

Nicaragua must end 'witch-hunt' against dissenting voices – UN human rights experts

Following weeks of civil unrest in Nicaragua, a group of 11 UN independent human rights experts urged the Government on Thursday to stop the violent repression of protestors, which has left at least 317 people dead and 1,830 injured, stressing that “no one should be detained for the exercise of their human rights”.

“We are appalled that many human rights defenders, journalists and other opposition voices are being criminalised and accused of unfounded and overly punitive charges such as ‘terrorism’,” the UN experts said, warning that this is “creating an atmosphere of fear and uncertainty among different communities and among civil society representatives in the country.”

Street protests against social security reforms began in April and were immediately [violently suppressed](#) by security forces and groups affiliated with the governing party. One hundred days later, the protests have “decreased in number and intensity following the removal of roadblocks by the Government” according to the [Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights \(OHCHR\)](#), but the UN experts said that dissident voices – ranging from rural community leaders and students, to journalists and Catholic Church leaders – are still being subjected to intimidation, threats, collective detention.

“We deplore what appears to be a smear campaign aimed at discrediting or vilifying human rights defenders as ‘terrorists’ and ‘coup-mongers’, and apparent attempts to undermine the opposition,” the human rights experts’ [statement](#) read.

“We are also deeply concerned that new legislation adopted earlier in July by the Nicaraguan Congress to target money laundering, terrorist financing and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, could provide the authorities with increased leeway for arrests and criminal proceedings against protesters, and be misused,” the UN experts stressed.

“Impunity, violence and repression have never been a breeding ground for peace and stability and will certainly, on the contrary, plunge the country into deeper social and political unrest,” the experts warned.

They reminded the Government of the importance of keeping a clear and up-to-date record of the names and locations of people who have been deprived of their liberties and stressed that those who face legal proceedings must be guaranteed their right to a fair trial, with all the guarantees of due process.

“We exhort the Government of Nicaragua to immediately demobilise paramilitary groups and to investigate the extrajudicial executions, killings and reports of enforced disappearances with due diligence, without delay and through the use of effective, impartial and independent procedures,” the statement read.

“We also urge the Government to refrain from engaging in practices of criminalisation against human rights defenders and other activists, including through the inappropriate use of national security and counter-terrorism legislation,” said the independent experts, requesting that full access into detention centres and other locations be granted to human rights groups so they can continue assessing the situation in the country.

[FROM THE FIELD: A mountain of indigenous knowledge in Peru](#)

The Suri alpaca, an animal which is similar to a llama, is known for its soft coat which makes high quality but delicate yarn.

In recent years the Suri yarn has lost popularity because it’s harder to spin, dye, knit and weave. As a result, local communities have turned towards more profitable alpaca yarns.

Now, with the support of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), those communities are becoming reacquainted with the traditional knowledge and techniques needed to work Suri, and crucially, learning how to market their goods from a remote location.

On [International Day of the World’s Indigenous Peoples](#) marked annually on 9 August, artisans and herders in the Andes, are now faced with a new challenge, keeping up with increased demand for their Suri fibre.

[Read the full story here.](#)



[UN urges protection of indigenous peoples' rights during migration](#)

In his [message](#) on the Day, he noted that “some are subject to displacement or relocation without their free, prior and informed consent”, adding that “others are escaping violence and conflict or the ravages of climate change and environmental degradation” and that many migrate in search of better prospects and employment for themselves and their families.

Mr. Guterres stated that while migration is an opportunity, “it also carries inherent risks”, citing the unsafe and unsanitary conditions many end up living in, especially in urban areas. For example, in Latin America, around 40 per cent of all indigenous peoples live in urban areas, with the numbers reaching as high as 80 per cent in some countries in the region. Many lack access to public services and often face discrimination.

“Indigenous women and girls experience disproportionately high rates of trafficking and other forms of violence,” he explained, adding that “indigenous youth are faced with complex questions regarding their identity and values”.

For indigenous peoples whose territories are divided by international borders, the Secretary-General called for cooperation across these borders so that their identity, occupations and traditional practices can be safeguarded.

Referring to the [Global Compact](#) for migration, which UN Member States have committed to adopt later this year, Mr. Guterres said “this will establish an international framework for regional and global cooperation” and “provide a platform to maximize the benefits of migration and support vulnerable migrant groups, including indigenous peoples”.



United Nations

He called for the full realization of the [UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#), “including the rights to self-determination and to traditional lands, territories and resources”.

“It is essential that the rights and identities of indigenous peoples are protected,” Mr. Guterres stressed. “And, wherever they live,” he added, “let us ensure that indigenous peoples enjoy recognition for their contributions and the opportunity to thrive and prosper in peace on a healthy planet”.

There are an estimated 370 million indigenous people in the world, living across 90 countries. Although they make up less than 5 per cent of the world’s population, they account for 15 per cent of the world’s poorest.

Audrey Azoulay, the Director-General of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), also focused on migration and movement in her [message](#), explaining that migration influences the way of life of many indigenous peoples, whether these be nomadic pastoral societies, or hunter-gatherer peoples who travel several hundred square kilometres, in order to benefit from the unique resources of their ecosystem and to preserve a delicate balance.

“However, indigenous peoples are now increasingly exposed to forced migrations, which are often the result of environmental disasters or social and political conflicts,” she said, warning that as they are driven from their territories, indigenous peoples see their lifestyles and cultures disintegrate and vanish, often without any prospect of returning.

As such, UNESCO is working with indigenous peoples to help them to meet the challenges ahead, in line with the [2030 Agenda](#) for Sustainable Development in a number of ways, including in collaboration with the local authorities and the UN [Food and Agriculture Organization](#) (FAO) of the United Nations, to pilot a study programme for pastoral societies, paving the way for the establishment of educational systems adapted to transhumant peoples.

[Former Chilean President Bachelet put forward by UN chief as next High Commissioner for Human Rights](#)

She has twice been President of Chile, and on Wednesday, ground-breaking politician and women’s rights champion, Michelle Bachelet was nominated by the United Nations chief [António Guterres](#) for the key post of High Commissioner for Human Rights.

The Secretary-General [nominated](#) Ms. Bachelet after consulting widely with the Chairs of the regional groups of Member States. Her name now goes forward for consideration and approval by the 193-member UN General Assembly.

Ms. Bachelet just ended her second four-year term as President earlier this year, having already held the post between 2006 and 2010. She was the first woman to be elected to Chile's highest office. After her first term, she came to New York as the first ever Executive Director of the UN gender equality office, [UN-Women](#).

She also held key governments posts earlier in her political career as Chile's Minister of Defence, and Minister of Health.

The High Commissioner, is the [principle official](#) who speaks out for human rights across the whole UN system, strengthening human rights mechanisms; enhancing equality; fighting discrimination in all its forms; strengthening accountability and the rule of law; widening the democratic space and protecting the most vulnerable from all forms of human rights abuse.

The job is currently held by [Zeid Ra'ad al-Hussein](#), who steps down from the unique role, calling governments and leaders to account for human rights abuses, at the end of this month. He served a single term, beginning in 2014.

Headquartered in Geneva, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights ([OHCHR](#)) is mandated to promote and protect the universal exercise and full realization of human rights, across the world, as established in the [UN Charter](#).

[Amid 'volatile' environment, UN mission chief urges Iraqi leaders to 'listen to the voice of the people'](#)

Despite a myriad of "long-neglected social, economic and development needs", the Head of the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq ([UNAMI](#)) on Wednesday said progress had been made towards recovery and stability in the battle-scarred country, and called for Iraqi political leaders to continue to "work for national reconciliation" through "inclusive" solutions.

Briefing the Security Council, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq, Ján Kubiš, started by updating Members on the manual ballot recount completed on Monday, in response to "complaints and allegations of electoral fraud and mismanagement" following parliamentary elections on 12 May. Mr. Kubiš noted the monitoring and support role played by UNAMI, as well as the oversight and advice provided by the UN throughout the process.

"I welcome the orderly, transparent, credible and well-organised conduct of the recount," he noted, applauding "the dedication and professionalism of all recount staff," which, he said, "increased public confidence in the electoral process."

As for the ongoing civil unrest that has broken out across Basra and various southern Governorates, and which resulted in the death of at least 18 persons with 519 injured in recent months, he commended the "major efforts to provide swift and tailored responses to legitimate popular demands, bringing a temporary relief to people living under strenuous conditions".

"These measures, however, remain insufficient to address the depth of people's needs and concerns," he added, urging "political leaders to listen to the voice of the people, seize the opportunity and accelerate the process of formation of a patriotic, inclusive and non-sectarian national government that will put all the rich resources of Iraq at the disposal, and for the benefit, of its people."

The Head of UNAMI insisted on the need to ensure that women in particular have access to "leadership positions in Iraq" so they are "not left behind in recovery and rebuilding efforts" and can "play key roles" in shaping the future of a country that "owes them a lot."

In his briefing, the Special Representative mentioned that the country's security and human rights situation remains "volatile" with sporadic terrorist attacks against civilians and government entities, and kidnappings.

"I note with concern that although the level of violence in Iraq has decreased since last year, armed conflict, terrorism and acts of violence continued to take a toll on civilians," he said, adding that improvised explosive devices remain the number one cause of civilian casualties.

He also mentioned as "unacceptable" the plight of over 3,100 Yazidis who remain in the hands of ISIL or Da'esh, including those simply missing since their region in northern Iraq was overrun by the terrorist group in August 2014.

As the humanitarian and protection situation remains dire, the Special Representative went on to highlight the major reconstruction efforts undertaken across the country, especially in Mosul's old city, with the support of various UN agencies.

"I note with appreciation that one year after the liberation of Mosul, [UN] clearance teams have removed 43,700 explosive hazards in the city" from roads, bridges, schools, universities, hospitals, clinics, water treatment plants and municipal buildings, he told the Council.

He also commended the efforts made on health care provision and access to education, noting however the "funding remains a critical issue". According to the UN's [Financial Tracking Service](#), as of 8 August, a \$202 million (36 per cent) funding gap remains based on requirements laid out in the 2018 [Humanitarian Response Plan](#).

Mr. Kubiš urged the Members of the Security Council to continue to support Iraq in its path to stability and prosperity. "In tandem with our collective humanitarian and stabilization efforts, recovery and development efforts are critical to Iraq and Member States are requested to continue supporting them", he said.

Among other things, in his briefing, the Special Representative also updated the Security Council on the National Government's relations with the Kurdistan Regional Government, the continued presence of Turkish armed forces along the border in the north of Iraq, the plight of Syrian refugees living in the country, and the search for 625 Kuwaiti and third-country nationals who went missing after the 1990 conflict.