

Verdict against South Sudan soldiers 'finally delivers justice' – UN Mission

The United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) has applauded the verdict by a military court on Thursday, that found ten government soldiers guilty of murder, rape and other crimes against civilians and journalists at a hotel in the capital Juba, just over two years ago.

[“The victims and survivors of this horrific attack deserved justice and that has been served today,”](#) said UNMISS in a statement.

“The outcome of the trial also sends a powerful message to other would-be offenders, including members of the armed forces, that they will be prosecuted and punished for such violence,” it added.

It is the first time that soldiers have been sentenced for atrocity crimes in South Sudan, where government and rebel soldiers have been accused of committing numerous atrocities against civilians since civil conflict intensified in 2013.

The brutal assaults – which included the murder of a local journalist and rape of five foreign aid workers – occurred at the Terrain Hotel in July 2016, amidst heavy fighting between Government and rival forces which lasted three days and left dozens dead.

The judgement delivered early on Thursday, handed down lengthy prison terms to the guilty and also ordered the Government to pay damages to the victims.

The victims and survivors of this horrific attack deserved justice and that has been served today – [UN Mission in South Sudan](#)

However, according to evidence raised during the trial, “questions remain about whether accountability for these crimes reached high enough up the chain of command,” added UNMISS.

‘True courage’ of witnesses and survivors

In the statement, the UN Mission also commended the witnesses and survivors for demonstrating “true courage and patience” by participating in the judicial process, which began in May 2017.

“There were some significant challenges throughout the process, including the detention conditions of the defendants, some impediments to the defendants’ access to counsel, and the trial of these crimes against civilians in a military rather than civilian court,” it said.

However, the UN Mission noted, as the trial progressed, there was a willingness to adopt new procedures, including allowing testimony to be given via video link and using closed sessions to protect the identities of witnesses.

Widespread sexual and gender-based violence persists

The UN Mission also underscored that despite bringing to justice the offenders in one particular case, the “broader problem” of widespread sexual and gender-based violence against South Sudanese women and children, continues to fester.

The world’s youngest nation has remained mired in conflict and instability, with most cases of violence going unreported and there is widespread impunity across the country, added UNMISS.



UNMISS Photo

A UN integrated patrol at a protection of civilians site in Bentiu, South Sudan. After widespread violence across the country in July 2016, such patrols helped local communities feel more secure.

2016 violence and the aftermath

The fighting between the Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLA) and the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement/Army in Opposition (SPLM/A-IO) in July 2016 saw dozens killed, with more than 200 reported rapes, and widespread looting and destruction of property.

UN compounds and UNMISS-managed civilian protection sites also came under attack. Two UN peacekeepers from the Chinese contingent were killed and several injured, and 182 buildings on the UN House compound were struck by bullets, mortars and rocket-propelled grenades.

An [independent special investigation](#) – [commissioned](#) by then Secretary-General

Ban Ki-moon and led by retired Major General Patrick Cammaert of the Netherlands – [found](#) “a lack of leadership on the part of key senior Mission personnel had culminated in a chaotic and ineffective response to the violence.”

The investigation was unable to verify allegations that peacekeepers failed to respond to acts of violence committed directly in front of them.

In [response](#) to the report, the UN [moved to enhance training](#) as well as accountability, including working with Member States to bolster the protection of civilians by uniformed personnel in future peacekeeping operations.

[‘Legally binding’ nuclear-test ban essential to prevent ‘catastrophic impact’ says UN chief](#)

“Last month I visited Japan and met with survivors of the atomic bomb attack on Nagasaki,” Mr. Guterres said at a high-level meeting in New York, commemorating the Day. “Through the testimony of the survivors, the Hibakusha, we are reminded of the need to ensure that nuclear weapons are [never used again](#).”

Mr. Guterres also stressed the need to “remember the victims of the disastrous era of widespread nuclear testing.”

“The legacy of more than 2,000 nuclear tests has touched people and communities in many regions, from the residents of Semipalatinsk and the steppe of Kazakhstan, to South Pacific islanders, and the Maralinga Tjarutja people of South Australia,” he declared, adding that included were some of the world’s most vulnerable communities, in some of the most fragile areas of the planet.

Moreover, the UN chief pointed out that nuclear testing inevitably has a “catastrophic impact” on the environment, human health, food security and economic development.

Every effort must be made to bring about the immediate entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty – *UN Secretary-General*

“That is why we should all welcome the robust norm against nuclear testing that has developed since the end of the Cold War, including through the

voluntary moratoria implemented by most States that possess nuclear weapons," he stressed.

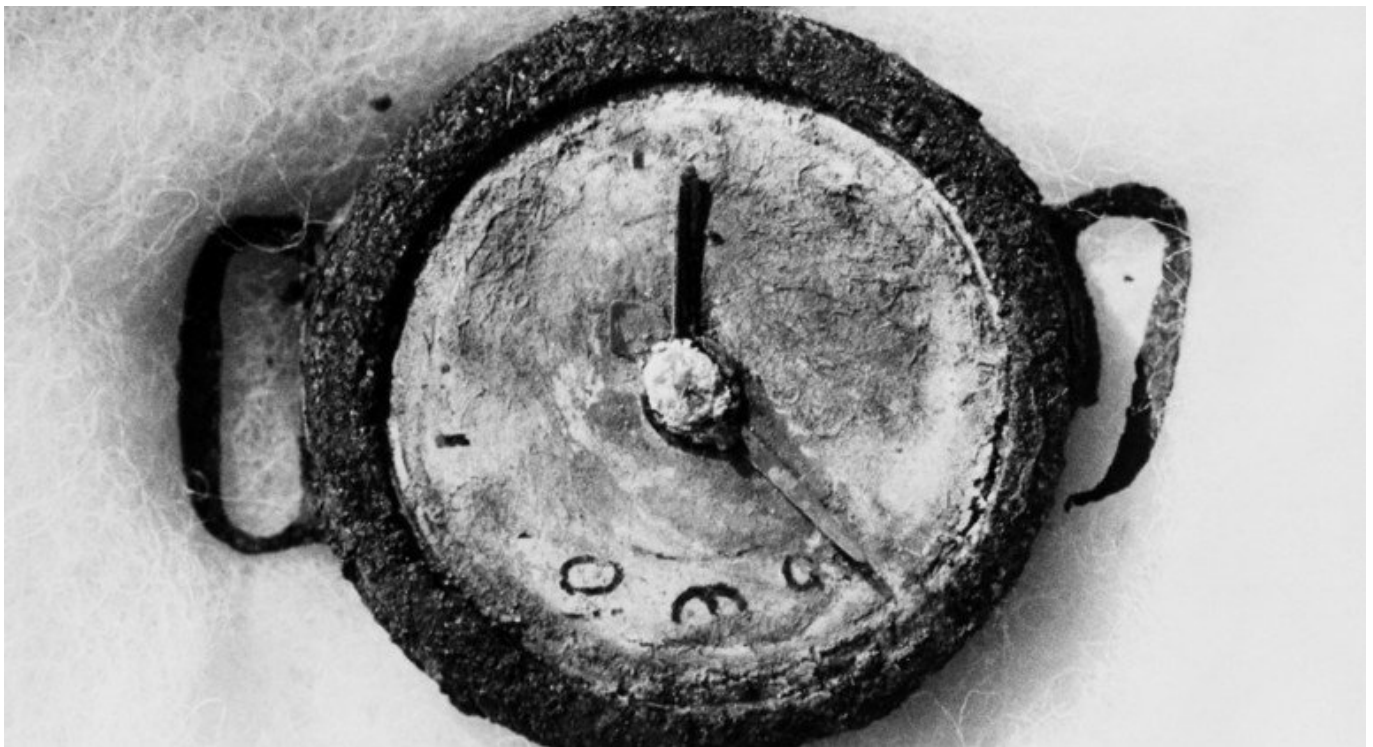
Since the turn of the century, only the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, commonly known as North Korea, has broken this norm, leading to condemnation from the Security Council and repeated imposition of sanctions.

What these tests have shown is that "no ad hoc measure can replace a global, legally binding ban on nuclear-testing," the UN chief underscored.

"Every effort must be made to bring about the immediate entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, CTBT," he continued. "As I stated in my disarmament agenda, 'Securing Our Common Future,' the CTBT has an essential role within the nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation regime."

By constraining the development and qualitative improvement of nuclear weapons, the treaty puts a brake on the nuclear arms race and serves as a barrier against States that might seek to develop, manufacture and use acquire nuclear weapons in violation of their non-proliferation commitments.

"Yet," he lamented, "more than 20 years since its negotiation, the Treaty has yet to enter into force. The failure to do so prevents its full implementation and undermines its permanence in the international security architecture."



UN Photo/Yuichiro Sasaki

Although more than 180 countries have signed the treaty, and mostly ratified it, it can only enter into force after it is ratified by eight countries with nuclear technology capacity, namely China, Egypt, India, Iran, Israel, North Korea, Pakistan and the United States.

Taking the podium, General Assembly President, Miroslav Lajčák, spoke of how nuclear testing escalates tensions.

“They create openings for [political miscalculations](#). And they bring us closer to the brink,” he asserted, saying the meeting at UN Headquarters was “vital for our planet, and for humanity.”

Turning to the CTBT, he bemoaned the fact that it has yet to become active.

“We need a legally binding system; we need a clear verification mechanism; we need the CTBT to enter into force,” he stated, urging the eight States required to ratify “to do so urgently.”

Finally, he hoped to see “tangible” disarmament action on the Korean Peninsula, noting that “verification is crucial for progress.”

[UN hails ‘ground-breaking’ Supreme Court ruling to decriminalize gay sex in India](#)

A landmark ruling in India that decriminalizes gay sex has been welcomed as a “ground-breaking decision” by the [UN agency](#) leading the fight against HIV/AIDS.

India’s Supreme Court on Thursday struck down a key section of a colonial-era law which made specific sexual acts between adults illegal.

“Today is a day of gay pride, a day of celebration, a day when respect and dignity was finally restored in India for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) people,” Michel Sidibé, Executive Director of UNAIDS, [said](#) in a statement.

“I hope this decision sets the trend and is followed by similar decisions in other countries that remove unjust laws criminalizing homosexuality.”

UN [Secretary-General António Guterres](#) also welcomed the decision by India’s highest court, applauding the verdict of the Chief Justice, who said that discrimination and prejudice are always “irrational, indefensible, and arbitrary.”

The UN system in India expressed hope that it will boost efforts to stamp out stigma and discrimination against LGBTI people, which violates their human rights.

The UN office in Delhi issued a [statement](#) which stressed that “focus must now be on ensuring access to justice, including remedy; effective investigations of acts of violence and discrimination; and effective access to economic, social and cultural rights.”

Mr . Sidibé, the UNAIDS chief, explained that besides being a human rights violation, criminalization of consensual same-sex relations, hinders people from accessing and using services related to HIV prevention and increases their risk of acquiring the virus.

He said that in India, HIV prevalence among gay men and other men who have sex with men is nearly three per cent, while the rate among transgender people stands at just over three per cent. Meanwhile, the national average among all adults is just 0.26 per cent.

“Around three out of ten gay men and four out of ten transgender people in India who are living with HIV do not know their HIV status. Many LGBTI people living with HIV do not have access to HIV treatment,” he added.

With gay men accounting for 18 per cent of all new HIV infections worldwide. UNAIDS is calling on countries to ensure the human rights of all people are respected, regardless of their sexual orientation.

[UN condemns deadly twin bombings in Kabul, killing first-responders, sportsmen, journalists](#)

The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) condemned an attack on a Kabul sports centre on Wednesday, which killed at least 22 people, including first-responders, sportsmen, and two journalists who were covering the initial bombing for a local news agency. Around 75 others were wounded.

The first of two blasts occurred when a suicide bomber detonated himself inside a gym at a wrestling event. A car bomb was triggered soon after, as first responders attended the scene.

“This latest cynical act of terror targeting ordinary citizens of Kabul, along with first responders and journalists, is deeply shocking,” said Tadamichi Yamamoto, the UN Special Representative for Afghanistan.

The sports centre is located in Kabul’s Dashti-i-Barchi suburb, which is predominantly a Shi’a Muslim neighbourhood.

UNAMA has documented a pattern of attacks deliberately carried out against this minority community in recent years, the latest of which occurred on 15 August at an education centre.

As the Shi'a community prepares in coming days to commemorate [Ashura](#) – at which time millions of Shia Muslims globally mark the martyrdom of the prophet Mohammed's grandson at the Battle of Karbala, "immediate and long-term security measures must be commensurate with the continued risks this community is facing", said [a statement](#) released on Thursday by the Mission.

We join Afghans in expressing our revulsion at such a callous attack – *UN Special Representative Yamamoto*

UNAMA demanded that "the orchestrators of this campaign of systematic attacks against the Shi'a Muslim religious minority face justice for their crimes."

The UN mission also expressed its deep concern over the heavy price paid by Afghan media during the years-long civil conflict, with the killing of journalists in Afghanistan being among the highest in the world, and extended its deep condolences to families who had lost loved ones and wished the injured a quick recovery.

"We join Afghans in expressing our revulsion at such a callous attack," concluded Mr. Yamamoto.

According to news reports, while the Taliban denied responsibility, the attack bore the hallmarks of the terrorist group ISIL, also known as Da'esh, which has carried out a wave of bombings against minority Shiites in recent years.

In July, UNAMA released figures highlighting the tragic toll the conflict has had on civilians, revealing that the first half of 2018 was the deadliest for Afghans since UNAMA began documenting civilian casualties in 2009.

[Runaway climate change still "a real possibility": UN Secretary-General](#)

Greater ambition, urgency and action are needed if we are to prevent ever greater climate-related crises, said UN Chief [Antonió Guterres](#) on Wednesday, at the launch of the 2018 [New Climate Economy](#) report, at UN Headquarters in New York

The document, published by the [Global Commission on the Economy and Climate](#) – a project comprising several UN bodies, and other institutions – finds that

the benefits of smarter and clearer growth are significantly under-estimated, and that bold climate action could deliver \$26 trillion in economic benefits through to 2030.

Other benefits of switching to a clean economy include the creation of over 65 million new low-carbon jobs, and 700,000 fewer air pollution-related deaths.

Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, former Finance Minister of Nigeria and Co-Chair of the Global Commission, said that “policy makers should take their feet off the brakes, send a clear signal that the new growth story is here and that it comes with exciting economic and market opportunities. \$26 trillion and a more sustainable planet are on offer if we act decisively now.”

Speaking at the launch, Secretary-General Guterres said that momentum for climate action is growing every day, with over 130 of the world’s most influential companies now committed to using only renewable energy, fossil fuel-dependent countries looking to diversify, and over 250 investors with \$28 trillion in managed assets signing on to the [Climate Action 100+ initiative](#).

Shifting to a sustainable growth path has many other benefits. Climate resilient water supply and sanitation could save the lives of more than 360,000 infants every year, restoring degraded lands means better lives for farmers, and clean air has vast benefits for public health.

Mr. Guterres that clean energy systems help developing countries, where over 1 billion people still do not have access to electricity,” adding that “it can help deliver access to energy to the one billion people who currently lack electricity. For example, Bangladesh has installed more than four million solar home systems. This has created more than 115,000 jobs and saved rural households over \$400 million dollars in polluting fuels.”

Lord Nicholas Stern, Economics and Government Professor at the London School of Economics, who also Co-Chairs the Global Commission, said “we know we are grossly underestimating the benefits of this new growth story. And further, it becomes ever more clear that the risks of the damage from climate change are immense, and tipping points, irreversibilities, getting ever closer.”

Underlining the risks faced by the world, the UN chief said that climate change is “running faster than we are”, and that women, the poorest and the most vulnerable are hit first and worst by storms, floods, droughts, wildfires and rising seas.

Mr. Guterres reminded those present that the last 19 years included 18 of the warmest on record, that greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere continue to rise, and that there is still a significant gap between national commitments to lower emissions, and actual reductions.

The Secretary-General told those present that climate change will be high on the agenda of the 2018 opening session of the General Assembly, as part of efforts to galvanise action ahead of the milestone 2020 meeting of parties to

the 2015 [Paris Agreement](#).