze for hours.

Meanwhile, the Houthis early Tuesday released footage of what they described as a surface-to-air missile bringing down a U.S. MQ-9 Reaper drone off the coast of Hodeida, a Yemeni port city they hold on the Red Sea. The footage included a video of men dragging pieces of debris from the water onto a beach.

Images of the debris, which included writing in English and what seemed to be electrical equipment, appeared to correspond to known pieces of the Reaper, usually used in attack missions and surveillance flights. Pentagon spokeswoman Sabrina Singh told journalists in a briefing the Houthis shot down the drone.

In November, the Pentagon acknowledged the loss of an MQ-9, also shot down by the rebels over the Red Sea.

Since the Houthis seized the country's north and its capital of Sanaa in 2014, the U.S. military has lost at least four drones to shootdowns by the rebels — in 2017, 2019 and this year.

Meanwhile, the Houthis claimed an attack on the Sea Champion, a Greek-flagged, U.S.-owned bulk carrier full of grain bound for Aden, Yemen, carrying grain from Argentina. Central Command said the carrier "has delivered humanitarian aid to Yemen 11 times in the past five years" as the country remains on the edge of famine amid the war there.

The rebels separately claimed an attack on the Marshall Islands-flagged bulk carrier Navis Fortuna, a ship that had been broadcasting its destination as Italy with an "all Chinese" crew to avoid being targeted. Private security firm Ambrey reported that the vessel sustained minor damage in a drone attack.

The U.S. shot down 10 bomb-carrying Houthi drones, as well as a cruise missile heading toward the Arleigh Burke-class destroyer USS Laboon over the last day, Central Command said Tuesday. The U.S. military also conducted strikes targeting a Houthi surface-to-air missile launcher and a drone prior to its launch.

The Houthis acknowledged the drone attacks and claimed other assaults not immediately acknowledged by the West.

Since November, the rebels have repeatedly targeted ships in the Red Sea and surrounding waters over Israel's war against Hamas in the Gaza Strip. They have frequently targeted vessels with tenuous or no clear links to Israel, imperiling shipping in a key route for trade among Asia, the Mideast and Europe. Those vessels have included at least one with cargo for Iran, the Houthis' main benefactor.

The European Union has launched its own campaign to protect shipping, with member France saying on Tuesday that it shot down two Houthi drones overnight in the Red Sea.

So far, no U.S. sailor or pilot has been wounded by the Houthis since America launched its airstrikes targeting the rebels in January. However, the U.S. continues to lose drones worth tens of millions of dollars and fire million-dollar cruise missiles to counter the Houthis, who are using far cheaper weapons that experts believe largely have been supplied by Iran.

Based on U.S. military statements, American and allied forces have destroyed at least 73 missiles of different types before they were launched, as well as 17 drones, 13 bomb-laden drone boats and one underwater explosive drone over their monthlong campaign, according to an AP tally. Those figures don't include the initial Jan. 11 joint U.S.-U.K. strikes that began the campaign. The American military also has shot down dozens of missiles and drones already airborne since November.

The Houthis haven't offered much information regarding their losses, though they've acknowledged at least 22 of their fighters have been killed in the American-led strikes. Insurgent forces including the Houthis and allied tribes in Yemen number around 20,000 fighters, according to the International Institute for Strategic Studies. They can operate in small units away from military bases, making targeting them more difficult.

The Houthis may view the costs as balanced by their sudden fame within an Arab world enraged by the killing of women and civilians by Israel in Gaza.

In the past, others — including the late Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein and al-Qaida leader Osama bin Laden — have used the Palestinians' plight to justify their "actions and garner support," wrote Fatima Abo Alasrar, a scholar at the Washington-based Middle East Institute.

"It legitimizes the Houthis' actions in the eyes of those who sympathize with the Palestinian cause, distracts from the more immediate issues associated with the Yemen conflict and the failures of Houthi governance, and potentially broadens the base of their support beyond Yemen's borders," Alasrar added.

If the Houthi attacks continue, it could force the U.S. to intensify and widen its counterattacks across an already volatile Mideast.

"Without a cease-fire in Gaza, the Houthis could be tempted to further escalate against U.S. interests in the Red Sea and in the region," wrote Eleonora Ardemagni, a fellow at the Italian Institute for International Political Studies.

For Washington, "deterrence options" are getting narrower, she added.

[**back to contents**]

Special Tribunal for Lebanon

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

[**back to contents**]

Israel and Palestine

ICC prosecutor 'deeply concerned' by situation in Gaza's Rafah (Reuters) By Anthony Deutsch
February 12, 2024

> **International Criminal Court prosecutor Karim Khan said on Monday he was deeply concerned about reports of bombardment and potential ground incursion by Israeli forces in the southern Gaza city of Rafah.**

Khan posted on X after airstrikes in the city that is the last refuge of about a million displaced civilians.

The prosecutor said the court was "actively investigating any crimes allegedly committed" in Gaza and that "those who are in breach of the law will be held accountable".

He later told Reuters that half of the population of Gaza is currently concentrated around Rafah, "reportedly six times its normal concentration".

"When you have a population that is 60% children and women by all accounts, the risks to civilians are profound", he said.

"This situation is one that I give the utmost priority to. It's an issue that we're moving forward on."

Israel is not a member of the Hague-based court and does not recognise its jurisdiction. But Khan said in October his court had jurisdiction over any potential war crimes carried out by Hamas Palestinian militants in Israel and by Israelis in the Gaza Strip.

Israel denies committing atrocities in its attacks on Gaza, which followed the Hamas cross-border raid on southern Israel on Oct. 7 in which 1,200 Israelis were killed and around 240 were taken hostage, according to Israeli tallies.

More than four months on, much of the densely-populated strip of land on the Mediterranean is in ruins, with 28,340 Palestinians dead and 67,984 wounded, according to Gaza health officials.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office has said four Hamas battalions are in Rafah, and that Israel cannot achieve its goal of eliminating the Islamist militants while they remain there. Civilians should be evacuated from the combat zone, it said.

ICJ holds hearings on Israel's occupation of Palestinian territories (Reuters) By Stephanie van den Berg
February 16, 2024

> **A record 52 states will present arguments about the legal consequences of Israel's occupation of the Palestinian territories at the International Court of Justice (ICJ), the U.N.'s highest legal body.**

The ICJ's six days of hearings starting on Monday come after the U.N. General Assembly asked the court in 2022 for an advisory, or non-binding, opinion on the occupation. While Israel has ignored such opinions in the past, it could add political pressure over its ongoing operation in Gaza, which has killed 28,775 people, mostly civilians.

It is part of a Palestinian push to get international law institutions such as the ICJ to examine Israel's conduct which has become more urgent since the Oct. 7 attacks by Hamas in Israel and Israel's military response in the Gaza Strip.

"Politically, this will help in achieving a two-state solution. We are using the platform of the largest judicial body to advance our cause," Omar Awadallah, a senior official in the Palestinian Foreign Ministry, told journalists at a briefing before the hearings.

Israel captured the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem - areas of historic Palestine which the Palestinians want for a state - in a 1967 war. It withdrew from Gaza in 2005, but, along with neighbouring Egypt, still controls its borders.

It is the second time the U.N. General Assembly has asked the ICJ, also known as the World Court, for an advisory opinion related to the occupied Palestinian territory. In July 2004, the court found that Israel's separation wall in the West Bank violated international law and should be dismantled, though it still stands to this day.

"The International Court of Justice is set for the first time to broadly consider the legal consequences of Israel's nearly six-decades-long occupation and mistreatment of the Palestinian people," said Clive Baldwin, senior legal adviser at Human Rights Watch.

"Governments that are presenting their arguments to the court should seize these landmark hearings to highlight the grave abuses Israeli authorities are committing against Palestinians, including the crimes against humanity of apartheid and persecution."

The advisory opinion proceedings are separate from the genocide case that South Africa filed at the World Court against Israel for its alleged violations in Gaza of the 1948 Genocide Convention. In late January the ICJ in that case ordered Israel to do everything in its power to prevent acts of genocide in Gaza.

The outcome of the advisory opinion would not be legally binding but would carry "great legal weight and moral authority," according to the ICJ.

The precise question put to the court is to give an opinion on the legal consequences of Israel's "occupation, settlement and annexation ... including measures aimed at altering the demographic composition, character and status of the Holy City of Jerusalem, and from its adoption of related discriminatory legislation and measures."

The general assembly also asked the 15-judge panel of the ICJ to advise on how those policies and practices "affect the legal status of the occupation" and what legal consequences arise for all countries and the United Nations from this status.

The court will hear over 50 states and three international organisations over six days of hearings including the United States, Russia, China and South Africa. While Israel has filed a written statement with the court, it has not asked to participate in the hearings. On Monday proceedings will start with submissions from the Palestinian authorities.

World Court to Review 57-Year Israeli Occupation (Human Rights Watch) February 16, 2024

> **An unprecedented number of countries and international organizations are expected to participate in the International Court of Justice's (ICJ) oral hearings on Israel's occupation beginning February 19, 2024, Human Rights Watch said today. Fifty-two countries and three international organizations will participate in the oral proceedings, more than in any other case since the world's highest court began functioning in 1946.**

The broad participation in the hearings and the many written submissions reflect growing global momentum to address the decades-long failure to ensure respect for international law in the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

"The International Court of Justice is set for the first time to broadly consider the legal consequences of Israel's nearly six-decades-long occupation and mistreatment of the Palestinian people," said Clive Baldwin, senior legal adviser at Human Rights Watch. "Governments that are presenting their arguments to the court should seize these landmark hearings to highlight the grave abuses Israeli authorities are committing against Palestinians, including the crimes against humanity of apartheid and persecution."

The oral proceedings stem from a December 2022 request by the United Nations General Assembly for an advisory opinion by the court on the legal consequences of Israel's policies and practices in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. The court has the opportunity to address the prolonged occupation, to consider Israel's practices and policies violating international legal prohibitions against racial discrimination, including the crimes against humanity of apartheid and persecution, and to appraise the legal responsibilities of other countries and the UN to address violations of international law arising from the occupation.

Although ICJ advisory opinions are non-binding, they can carry great moral and legal authority and can ultimately become part of customary international law, which is legally binding on states.

These proceedings, which will last six days, are distinct from the case brought by South Africa to the same court alleging that Israel is violating the Genocide Convention amid the hostilities between Israeli forces and Palestinian armed groups that escalated following the October 7, 2023, Hamas-led attacks.

The General Assembly first asked the ICJ for an advisory opinion related to the Occupied Palestinian Territory in December 2003. In July 2004, the ICJ's advisory opinion found that the route of Israel's separation barrier violated international law and that it should be dismantled.

The December 2022 request to the court is wider in scope. The General Assembly asked the court to give its opinion on the "legal consequences arising from the ongoing violation by Israel of the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, from its prolonged occupation, settlement and annexation" of the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including "its adoption of related discriminatory legislation and measures," and on the legal consequences of the occupation and Israel's practices for all states and the UN.

The request provides the court the opportunity to evaluate the situation two decades after its last advisory opinion on the Occupied Palestinian Territory and provide guidance on the law, including the continued application of international humanitarian law and human rights law. The court could also assess Israel's conduct under international human rights law, including prohibitions on racial discrimination, and international criminal law, including the crimes against humanity of apartheid and persecution.

The ICJ adjudicates disputes between states and issues advisory opinions on international law. It lacks jurisdiction over the conduct of non-state armed groups like Hamas. The International Criminal Court (ICC), by contrast, addresses serious international crimes allegedly committed by individuals, including members of armed groups. The ICC prosecutor confirmed that since March 2021 his office has been conducting an investigation into alleged atrocity crimes committed in Gaza and the West Bank since 2014, and that the court has jurisdiction over international crimes committed by all parties in the current hostilities between Israel and Palestinian armed groups.

Human Rights Watch has documented that Israeli authorities are committing the crimes against humanity of apartheid and persecution against Palestinians. Given that the responsibilities of an occupying power toward the rights of the occupied population increase over time, Human Rights Watch has also called for Israel to provide Palestinians in the occupied territory with rights at least equal to those it grants its own citizens, in addition to the protections of international humanitarian law.

The ICJ is composed of 15 judges elected by the UN General Assembly and Security Council for nine-year terms. Fifty-seven states and international organizations had filed a written statement in the proceedings in July 2023, before the October escalation in hostilities. Fifteen states and international organizations filed additional written comments in October and November 2023. Among those participating in the oral proceedings are Palestine, South Africa, Belgium, Brazil, the United States, Russia, France, China, Namibia, Pakistan, Indonesia, the United Kingdom, Switzerland, and the African Union. Israel submitted a written statement and chose not to participate in the oral hearings.

The ICJ will issue its legal opinion at a date to be determined. Past practice suggests that the opinion will be issued before the end of 2024.

[**back to contents**]

Gulf Region

[**back to contents**]

ASIA

Afghanistan

Concerns raised after alleged war criminals escape overseas (The New Daily) By Dominic Giannini
February 13, 2024

> **Concerns have been raised that slow progress prosecuting Australians alleged to have committed war crimes has resulted in some of the accused fleeing overseas to nations with no reciprocal extradition agreements.**

Greens senator David Shoebridge pushed the Office of the Special Investigator Director General Chris Moraitis in a fiery exchange about the allegations during a Senate hearing late Monday night.

Senator Shoebrige alleged under parliamentary privilege some of the 19 special forces soldiers suspected of committing war crimes in Afghanistan had left Asustralia.

Moraitis refused to confirm the number but said his office was investigating people "in countries which may or may not have extradition relations with Australia".

Senator Shoebridge also alleged some had worked as mercenaries, but Moraitis said he was unaware of this.

Despite extradition hurdles, the Australian legal processes had "a very good chance of achieving justice", Moraitis said.

"Albeit delayed," he added.

He also revealed one soldier who may have been a material witness in the prosecution case had since died by suicide.

Senator Shoebridge challenged the director general over the fact only one person had been charged with a war crime since the office was stood up three years ago.

"Do any of those KPIs (key performance indicators) actually involve charging the 19 people?" he asked.

Moraitis defended the work of his office, saying it was seeking to have as many people who were referred to it charged.

"We have charged one person with murder, the first person in Australian history has actually been charged with a war crime for the record," he responded.

The investigations stem from a document known as the Brereton report, which investigated alleged war crimes by Australian troops between 2005 and 2016.

It found credible evidence of 39 murders of Afghan civilians and prisoners committed by or at the instruction of Australian soldiers.

Pakistan's Asif Durrani to attend Doha meeting on Afghanistan (The Khaama Press News Agency)
By Fidel Rahmati
February 17, 2024

> **The second Doha meeting, scheduled by the United Nations Secretary-General for February 18 and 19, will bring together special envoys from different countries and international organizations. They'll discuss important issues facing Afghanistan.**

While the UN has extended invitations to the Taliban for the Doha meeting, the group has exercised caution, awaiting further details on the participants and objectives. The Taliban's potential participation has stirred debate, with concerns raised about their history of human rights abuses and war crimes.

On Friday, the ambassador of the Russian Federation, Dmitry Zhirnov, met with Taliban Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi. The meeting emphasized the bilateral relations between Afghanistan and Russia, as well as the Afghan government's participation in the upcoming Doha meeting.

In the meeting, Muttaqi stated that the Taliban is closely coordinating with relevant UN bodies, expressing their views on the potential participation of a delegation in the Doha meeting.

He emphasized that if there's an opportunity for substantial consultations between the Taliban delegation and the UN regarding Afghanistan's issues, and if they can effectively represent Afghanistan, then the Doha meeting would be beneficial. However, Muttaqi added that if the Taliban's conditions aren't respected, non-participation would be favoured, indicating ongoing dialogue with all Doha meeting participants.

But, he did not mention the Taliban's conditions in the upcoming Doha meeting.

Amidst the diplomatic preparations, there has been a notable surge in social media-driven protests by Afghan citizens in various cities. These protests underscore opposition to the Taliban's potential involvement in the Doha meeting, with critics advocating for addressing the group's alleged crimes through international legal channels rather than political negotiations.

Minister says Ben Wallace and future head of the army failed to properly investigate alleged SAS Afghan crimes (The Independent) By Holly Bancroft
February 21, 2024

> **A minister has said that former defence secretary Ben Wallace and former director of special forces General Sir Roly Walker, who is to become head of the army in June, failed to properly investigate allegations of war crimes by the SAS in Afghanistan.**

Veterans minister Johnny Mercer was speaking to an inquiry into killings of Afghans by the UK special forces between 2010 and 2013. He told the inquiry yesterday that he tried to investigate the claims but that senior figures with the UK special forces were "unable to answer basic questions" and he "did not believe them".

On Tuesday, Mr Mercer said it became clear that figures within the Ministry of Defence were "working against me" when an email trail relating to the SAS allegations was published by The Sunday Times in 2020. He became "angry" with then-defence secretary Ben Wallace, then-director of special forces Gen Walker and other senior MoD figures after The Sunday Times' piece showed that senior special forces officers expressed serious concerns about the killings of 33 people in 11 night raids in the war-torn nation in 2011.

Mr Mercer said the director of special forces, the chief of the general staff and the defence secretary had "not done their job that was incumbent upon them with their rank and privileges in those organisations".

He later added that "senior figures within the MoD had failed in their most basic duty". He clarified that he did not think that "anybody lied to me".

Gen Walker was director of special forces from 2018-2021 and he is due to take over as head of the army in June this year.

Mr Mercer said he had repeatedly asked to see documentation relating to the UKSF war crimes allegations. He told the inquiry: "It was completely unacceptable that I had asked to see this information and I found out about it in The Sunday Times."

The veterans minister wrote to Mr Wallace in August 2020 shortly after emails surfaced.

The letter, shown to the inquiry, detailed how he told Mr Wallace it was "completely unacceptable" he had been allowed to make statements to the Commons in January 2020 when people knew them to be "incorrect". Mr Mercer had played down the allegations in public and told the Commons that internal UKSF complaints related to a "small number of individuals within the investigations team", when they were in fact "widespread".

He asked Mr Wallace if he could correct the record in parliament but was refused, he told the inquiry.

Later on, Mr Mercer said he has also heard from members of Afghan partner units directly that they had refused to work with a British special forces unit, known to the inquiry as UKSF1, after Afghan men, who had been restrained, were shot dead by UK special forces. They claimed Afghan children had also been killed by British soldiers, the inquiry heard.

The killing of children was "one trigger" for Afghan partner forces to refuse to work with UKSF1, he said.

Mr Mercer confirmed to the inquiry that these were allegations of murder. Many members of these Afghan partner units, known as the Triples, have been denied sanctuary in the UK by the MoD. UKSF have power over whether their applications for relocation are approved.

Mr Mercer was also warned by the chairman of the independent inquiry of "potentially serious legal consequences" after he refused to disclose names of his sources to the investigation.

Sir Charles Haddon-Cave told Mr Mercer his decision to "refuse to answer legitimate questions ... at a public inquiry" were "disappointing ... surprising ... and completely unacceptable". He added that his refusal could have "potentially serious legal consequences that I am prepared to put in train".

Afghan families have accused UK special forces of conducting a "campaign of murder" against civilians, while senior officers and personnel at the MoD "sought to prevent adequate investigation".

Two Royal Military Police investigations, codenamed Operation Northmoor and Operation Cestro, are set to be scrutinised by the inquiry.

No charges were brought under Operation Northmoor - a £10m investigation which was set up in 2014 to examine allegations of executions by special forces, including those of children.

Operation Cestro saw three soldiers referred to the Service Prosecuting Authority, but none of them were prosecuted.

The inquiry continues.

[**back to contents**]

Bangladesh International Crimes Tribunal

Three Convicted War Criminals Sentenced to Life Imprisonment for 1971 Liberation War Crimes (Bangladesh News Network) By Muhammad Jawad
February 12, 2024

> **Three individuals, AKM Akram Hossain, Aminuzzaman Faruk, and Mokhlesur Rahman (aka Tara), were sentenced to life imprisonment by the International Crimes Tribunal on Monday for war crimes committed during the 1971 Liberation War. The verdict, delivered by a three-member bench headed by Justice Md Shahinur Islam, found the trio guilty of murdering six people, kidnapping, detaining and torturing individuals, and setting fire to properties in Nakla Upazila.**

Shadows of a Forgotten War

The 1971 Liberation War, a nine-month conflict that led to the secession of East Pakistan and the creation of Bangladesh, remains a painful chapter in South Asian history. The Pakistani occupation army and its auxiliary forces committed civilian atrocities that bore the hallmarks of genocide, as per the UN Genocide Convention 1948. Yet, geopolitical conflicts of interest prevented Bangladesh from prosecuting the alleged 195 war criminals, who were repatriated to Pakistan under the New Delhi Agreement and the Shimla Pact.

The Long Road to Justice

Decades later, the International Crimes Tribunal (ICT) of Bangladesh has begun sentencing those responsible for war crimes during the Liberation War. The tribunal has faced numerous challenges, including the complexities of proving the genocidal intent behind these acts. As a result, the prosecution has been cautious in charging genocide, with limited success, and has instead focused on charging the factual account of atrocities.

Life Sentences for Three Convicted War Criminals

On Monday, the ICT handed down life sentences to AKM Akram Hossain, Aminuzzaman Faruk, and Mokhlesur Rahman (aka Tara) for their involvement in crimes against humanity during the 1971 war. The trio was found guilty of murdering six people, kidnapping, detaining and torturing individuals, and setting fire to properties in Nakla Upazila. The verdict, delivered by a three-member bench headed by Justice Md Shahinur Islam, marks a significant step towards justice for the victims and their families.

As the world continues to grapple with the legacies of conflict and the pursuit of justice, the life sentences handed down by the ICT serve as a powerful reminder of the human cost of war and the importance of holding those responsible accountable. For the people of Bangladesh, the verdict offers a small measure of closure, as the nation continues to heal from the wounds of its tumultuous past.

The sentences delivered by the International Crimes Tribunal on Monday, which found AKM Akram Hossain, Aminuzzaman Faruk, and Mokhlesur Rahman (aka Tara) guilty of war crimes during the 1971 Liberation War, represent a crucial milestone in the pursuit of justice for the victims and their families. These life sentences not only acknowledge the gravity of the crimes committed but also send a clear message that perpetrators of such atrocities cannot evade accountability. In this way, the ICT's verdict contributes to the broader global effort to uphold international law and protect human rights, even in the face of political obstacles and historical complexities.

[**back to contents**]

War Crimes Investigation in Myanmar

Myanmar: Military air strikes that killed 17 civilians 'must be investigated as war crimes' (Amnesty International) February 8, 2024

> **Air strikes by the Myanmar military killed 17 civilians — including nine children — as they gathered to attend church last month, Amnesty International said in a new investigation.**

The strikes, at approximately 10.30am on Sunday 07 January, struck close to Saint Peter Baptist Church in Kanan village in Sagaing region, near the country's western border with India. More than 20 people were injured.

Witnesses told Amnesty International that two children were killed by the first set of explosions while playing football in front of a nearby school. Many of the other victims were trying to run to safety when the second air strike hit. The attack damaged the church and school, as well as six civilian houses.

"The Myanmar military's deadly attacks on civilians show no signs of stopping," said Matt Wells, Director of Amnesty International's Crisis Response Programme.

"The world cannot continue to look the other way while the Myanmar military relentlessly attacks civilians and civilian targets, including churches, schools and hospitals. Countries and companies around the world must stop the flow of jet fuel to the military, to protect civilians from further catastrophe.

"These attacks must be investigated as war crimes, and the UN Security Council should refer the situation in Myanmar to the International Criminal Court. The perpetrators of these crimes under international law must be brought to justice."

Amnesty International interviewed four witnesses to the attacks, one person who visited Kanan after the attack and saw the bodies of those killed, and another person with knowledge of military operations in the area. The organization also analysed 99 photos and videos of the strikes and their aftermath, including images of those killed and injured.

All of the structural damage caused to the school, church and nearby homes is consistent with air strikes. The combined photo and video evidence indicates at least three impact locations, with craters consistent with aircraft bombs of approximately 250kg each. Satellite imagery taken after the strike also confirms significant damage to the school, adjacent structures and nearby homes, all consistent with an air strike.

The Myanmar military has denied responsibility for the attack, claiming no planes were flying in the area that morning. However, Amnesty International reviewed a video taken during the strike which shows the distinctive swept-wing silhouette of an A-5 fighter jet flying over the village. In Myanmar, only the military flies A-5 jets, which were imported from China.

Amnesty International previously documented how the Tada-U military air base, near Mandalay, is often used to launch aircraft in strikes aimed at Sagaing. Satellite imagery of Tada-U, taken shortly before and after the strike, shows active A-5 operations on the airfield. In three separate postings on a group messaging channel reviewed by Amnesty International, flight spotters on the ground indicated they witnessed a fighter jet taking off from Tada-U air base at 10am; an A-5 flying northwest over Kalewa, in the direction of Kanan, at 10.26am; and then an A-5 landing from the northwest at Tada-U at 10.56am. The locations, directions and timings of these observations are all consistent with an attack on Kanan at approximately 10.30am.

Sources interviewed by Amnesty International said they had been told that members of a local People's Defense Force (PDF) — one of many local armed groups formed since the coup to oppose the military's rule — had planned a ceremony at the village school later that day. However, based on consistent witness accounts, fighters do not appear to have been present at the time of the strikes, which killed and injured civilians only.

Even if the military believed there may have been lawful targets present, it dropped several large bombs on a residential area at a time on Sunday when civilians were gathering for church, and struck again as civilians fled in panic. As such, these attacks were indiscriminate at a minimum, and should be investigated as war crimes.

Last week, Amnesty International called again for the sale or transfer of jet fuel to Myanmar to be suspended after its investigation suggested the military were still importing fuel despite sanctions being placed on individuals and companies linked to the supply chain.

'We can't sleep when we think about what happened'

The Myanmar military has repeatedly attacked civilians and civilian objects — often destroying or damaging schools, religious buildings and other key infrastructure — in the three years since carrying out a coup.

Kanan — a village of an estimated 7,000 people — is located just north of the town of Khampat in Tamu township. Most of its residents are ethnic Chin, and practice Christianity.

Residents of Kanan said that, prior to these strikes, they had not directly experienced armed conflict since the February 2021 coup. However, on 07 November 2023, a coalition of resistance forces seized Khampat from the military following four days of clashes. The military attempted to retake the town with a series of ground offensives in December, but was unsuccessful and retreated after a week, according to local media reports.

Witnesses told Amnesty International of the devastation caused by the air strikes on 07 January 2024. A 56-year-old community worker said he saw a jet flying overhead as he prepared to leave his home for the nearby church. Moments later, the first strike hit approximately 200 meters from where he was standing.

He hid in his family's rice storage shed with his wife and two children, just before another strike hit. Around 15 minutes later, he went to assist the injured and collect the bodies of the dead, which he described as "distressing". Amnesty International reviewed photographs of the aftermath of the strike, which showed that one of the victim's bodies had been dismembered, and that others had suffered catastrophic head injuries, also as described by witnesses.

A 68-year-old man, who was inside the church when the first bomb struck, said: "We only knew about it when the bomb fell. We didn't hear the plane. We were singing inside the church when it happened. The church's ceiling collapsed and windows were broken, so people inside the church fled outside."

A 43-year-old market vendor, who was struck on the head by falling debris as he attempted to leave the church, told Amnesty International the second strike hit people who were running for their lives. He said: "Everyone was scared and fleeing and trying to get home, and the second air strike hit at that moment. There is a road behind the church, and it hit the people who were running home."

A 40-year-old man said the traumatized community remained on constant alert fearing further attacks. He said: "Even when we hear the sound of a motorbike, we are frightened thinking of a plane coming. We can't sleep when we think about what happened… [The attack] has left emotional scars. We can't go to church."

The damage caused, as well as fear of further attacks, forced the majority of villagers to flee, seeking refuge in nearby villages, farms and forests, or across the border with India. Many of those displaced are relying on support from relatives, local religious and charity groups, and host communities to survive.

Background

Since the February 2021 coup, Myanmar has experienced a severe escalation of human rights violations.

Amnesty International's May 2022 report, 'Bullets rained from the sky': War crimes and displacement in eastern Myanmar, found Myanmar's military had subjected civilians to collective punishment via widespread aerial and ground attacks, arbitrary detentions, torture, extrajudicial executions and the systematic looting and burning of villages.

An August 2022 report, 15 days felt like 15 years: Torture in detention since the Myanmar coup, documented torture and other ill-treatment when Myanmar's military interrogated and detained individuals suspected of being involved in protests.

A November 2022 report, Deadly Cargo: Exposing the Supply Chain that Fuels War Crimes in Myanmar, called for a suspension of the supply of aviation fuel to prevent the military from carrying out further unlawful air strikes.

Amnesty International also documented an air strike on an internally displaced persons camp in Kachin State 09 October 2023, which killed at least 28 civilians, including children.

Myanmar Journalist Shot, Killed While in Military Custody (Voice of America) By Liam Scott
February 16, 2024

> **Media watchdogs are demanding an investigation into the death in military custody of a journalist in Myanmar.**

Myat Thu Tan, a contributor to the local online outlet Western News, was shot and killed on January 31 while in military custody in the town of Mrauk-U in Myanmar's Rakhine State, according to reports.

The journalist's body was found, along with six other political prisoners, buried in a bomb shelter, after the Arakan Army, an ethnic armed organization, overran the military camp on February 5.

Local media said the bodies showed signs of torture.

The New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists, or CPJ, on Friday called for an independent investigation into the killing and for the perpetrators to be held accountable.

"We strongly condemn the murder of journalist Myat Thu Tan and call on Myanmar authorities to identify and prosecute those responsible," Shawn Crispin, CPJ's senior Southeast Asia representative, said in a statement.

"A culture of impunity has taken deep root in Myanmar since the 2021 democracy-suspending coup. The junta must stop killing, and start protecting, journalists," Crispin said.

Myanmar's military stands accused by the United Nations and human rights groups of committing war crimes and crimes against humanity around the country since the February 2021 coup.

The country ranks ninth in the world in terms of impunity in journalist killings, according to the CPJ.

Myanmar's military did not immediately reply to VOA's request for comment.

Myat Thu Tan was arrested at his home in Mrauk-U in September 2022 and held in pretrial detention under a broad provision that criminalizes incitement and the spread of false news. The arrest was linked to his critical Facebook posts, according to reports.

The journalist, known also as Phoe Thiha, reported for several news outlets, including at one time, the Democratic Voice of Burma, or DVB.

Shortly after the February 2021 coup, the military revoked DVB's license. Its team now works from exile.

The journalist's arrest and killing highlight the grave security threats facing reporters in Myanmar, where the military has cracked down hard on the media in the past three years.

DVB's executive director Aye Chan Naing discussed those threats in an interview with VOA earlier this month.

"The most challenging situation that we are facing is security for our journalists," Aye Chan Naing said.

Dozens of journalists have been detained since the coup, and others have gone into exile or work under the radar.

Myanmar currently is ranked second only to China for the number of journalists detained for their work. It had at least 43 in custody at the time of CPJ's latest census of imprisoned journalists.

Myat Thu Tan is the fourth journalist to die while in military custody in Myanmar since 2021.

[**back to contents**]

AMERICAS

South America

Paraguayan policeman on trial for torture meted out decades ago (Yahoo News) By Hugo Olazar
February 16, 2024

> **Five decades ago, he was a feared policeman nicknamed "the Whip," an enforcer of Paraguay's military dictatorship. Today, aged 87, Eusebio Torres is finally standing trial on torture allegations dating to 1976.**

Some 20 witnesses testified against Torres in a court in Asuncion this past week, detailing his alleged cruelty and opening a rare window onto crimes committed under the 1954-1989 rule of strongman Alfredo Stroessner -- South America's longest-serving dictatorship.

Torres, under house arrest, attended the hearings online, listening stoically as witnesses detailed allegations of extreme brutality committed against dissidents -- real and suspected -- of the Stroessner regime.

"He (Torres) ordered me to undress and, with his leather-braided whip, he began to hit me hard, with rage... One of the impacts burst my eye," one of them, Carlos Arestivo, told the court of an incident 47 years ago.

He has worn a glass eye since.

Another, 70-year-old Guillermina Kanonnikoff, said Torres had "tortured me with whips while I protected my eight-month-old child with my body."

Her husband, Mario, did not survive his own interrogation, she said.

Constantino Coronel, 92, told the court how he was made to drink blood from his own wounds, had his head dunked in a toilet bowl with feces, and given repeated electric shocks.

- Justice, not revenge -

The Stroessner dictatorship left a tally of 59 extra-judicial executions, 336 people disappeared, nearly 20,000 illegal detentions, and almost 19,000 cases of torture.

On the scale of small Paraguay, it affected "one in 133 inhabitants," according to a Truth and Justice Commission report from 2008.

Prosecutions have been rare, however, with about a dozen police officers held for torture and Stroessner himself, sentenced in absentia, dying in 2006 at the age of 93 never having been extradited from retirement in Brazil.

The trial, victim Antonio Valenzuela Pecci told AFP, is "of great importance, because very few police officers... of the Stroessner dictatorship were convicted."

He added: "It is a desire for justice that animates us, not revenge."

For her part, Kanonnikoff insisted that "all these people who committed crimes against humanity continue to be protected. This guy (Torres) knows perfectly well what happened to the people who disappeared in 1976."

This was a year of mass arrests at the height of "Operation Condor" that saw South America's military dictatorships club together to hunt down and eliminate left-wing dissidents across national borders.

The right-wing Colorado Party that was in power in Paraguay at the time continues to dominate politics today, and Torres was honored by the state in 2014 for a half-century career -- an event that sparked much anger.

Prosecutors have sought a 15-year prison sentence for Torres, whose defense lawyers have asked for the charges to be dismissed.

A ruling is expected next week.

[**back to contents**]

Venezuela

Venezuela I situation: ICC Appeals Chamber to deliver judgment on appeal against authorisation to resume investigations on 1 March 2024 — Practical information (ICC) February 16, 2024

> **On 1 March 2024 at 15h00 (The Hague local time), the Appeals Chamber of the International Criminal Court (ICC) will deliver its judgment on the appeal of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela against Pre Trial Chamber I's decision authorising the resumption of the investigation in the situation.**

The judgment will be delivered during at a public hearing in Courtroom II at the seat of the Court in The Hague (Netherlands) in the presence of the Office of the Prosecutor, the Representatives of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and the Office of Public Counsel for Victims (OPCV). The session will be transmitted live through the ICC website. The Appeals Chamber in this appeal is composed of Judge Marc Perrin de Brichambaut, Presiding, Judge Piotr Hofmański, Judge Luz del Carmen Ibáñez Carranza, Judge Solomy Balungi Bossa and Judge Gocha Lordkipanidze. Background: Venezuela ratified the Rome Statute on 7 June 2000. On 27 September 2018, the Office of the Prosecutor received a referral from a group of States Parties to the Rome Statute, namely the Republic of Argentina, Canada, the Republic of Colombia, the Republic of Chile, the Republic of Paraguay, and the Republic of Peru, regarding the situation in the Venezuela since 12 February 2014. On 3 November 2021, the Prosecution announced its decision to proceed with investigations. On 21 April 2022, the Prosecution notified Pre-Trial Chamber I that it had received a request from Venezuela to defer the Office's investigations in favour of the actions carried out by the national authorities of Venezuela, pursuant to article 18(2) of the Rome Statute. On 1 November 2022, the Prosecution requested the Pre-Trial Chamber to resume the investigation in this Situation. On 27 June 2023, Pre-Trial Chamber I authorised the ICC Prosecution to resume its investigation in the situation in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela I, pursuant to article 18(2) of the Statute. On 3 July 2023, Venezuela submitted its notice of appeal against the Pre-Trial Chamber's Article 18(2) Decision. On 14 August 2023, Venezuela filed its appeal brief. In the course of these appellate proceedings, the Appeals Chamber received written submissions from the Prosecutor and the Office of Public Counsel for Victims, as well as representations from victims and observations from the Organization of American States Panel of Independent International Experts. On 7 and 8 November 2023, the Appeals Chamber convened a hearing to fully address the issues arising in this appeal.

[**back to contents**]

TOPICS

Truth and Reconciliation Commission

Tamil Diaspora Organizations contend that Sri Lanka's TRC Commission will not deliver justice for Tamils (WPRI 12 News) February 21, 2024

> **Tamil Diaspora organizations call for consultation with victims, an integrated transitional justice process and early implementation of trust-building efforts prior to the establishment of yet one more in a long line of ineffective commissions for the benefit of the international community.**

In December 2023 Sri Lanka tabled legislation for a Commission on Truth, Unity and Reconciliation, which had been a talking point for almost a year and supposedly was developed based on South Africa's Truth & Reconciliation Commission(1). Sri Lanka has a long history of setting up commissions, which are either ineffective or have their recommendations ignored or both(2). Sri Lanka also has a long history of war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide which it would prefer not to have to address. Some of the most serious pressure for justice for international crimes originates outside the island, so the government attempts to show good faith efforts with an ever-growing thicket of powerless government or government-appointed bodies(3)

A TRC process was successful in South Africa because it was convened after the Botha regime acknowledged that the fundamental cause for the unrest was Apartheid and that racist system was abolished. In Sri Lanka, the Sinhala Buddhist establishment in the South has not taken any genuine steps to find a lasting political solution addressing the fundamental causes for the legitimate Tamil struggle for self-determination. Having been subject to mass atrocity crimes including genocide, the Tamil people expect an independent and international accountability process to hold to account all perpetrators of these crimes and to facilitate remedial justice including a constitutional framework that recognizes their inalienable rights. Only such an approach could allow the Tamil people to decide their political, cultural, social and economic destiny and live in security in their traditional homeland in the North-East of the island.

The international community should note the lack of any justice and accountability process associated with this new commission. The Government of Sri Lanka has repeatedly demonstrated that it does not have the political will to end impunity for past war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide(4). This new effort is no different. Without any real reckoning with the past, there can be little progress on either unity or reconciliation.

"If the Sri Lankan Government is serious about Truth, Unity and Reconciliation, it should consider first establishing an honest and credible partnership with victims and, second, demonstrating that it understands progress is only possible through a coordinated transitional justice process. Third, before yet another commission is established, there are a good number of confidence-building actions to halt the on-going structural genocide of the Tamils which should be taken to create the appropriate atmosphere for progress", , said Pushparany Williams, President of USTAG.

Organizations which endorse this PR: 1. Australian Tamil Congress; chairperson@australiantamilcongress.com 2. Federation of Tamil Sangams of North America (FeTNA); contact@fetna.org 3 Ilankai Tamil Sangam; president@sangam.org 4.United States Tamil Action Group (USTAG); info@theustag.org 5. World Thamil Organization; wtogroup@gmail.com

NPA's apartheid case shame: State prosecutors have 'failed' to investigate crimes exposed by the TRC (Daily Maverick) By Dianne Hawker
February 21, 2024

> **The National Prosecuting Authority is in danger of not meeting its five-year deadline to conclude investigations into apartheid-era crimes referred to it by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.**

This is according to a recent report concluded by advocates Dumisa Ntsebeza SC and Sha'ista Kazee who concluded a three-month probe into the workings of the NPA's TRC component.

The investigation was commissioned by the NPA to determine whether the unit's structure was effective for investigating and concluding 133 outstanding TRC-related cases linked to apartheid-era crimes.

The NPA has faced numerous problems in getting through these cases, including internal processes, lack of political will, the lapsing of time and cooperation with the police, the report pointed out.

"The need for a legal opinion of this type, some two-and-a-half decades after the conclusion of the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, is a devastating indictment on South Africa…

"It is evident, though, that in our modern history, we have failed to honour those who suffered for justice and freedom in our land.

"Our finding is that the NPA, the state entity responsible for discharging the mandate to bring justice to the victims and survivors of apartheid-era crimes between 1 March 1960 and 5 December 1993, has failed in its mandate," the report says.

The NPA set up its TRC component in September 2021 within the office of Deputy National Director of Public Prosecutions, Rodney de Kock. The unit is currently dealing with 133 cases referred to the NPA by the TRC, in matters where amnesty was not given or the alleged perpetrators did not come forward to give evidence.

Although it has dedicated staff, including 25 prosecutors and 40 investigators, the report raises concerns about the slow progress of the cases.

The component has categorised its work into three groups:

A – cases where evidence still needs to be secured. B – cases that need expert reports and DNA analysis. C – cases where the investigation is nearing completion. An examination of this categorisation showed that 64% of the cases are still in Category A, 10% are in Category B and only 24% – nearing the end of investigation – are in Category C.

"It is apparent that the majority of cases remain at the beginning stage of the investigation and require the location of and access to available evidence, the docket and the inquest report, for example.

"It is surprising and concerning that the majority of cases remain in Category A, despite the passing of some 22 months of dedicated and focused work by the investigating officers and prosecutions working together.

"If the documents cannot be located over 22 months, in circumstances where there are full-time investigators and prosecutors on the task, it is inconceivable that these matters will move forward at an expedited rate and be prosecuted over the next five years," the report says.

'Systematic obstructions'

Ntsebeza and Kazee spoke to several investigating officers and prosecutors working on the cases and heard about some of the causes of the delays.

For instance, they had problems accessing important documents and tracing potential witnesses due to the amount of time that had passed.

They also found that former police Special Branch members refused to cooperate, including those already given amnesty during the TRC process.

There had also been "delays in securing legal representation for accused persons who are former South African Police and Security Branch members", which Ntsebeza and Kazee believe are "readily capable of resolution".

"The consequence of the impasse is of serious concern because any delay by the SAPS in authorising the funding of legal representation to alleged perpetrators means that the matter is incapable of proceeding in court.

"This creates a backlog on the court roll and raises the grave possibility of the prosecution being struck from the court roll.

"It is lamentable that even after a decision to prosecute has been taken, cases are capable of being held hostage by another organ of state," the report said.

Ntsebeza and Kazee note that the SAPS is "capable of effectively stymying the progress of TRC-related cases at the investigation stage".

Read more in Daily Maverick: The secret 'Pact of Forgetting' and the suppression of post-TRC prosecutions

"The impasse concerning payment for essential work carried out by the SAPS Forensic Unit in Pretoria, particularly for scene reconstruction and simulation, and the finalisation of the report, also falls to be addressed at the national level.

"It is these systemic obstructions which may well result in the TRC component not meeting its five-year target."

Ntsebeza and Kazee also note that the lack of progress in investigations and frequent changes in investigators has left the affected families with a "deep distrust of the investigation and prosecution process", which is "not without foundation".

Commission of inquiry

Ntsebeza and Kazee also investigated whether there was a need for a deeper look into allegations of political interference within the NPA, allegations which, if found to be true, would amount to criminal misconduct.

It has recommended a full commission of inquiry be set up in terms of section 84 2(f) of the Constitution or the Commissions Act of 1947 "to investigate the extent of, and rationale behind, the political interference with the NPA between the period 2003 to 2017."

The report notes that while the allegations of interference have been made publicly, this legal opinion did not have full investigative powers that would allow it to subpoena witnesses.

It has recommended that if an inquiry is set up, senior officials be subpoenaed, "including former president (Thabo) Mbeki and the former ministers of justice, police and defence".

It also recommends the calling of the former heads of the National Intelligence Agency, the Special Investigating Unit and the now defunct crime-fighting unit, the Scorpions.

The NPA is yet to confirm whether it will request the President to set up such an inquiry, as required by the Constitution.

Read more in Daily Maverick: The Truth and Reconciliation Commission has still not resulted in restorative justice

Former NPA head Vusi Pikoli, who previously complained about political interference in efforts to prosecute the TRC-related cases, told Daily Maverick that such an inquiry "all depends on political will on the part of the government".

"Given the fact that it might implicate members of the former government, including ministers and senior officials, it would be like government taking itself to court," he said.

Pikoli noted, however, that there was a legal obligation to fully probe allegations of interference in the work of the NPA, and criminal consequences attached to this through the NPA Act.

"The NPA is expected to carry out its function without interference. An inquiry won't help the victims but it will serve as a deterrent in the conduct of government ministers to act in terms of the law and that there are consequences," he said.

Lukhanyo Calata, whose father Fort was murdered along with Matthew Goniwe, Sicelo Mhlauli and Sparrow Mkhonto – the "Cradock Four" – welcomes the finding that a commission of inquiry should be set up.

"We haven't had an inquiry into this issue. The Zondo Commission had nothing to do with allegations of political interference at the NPA when it came to TRC cases. The notion that South Africa has 'inquiry fatigue' is false.

"We need to find out who the people are at the executive level who interfered with this case and we need to find out why they did this," he said.

He added that the NPA's previous decisions not to examine the TRC-related cases sent a message to families that they were "not deserving of justice".

While happy that the NPA had decided to reopen the Cradock Four case, Calata was concerned about the impact the delays have had.

"We must welcome the small progress that has been made in the appointment of prosecutors and investigators. It shows that people in government are taking this seriously, But it is almost too little too late. We should have had specialised courts set up to deal with TRC cases.

"When we say the ANC administration failed us, it is because they never put in place the building blocks to deal with these matters," he said.

Cracking the whip

Ntsebeza and Kazee say that in addition to a commission of inquiry, NPA leaders need to move with urgency.

"There is a plan and a target and a structure. The NPA leadership must insist on results, on outcomes of the investigative process, of prosecutions that are based on solid evidence and cooperation from all other organs of state.

"There is no nice way to state this demand that needs to be made from the NPA. The NDPP must crack the whip."

The report recommends that the NPA should urgently finalise its internal training manual and policy for TRC prosecutors and that all investigation reports, statements and affidavits be uploaded to a central database in electronic format to help facilitate links between cases.

The NPA had not responded to Daily Maverick's questions at the time of publication, saying only that it needed more time to respond.

[**back to contents**]

Terrorism

[**back to contents**]

Piracy

Fears that pirates are returning to seas off Somalia (Macau Business) February 14, 2024

> **The daring attack in December bore unsettling hallmarks of the piracy that once terrorised global shipping off eastern Africa: a cargo vessel hijacked, its crew taken to Somalia, and disappeared.**

The successful capture of the foreign vessel was the first by Somali pirates since 2017, and follows a spike in armed seaborne attacks around the Horn of Africa not seen in years.

Analysts caution that Somali piracy poses nowhere near the threat it did in 2011, when navies around the world had to deploy warships to beat back the scourge and restore order at sea.

But this recent upswing in pirate activity has raised further concerns about marine security and shipping at a time when crucial trade corridors off Yemen have come under siege.

The UK Marine Trade Operations, which monitors piracy, recorded six incidents off Somalia's coast since mid-December, from approaches by crews armed with machine guns and rocket launchers, to successful hijackings.

The MICA Center, a French maritime security agency, noted the "possible resurgence" of piracy off Somalia in a 2023 report. It recorded nine attacks over that year, describing the number as "novel".

Many of these incidents occurred off Puntland, the historic hub of Somali piracy. The northern state wraps around the Horn of Africa and boasts long coastlines on the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean.

Eric Jaslin, Commander of the MICA Center, said the increase occurred "almost simultaneously" as Yemen-based Huthi rebels began targeting boats headed for Israel in retaliation for the war in Gaza between Israel and Hamas.

"Almost at the same time, we began to observe a phenomena of piracy against dhows off the coast of Puntland," he said, referring to the traditional wooden fishing boats that sail the Indian Ocean.

A number of dhow hijackings last year raised the possibility that Somalia's dormant crews could be "re-equipping" for attacks further out at sea, said Timothy Walker, a researcher at the Institute for Security Studies (ISS).

Somali pirates have traditionally sought to capture a "mother ship" — a motorised dhow or fishing trawler — capable of sailing greater distances where they can target larger vessels.

Since the Huthi attacks, many cargo ships have slowed down hundreds of miles out at sea to await instructions on whether to proceed to the Red Sea, Walker noted.

"It creates a hunting ground," he said.

These ships have become especially vulnerable as some foreign navies have relocated from the Indian Ocean to the Red Sea in response to the Huthi attacks, analysts say.

Local conditions in Somalia have also allowed pirates to regroup.

State elections in Puntland over December and January meant some coastal security positions were vacated, said Omar Mahmood, researcher at the International Crisis Group.

"These two reasons — on land and offshore — provided an opportunity for these criminal networks that have always been there," he told AFP.

Puntland's Marine Police Force did not respond to requests for comment from AFP.

In Eyl, a traditional pirate stronghold on Puntland's east coast, locals say fishing trawlers from Southeast Asia, Iran and Europe plundering seas off Somalia have stirred anger in coastal communities.

"The reason why the pirates are re-emerging is because of the widespread illegal fishing on the coast," said Ahmed Abdi Nuh, an elder from Eyl.

These attacks could still constitute piracy under global definitions and have surfaced time and again, experts say.

"A lot of justification for the pirates who were captured in the past was a kind of Robin Hood argument — that they were actually preventing illegal fishing," Walker said.

Between January 29 and February 2 this year, four fishing boats were freed by the Indian and Seychellois navies after being hijacked, sometimes more than 800 nautical miles (1,500 kilometres) from the coast.

"The further away from Somalia the less likelihood for a connection to a fishing scenario," said Hans Tino Hansen, CEO of Danish maritime intelligence and security company Risk Intelligence.

Analysts played down fears the bad days of Somali piracy were back, stressing the presence of foreign navies had deterred once-wanton criminality at sea.

The overall number of piracy attacks has fallen sharply from a 2011 peak, when internal chaos in Somalia, and the absence of a coast guard, allowed pirates to hijack commercial ships and hold crews to ransom.

Since then a multinational naval force from as far afield as Japan, the UK and Brazil has brought muscle to patrols around Somalia, blunting this once-lucrative trade.

Compared to the early 2000s, navies have advanced systems for detecting pirate activity and merchant ships are more aware of the risks and familiar with security procedures.

Before the hijacking of the Maltese-flagged bulk carrier MV Ruen on December 14, no cargo vessel had been successfully boarded by Somali pirates since 2017, and before that 2012.

Mahmood said the recent uptick in pirate activity was "more likely to be a flare-up than full-fledged resurgence".

In Eyl, locals were doubtful too.

"There are warships patrolling the sea. I don't believe any pirate in their right mind would take the chance," said Ahmed Siyad, a fisherman in Eyl.

UN shipping agency working 'tirelessly' to solve Red Sea crisis (Hellenic Shipping News) February 13, 2024

> **The United Nations shipping agency is working "tirelessly" to solve the Red Sea crisis, which is severely disrupting the global transport of goods, according to its head.**

Yemen's Houthi rebels, supported by Iran, have launched dozens of attacks against ships in the Red Sea since November, targeting boats headed for Israel in an act of "solidarity" with inhabitants of the Gaza Strip, which is under heavy bombardment by Israel.

Despite retaliatory strikes by the U.S. and U.K., the rebels are still launching attacks, firing at the U.S. ship "Star Nasia" and U.K. vessel "Morning Tide" on Tuesday.

The International Maritime Organization (IMO), the U.N. agency responsible for security at sea, is working to ensure that "parties continue to talk so that the situation does not degenerate any further, and we can return to a safe maritime environment," its Panama-born Secretary General Arsenio Dominguez told Agence France-Presse (AFP).

"We are working tirelessly to coordinate action that will lead to a resolution," Dominguez added from the IMO's London headquarters.

The region is crucial for the global transport of goods, with around 12% of global maritime trade normally passing through the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, which controls access to the southern Red Sea.

Many shipowners have decided to stop operating in the Red Sea, instead sending their ships on the longer route around the south of Africa.

But "this is not the ideal solution," admitted Dominguez, as it increases the cost of transport, and ultimately the price of the cargo.

"We now have more than 60% of the annual tonnage that normally goes through the Suez Canal now going around southern Africa," he explained.

Separately, Egypt's Finance Minister Mohamed Maait on Sunday said part of the impact on Suez Canal revenue of the Red Sea attacks could be absorbed, thanks to previous growth which had been doing well before the incidents started.

Maait said the government was planning to rely more on the private sector in terms of project expenditure.

"If you look at (project spending) figures for the last seven months, it has dropped by 10%," he told Reuters on the sidelines of the World Governments Summit in Dubai.

Meanwhile, insurance has also gone up and increased fuel use is creating additional costs.

There is also a human impact, with the crew having to spend extra days at sea, said Dominguez. The IMO's objective is therefore to "provide practical and operational measures so that ships can continue to operate," he added.

Despite the headwinds, Dominguez said he remained "optimistic" about a resolution to the conflict.

[**back to contents**]

Gender-Based Violence

Hillary Clinton and Sheryl Sandberg decry sexual violence as a war tactic (CNN) By Catherine Thorbecke
February 9, 2024

> **Hillary Clinton, Sheryl Sandberg and a coalition of scholars, government officials and legal experts discussed Friday how to prevent sexual violence as a weapon of war.**

"We have seen an epidemic, an alarming epidemic of gender-based violence as a weapon of war," Clinton said during her opening remarks at the event in New York hosted by Columbia University's Institute of Global Politics and the Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security. Clinton, the former Secretary of State in the Obama administration, is a member of Columbia's faculty.

"This should be viewed as the global problem that it is, but sadly it is nothing new," Clinton added, noting this issue re-emerged during recent conflicts in Sudan, Darfur, Ukraine, and in Israel on Hamas' October 7 attack.

Israeli authorities have accused Hamas militants of committing widespread, systemic sexual violence as part of their attack. Despite mounting evidence from Israeli investigators and eyewitness sources, Hamas has repeatedly denied allegations that its fighters committed sexual violence during the attack.

Sandberg, the former chief operating officer of Facebook and founder of the nonprofit group Lean In, interviewed women who have been working on addressing this issue in Ukraine and Africa, emphasizing that it is important to learn from past conflicts where these atrocities have occurred in order to prevent these same horrors from taking place in the future.

"Each conflict sets the precedent for the next," Sandberg said. "How we handle each one matters for what happens in the future."

Sandberg has been raising awareness to the reports of widespread sexual violence on October 7, and previously spoke out alongside Clinton at a UN event last December in New York that broadcast witness testimony and other evidence of rape being used as a tool of war during the attacks.

"I feel so strongly that no matter the politics of a situation, rape can never be overlooked, because that would set such a dangerous precedent for people all over the world," Sandberg said Friday.

Sandberg interviewed Oleksandra Matviichuk, a Nobel Peace Prize-winning lawyer who has been documenting Russia's war crimes against civilians. Matviichuk said sexual violence during the war in Ukraine is violence that "is directed to the whole Ukrainian society."

"The survivors of sexual violence feel shame because it happens with them," Matviichuk said. "Their relatives, families, neighbors feel guilt because they can't stop this. And the other members of communities, they they feel fear, because they can be treated in the same way."

Some speakers called for new approaches to academic research. Others identified policies or collaborations that could help. Clinton ultimately called for more support from the UN and other international players in holding accountable perpetrators of this type of violence.

"Accountability is critical in preventing gender violence," Clinton said. "It's particularly important when the violence is committed by people in positions of authority, including the military or the police force."

"Part of the reason these crimes are so rampant is because they are perpetrated with impunity," Clinton added.

Finally, Clinton implored that the conference on Friday was not merely about "the symbolism of women in leadership roles" with her and Sandberg as headliners.

"It is about understanding deeply, the very real ways that women and girls are impacted differently by global challenges including this challenge of conflict-related sexual violence," Clinton said.

Clinton's remarks at Columbia University – and remarks by some other speakers – were briefly interrupted by protesters chanting "Free Palestine." Linda Thomas-Greenfield, former US Ambassador to the UN seemingly addressed these protestors at one point, recognizing "there are a lot of emotions about all of these issues."

"Please be assured that there is no issue that's related to sexual violence, violence anywhere in the world that we're not concerned about and we're not working on every single day," Thomas-Greenfield said.

[**back to contents**]

Commentary and Perspectives

[**back to contents**]

WORTH READING

War Crimes Prosecution Watch Staff

Founder/Advisor
Dean Michael P. Scharf

Faculty Advisor
Jim Johnson

Editor-in-Chief
Anna Buczek

Managing Editors

Technical Editor-in-Chief
Jacqueline Quander

Senior Technical Editors
Madison Turk

Associate Technical Editors
Madison Turk

Emerging Issues Advisor
Contact: **warcrimeswatch@pilpg.org**

Africa

Libya
Kelsey Tschanen, Associate Editor
Madison Turk, Senior Editor

Central African Republic
Kelsey Tschanen, Associate Editor
Madison Turk, Senior Editor

Sudan & South Sudan
Emily Walling, Associate Editor
Madison Turk, Senior Editor

Democratic Republic of the Congo
Emily Walling, Associate Editor
Madison Turk, Senior Editor

Côte d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast)
Anna Buczek, Associate Editor
Madison Turk, Senior Editor

Lake Chad Region
Nikita Joshi, Associate Editor
Madison Turk, Senior Editor

Mali
Nikita Joshi, Associate Editor
Madison Turk, Senior Editor

Liberia
Nikita Joshi, Associate Editor
Madison Turk, Senior Editor

Uganda
Margaret Crookstan, Associate Editor
Madison Turk, Senior Editor

Kenya
Margaret Crookstan, Associate Editor
Madison Turk, Senior Editor

Rwanda (International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda)
Margaret Crookstan, Associate Editor
Madison Turk, Senior Editor

Somalia
Margaret Crookstan, Associate Editor
Madison Turk, Senior Editor

Europe

Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina, War Crimes Section
Jacqueline Quander, Associate Editor
Carsen Thompson, Senior Editor

International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia
Anna Buczek, Associate Editor
Caresen Thompson, Senior Editor

Domestic Prosecutions in the Former Yugoslavia
Jacqueline Quander, Associate Editor
Carsen Thompson, Senior Editor

Turkey
Anna Buczek, Associate Editor
Caresen Thompson, Senior Editor

Kosovo Specialist Chambers
Anna Buczek, Associate Editor
Caresen Thompson, Senior Editor

Azerbaijan
Anna Buczek, Associate Editor
Caresen Thompson, Senior Editor

Kosovo Specialist Chambers
Anna Buczek, Associate Editor
Caresen Thompson, Senior Editor

Azerbaijan
Anna Buczek, Associate Editor
Caresen Thompson, Senior Editor

Russia
Xi Chen, Associate Editor
Caresen Thompson, Senior Editor

Middle-East

Iraq
Carsen Thompson, Senior Editor

Syria
Carsen Thompson, Senior Editor

Yemen
Xi Chen, Associate Editor
Carsen Thompson, Senior Editor

Israel and Palestine
Jacqueline Quander, Associate Editor
Xi Chen, Senior Editor

Asia

Afghanistan
Anna Buczek, Associate Editor
Estefania Sixto Seijas, Senior Editor

Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia
Anna Buczek, Associate Editor
Estefania Sixto Seijas, Senior Editor

Bangladesh
Anne Buczek, Associate Editor
Estefania Sixto Seijas, Senior Editor

War Crimes Investigations in Myanmar
Anna Buczek, Associate Editor
Estefania Sixto Seijas, Senior Editor

Americas

North and Central America
Annalie Buscarino, Associate Editor

South America
Katherine McBane, Associate Editor

Venezuela
Katherine McBane, Associate Editor

Topics

Truth and Reconciliation Commissions
Jessica Chapman, Associate Editor

Terrorism
Anna Buczek, Associate Editor

Piracy
Annalie Buscarino, Associate Editor

Gender-Based Violence
Katherine McBane, Associate Editor

Commentary and Perspectives
Anna Buczek, Associate Editor
Lucas Katz, Senior Editor

Worth Reading

Anna Buczek, Associate Editor

Anna Buczek, Senior Editor

War Crimes Prosecution Watch is prepared by the
International Justice Practice of the **Public International Law & Policy Group**
and the **Frederick K. Cox International Law Center** of
Case Western Reserve University School of Law
and is made possible by grants from the **Carnegie Corporation of New York**
and the **Open Society Institute**.

Grotian Moment: The International War Crimes Trial Blog:
http://law.case.edu/grotian-moment-blog/

Frederick K. Cox International Law Center:
http://law.case.edu/centers/cox/

Cox Center War Crimes Research Portal:
http://law.case.edu/war-crimes-research-portal/

To subscribe or unsubscribe from this newsletter, please email ***warcrimeswatch@pilpg.org***.