

UK must end 'unlawful' administration of Chagos Archipelago 'as rapidly as possible,' top UN court rules

The UK Government is “under an obligation” to end its administration of the Chagos Archipelago “as rapidly as possible” the [International Court of Justice](#), the principal judicial body of the UN, stated in an [Advisory Opinion](#) released on Monday. The Opinion calls the continued administration of the archipelago “unlawful,” and “a wrongful act.”

The Chagos Islands were retained by the United Kingdom during negotiations over independence for the Indian Ocean island of Mauritius, which came to fruition in 1968. The islands have since been used for defence purposes by the UK and the United States, which established a military base on the island of Diego Garcia.

The entire Chagossian population was forcibly removed from the territory between 1967 and 1973, and prevented from returning. The former islanders are dispersed in several countries, including the UK, Mauritius and Seychelles. For the Court, ending the UK administration of the territory is a necessary step to the full decolonization of Mauritius in a manner “consistent with the right of peoples to self-determination.”

It includes a reminder that all Member States have an obligation to co-operate with the United Nations in bringing about the full decolonization of Mauritius. This would include the resettlement of Mauritian nationals on the Chagos Archipelago, an issue described as relating to the “protection of the human rights of those concerned.”

It states that, after a review of the circumstances in which the Council of Ministers of the colony of Mauritius agreed in principle to the detachment of the Chagos Archipelago, “the Court considers that this detachment was not based on the free and genuine expression of the will of the people concerned.”

The Opinion was delivered following a request by the UN General Assembly, and a request by Mauritius for the British Indian Ocean Territory, which includes the Chagos Archipelago, to be disbanded and the territory returned to the country, as well as a legal challenge by Mauritius to the UK Government’s creation of a marine protected area around islands.

Not a single child spared the 'mind-boggling violence' of Yemen's war

Four years of "mind-boggling violence" in Yemen "has not spared a single child", a top UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) official said on Monday, on the eve of a pledging conference in Geneva to help alleviate the suffering of millions across the country.

"In Yemen today, nearly 1.2 million children continue to live in 31 active conflict zones including Hudaydah, Taizz, Hajjah and Sa'da – in areas witnessing heavy, [war-related violence](#)", said Geert Cappelaere, UNICEF Regional Director for the Middle East and North Africa.

Since the [Stockholm Agreement](#) was reached following UN-brokered consultations last December between the Yemeni Government and Houthi rebel leaders, not enough has changed for the children there, the senior agency official declared.

The impact of the conflict in Yemen runs deep and has not spared a single child – *UNICEF Regional Director*

Every day since then, he said, children have been killed or injured, mostly while playing outdoors or on their way to or from school.

"The impact of the conflict in Yemen runs deep and has not spared a single child", spelled out Mr. Cappelaere. "Mind-boggling violence over the past four years, high levels of poverty, and decades of conflicts, neglect and deprivation, are putting a heavy strain on Yemeni society, tearing apart its social fabric – fundamental for any society and especially for children".

UNICEF and its humanitarian partners have stepped-up efforts to tackle the world's largest humanitarian crisis, with the World Bank and UNICEF providing 1.5 million of the country's poorest families with emergency cash assistance, to help prevent illegal child labour practices, marriage or recruitment into rebel forces.

"In 2019, UNICEF is appealing for \$542 million to continue responding to the massive needs of children in Yemen," the Regional Director said.

Noting that generosity alone "will not bring an end to children's suffering in Yemen", he again called on all warring parties to "put an end to violence in hotspots and across all of Yemen, protect civilians, keep children out of harm's way and allow humanitarian deliveries to children and their families wherever they are in the country."

As the international community meets in Geneva for a high-level pledging event for the humanitarian crisis on Tuesday, UNICEF appealed for

“unconditional contributions to provide lifesaving assistance” to Yemen’s children and urged a “massive re-investment” in the country to help Yemeni children have the future every parent aspires to for their own children.

“This is the only way that Yemen can stand back on its feet, stressed Mr. Cappelaere. “If not, Yemen will be riddled with violence and its future will hang by a thread – with disastrous consequences for children.”

Darfur peace process at a ‘standstill’ as demonstrations against Sudanese Government continue

Assistant Secretary-General for Africa, Bintou Keita, was briefing members on the operation of the UN-African Union Hybrid Operation in Darfur ([UNAMID](#)), conceding that it has “yet to be assessed” how recent political developments in Khartoum will impact peace in the troubled Darfur region.

Against the backdrop of more than ten weeks of protests across Sudan against fuel and cash shortages, which threaten to bring an end to his 30-years in power, President Bashir declared a state of emergency on Friday.

The president reportedly sacked his vice-president after declaring the state of national emergency, adding those duties to the current defense minister’s portfolio. He also dissolved elected regional governments, replacing them with “18 new governors from the military and security apparatus”, Ms. Keita told the Council, adding that “the Sudan armed forces are tasked to deliver law and order, in addition to national defense”.

“These developments have come at a time when the Darfur peace process had come to a standstill – once again – in the context of the ongoing demonstrations against the economic and political conditions in Sudan”, she continued.

“Conflict-related sexual violence remains a threat to the population in Darfur, especially displaced women and girls who face particular risk when they engage in livelihood activities outside IDP camps,” stressed Ms. Keita. “The fear of sexual violence also hampers the return of civilians to their places of origin.

UNAMID and the UN Country Team (UNCT) are continuing to work together towards a smooth transition from peacekeeping in Darfur to sustainable peacebuilding, said Ms. Keita who added that new Mission Headquarters in Zalingei is now “fully operational” and the office of the Joint Special Representative has relocated to Khartoum.

Flagging the “considerable political, humanitarian, and peacekeeping investments” made by the UN, she spelled out that it was “our collective responsibility to ensure that the exit of UNAMID does not create a vacuum that leads to persistent local level tensions or new risk factors”.

On drawing down the Mission in less than two months, she said that international efforts should be made “in earnest” to mobilize the needed resources to support UNAMID’s exit “while focusing on a difficult economic and social and humanitarian context in the larger Sudan.”

Noting that there are still close to two million IDPs in Darfur, she emphasized that “human rights, issues, including the protection of women, children, and vulnerable youth from violence, remain significant,” and that the local capacity for rule of law needs strengthening.

Ms. Keita concluded by saying that “UNAMID will spare no efforts” in its focus on protecting civilians, human rights, rule of law, the humanitarian situation and disarmament.

Make progress or risk redundancy, UN chief warns world disarmament body

A new global vision for arms control is needed and States must not “sleepwalk” into a new nuclear arms race, the [UN Secretary-General](#) said on Monday.

In an address to the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva, António Guterres highlighted several threats to world security, from chemical weapons to lethal autonomous weapons and hypersonic missiles.

His comments – which called for action to “alleviate tensions and take us back from the nuclear brink” – come ahead of a second planned summit later this week between US President Donald Trump and the leader of North Korea,

known officially as the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), Kim Jong-un.

"Key components of the international arms control architecture are collapsing," the UN chief said. "The continued use of chemical weapons with impunity is driving new proliferation. Thousands of civilian lives continue to be lost, because of illicit small arms and the use in urban areas of explosive weapons designed for open battlefields."

In addition, new weapon technologies were intensifying risks "in ways we do not yet understand and cannot even imagine", the UN Secretary-General added.

The past 70 years have seen major successes in disarmament initiatives, he insisted, noting that the most successful ones were those that were led by the "major powers".

But these gains are in "increasing jeopardy" amid a new arms race rendered "particularly dangerous" because of renewed uncertainty over nuclear weapons, Mr. Guterres said.

Highlighting the dangers of allowing the 1988 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty between Russia and the US and Russia to lapse, the UN chief warned that European States would be among the first where any insecurity "will be keenly felt".

Efforts must also be made to extend the "New START" arms reduction treaty between the US and Russia before it expires in 2021, he continued, since it was "the only international legal instrument limiting the size of the world's two largest nuclear arsenals".

Its inspection provisions represented important confidence-building measures that have benefited everyone, Mr. Guterres said, noting that "in the absence of trust, governments had sought "the strictest verification measures".

Such arms control procedures have been "one of the hallmarks" of international security for 50 years, he continued, adding that the joint Russia-US effort had resulted in global stockpiles of nuclear weapons decreasing to only one-sixth of what they were in 1985.

Today, however, "that legacy is in grave danger", the UN Secretary-General said, before reminding the forum that only last year, [he launched his Disarmament Agenda – "Securing Our Common Future"](#) – with 40 specific commitments to support disarmament.

His Agenda was a guide for action he noted, but also created to support Member States who have a "responsibility" to develop transparency and confidence-building tools that would help to "alleviate tensions and take us back from the nuclear brink".

Such steps should take into account regional nuclear challenges, the Secretary-General maintained, as well as technological developments including cyber security, artificial intelligence and the next generation of hypersonic weapons that could be used to launch attacks at unprecedented speed.



UN Photo/Antoine Tardy

The UN Conference on Disarmament body, during the opening day of its High-Level Segment, 25 February, 2019.

While noting that a majority of Member States sought the elimination of weapons of mass destruction, he noted that the Conference on Disarmament – the world’s only multilateral disarmament negotiation forum – has not undertaken any disarmament negotiations in two decades.

This had resulted in arms control negotiations increasingly taking place elsewhere, including the [UN General Assembly](#), or outside the United Nations framework, Mr. Guterres said.

“The history of this chamber is a cautionary tale,” he explained. “The failure of the Council of the League of Nations to grapple with the most pressing security challenges of its day was an important factor in its slide into irrelevance.”

[Joint UN-Red Cross appeal to end rising sexual violence as a weapon of war](#)

Sexual violence in conflict – and the stigma that survivors often face – must be addressed urgently, [UN chief António Guterres](#) said on Monday, in a joint appeal for more funding and international action, together with the head of the Red Cross, Peter Maurer.

Describing how he was “frequently horrified” by the first-hand accounts of survivors in his previous role as head of the UN refugee agency, [UNHCR](#), Mr. Guterres said that only last year, Rohingya refugees who had fled into Bangladesh spoke of the mass gang-rape of women and girls in their homes, before they fled northern Myanmar.

“The world is growing ever more aware of the ubiquity of conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence,” he said. “We must do everything in our power to end the horror and stigma that affects hundreds of thousands of women and girls, as well as men and boys, worldwide.”

We must do everything in our power to end the horror and stigma that affects hundreds of thousands of women and girls, as well as men and boys, worldwide – *UN chief Guterres*

His comments were echoed by women’s rights defender Julienne Lusenge, who heads a coalition of organizations in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) that help victims of sexual violence seek justice through the judicial system.

“During this month of February, our medical centre, Karibuni Wa Mama in Bunia, has received in a week 28 children, including a two year-old” who were all “victims of serious sexual violence,” said Ms. Lusenge, who is the Director of the Fund for Congolese Women and President of Solidarité Feminine pour la Paix et le Développement Integral (SOFEPADI).

“We keep receiving women...sexual slaves of various armed groups in our different offices. They are suffering from sexual slavery but also forced marriage, forced labour, mental, physical and economic violence as well as inhuman and degrading treatment.”

Appeal for \$27 million, and for countries to ‘re-state their commitment’

Peter Maurer, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross ([ICRC](#)), warned that the world was facing a grave protection failure amid rising sexual violence in conflict.

“We are asking States to re-state their commitment to international humanitarian law,” he said. “The law is clear: rape and other forms of sexual violence are violations. The Geneva Conventions made this prohibition clear and universal and yet 70 years on, we continue to face failures of behaviour and accountability.”

In an appeal for \$27 million to fund a better response to the issue in 14 countries, Mr. Maurer described the lasting damage caused by sexual and gender-based violence, which is used as a tactic of war to dehumanize victims and destabilize communities.

“We work with the survivors of horrific acts, including with women and girls

given as rewards in war, fathers whose sons have been abducted and raped, young women fleeing disaster and conflict only to be sexually enslaved, and with detainees when sexual atrocities are wielded as means of torture," he said.

Following the joint appeal in Geneva, the United Nations and Red Cross pledged to listen to survivors and victims of these crimes, to enable their voices to be heard and to support them through local organizations – particularly women's organizations – in conflict zones.

In addition, the UN will promote women's participation in conflict prevention and resolution and in all formal peace processes; instruct its peacekeeping operations to ensure they have systems in place to prevent conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence; and pursue justice for victims and survivors.

An additional way to tackle the prevalence of such violence against women, girls – and to a lesser extent, boys and men – is to promote gender equality, Mr. Guterres told journalists in Geneva.

"If we want to address the problems of violence, sexual violence against women and girls and also, indirectly, with a positive impact on sexual violence against men and boys," said the UN chief, "it's absolutely essential to look into the questions of power in our societies".

"And, maybe you call it feminism, I can tell that the most important reform I am making at the United Nations is to make sure we have gender parity at all levels of the organization."