

Suicide attack killing dozens at prayer in Afghan mosque 'may amount to war crimes,' says top UN official

A suicide attack that took place inside a Shia mosque in Afghanistan during Friday prayers, killing dozens and injuring more than 70, has been condemned by the head of the UN Mission in the country who said it "may amount to war crimes."

The UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) denounced the attack in Gardez city, about 50 miles south of Kabul, when two suicide bombers detonated their explosive vests.

"This attack targeting civilians has [no possible justification](#)," said UNAMA chief, Tadamichi Yamamoto, who also serves as the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Afghanistan. "Those who are responsible for enabling this attack must be brought to justice and held to account."

According to news reports, the Taliban has denied any links to the attack and there was no immediate claim of responsibility, but militants linked to the ISIL terrorist group, also known as Da'esh, have carried out similar attacks against Shiites in the past.

These brutal and senseless attacks against people at prayer are atrocities – *UNAMA chief Tadamichi Yamamoto*

"These brutal and senseless attacks against people at prayer are atrocities," said Mr. Yamamoto.

International humanitarian law prohibits deliberate attacks against civilians and civilian property, including places of worship. It also commits warring parties to allow religious leaders to serve their communities without fear of attack.

"Such attacks directed against congregations and places of worship are serious violations of international law that may amount to war crimes," he stressed.

UNAMA expressed its condolences to the loved ones of those killed and wished the injured a full and speedy recovery.

The latest terrorist assault comes on the heels of a suicide attack and hostage-taking at a government building on Wednesday, in the eastern city of Jalalabad.

According to mid-July [figures](#) from UNAMA, 1,692 civilians had been killed and

another 3,430 injured in the first six months of the year. This sets a record high for the first six months of any year, despite an unprecedented days-long ceasefire between the Government and Taliban extremists in mid-June.

[India and the UN: Celebrating 70 years of invaluable service to the cause of peace](#)

“UN peacekeeping operates in increasingly complex environments and we are grateful for steadfast partners like India, who have risen to new challenges and continue to participate meaningfully in our efforts to protect vulnerable civilians,” the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, [Jean-Pierre Lacroix](#), said in a recent interview with *UN News*.

Mr. Lacroix visited India in June as part of a wider trip to the sub-region during which he thanked the Government and people of India, as well as Bangladesh, Nepal and Pakistan, for their service and sacrifice in the name of peace. Together, troops and police from the four countries currently make up close to one-third of some 91,000 uniformed personnel across 14 UN peacekeeping operations.

UN peacekeeping operates in increasingly complex environments and we are grateful for steadfast partners like India – *UN Peacekeeping chief Lacroix*

Commencing with its participation in the UN operation in Korea in 1950, India has a long and distinguished history of service in UN peacekeeping, having contributed more personnel than any other country, as well as the first-ever all-female force that helped to bring peace to Liberia in the wake of that country’s brutal civil war.

From 2007-2016, there were nine rotations of all-female police units from India, whose primary responsibilities were to provide 24-hour guard duty, public order management and conduct night patrols in and around the capital, Monrovia, while assisting to build the capacity of local security institutions.

Hailed as role models, these female officers not only played a vital role in restoring security in the West African nation but also contributed to an increase in the number of women in the country’s security sector.

“The contribution you have made to inspiring Liberian women, to imparting in them the spirit of professionalism, to encourage them to join those entities,

those operations that protect the nation, for that we will always be grateful,” then President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf stated when the last all-female unit departed Liberia in February 2016.

Making a lasting impact in the communities in which they serve

In addition to their security role, the members of the female Indian Formed Police Unit also distinguished themselves through humanitarian service, including organizing medical camps for Liberians, many of whom have limited access to health care services.

Medical care is among the many services Indian peacekeepers provide to the communities in which they serve on behalf of the Organization. They also perform specialized tasks such as veterinary support and engineering services.

Indian veterinarians serving with the [UN Mission in South Sudan \(UNMISS\)](#), for example, stepped up to help cattle herders who were losing much of their stock to malnutrition and disease in the war-torn nation.

In South Sudan, cattle are not only a valuable source of food but also a commodity for bartering.

The Indian veterinarians ran a mobile clinic earlier this year, travelling across the Upper Nile region, including to remote and dangerous locations, to treat sick cattle and educate their owners about disease prevention.

“Wherever I went I was being welcomed by people. They were very happy because there was no one, no one to look after them and whatever little we could contribute as a veterinarian and part of UNMISS, it is beneficial for them and for the animals,” said Indian peacekeeper and veterinarian Prashant Tripathi.

The Indian contingent in the Upper Nile region includes the Indian Battalion, the Horizontal Mechanical Engineering Company, the Level II hospital, the Petroleum Platoon and the Force Signal Unit. They have all received UN medals of honour for their dedication and service in peacekeeping.

The Indian contingent in South Sudan has gone the extra mile by providing vocational training and life-saving medical assistance, as well as carrying out significant road repair work.

It is the nature of the Indian Army to step in any time when there is a need when we are on peacekeeping missions – *Colonel Gaurav Bhatra, UNMISS battalion chief*

Colonel Gaurav Bhatra, who commands the 850-strong Indian battalion, considers such efforts “a normal part of Indian culture.”

“Even in our country, we are sometimes called upon to assist in areas where it is extremely difficult to alleviate the suffering of the people. It is the

nature of the Indian Army to step in any time when there is a need when we are on peacekeeping missions.”

More than 200,000 Indians have served in 49 of the 71 peacekeeping missions established around the world since 1948. Currently, there are around 6,700 uniformed peacekeepers from India, the vast majority of them in the Democratic Republic of Congo and in South Sudan.

India has also provided 15 Force Commanders to various missions, and was the first country to contribute to the Trust Fund on sexual exploitation and abuse, which was set up in 2016.

India’s longstanding service has not come without cost; as of 30 June 2018, over 160 Indian peacekeepers have paid the ultimate price while serving with the United Nations.

“India has lost more peacekeepers than any other Member State. We grieve with the families and the people and Government of India for these losses,” noted Under-Secretary-General Lacroix.

“India’s continued commitment to UN peace operations and to global peace and security – even through these difficult periods – is invaluable.”

[Ethiopia: humanitarians scale up life-saving aid to over 1 million forcibly displaced by violence in the south-west](#)

To address the urgent needs of more than a million displaced by inter-communal violence in southwestern Ethiopia over the past four months, UN humanitarian agencies and their partners are ramping up their efforts, providing among other things shelter, household items, water and sanitation, and food to the most vulnerable.

“Those who fled described witnessing extreme violence during village raids, including indiscriminate killings, rape, livestock slaughter and houses being burnt to the ground,” [said](#) the spokesperson for the UN Refugee Agency ([UNHCR](#)), Andrej Mahecic, during a press briefing in Geneva on Friday. “Most report fleeing with nothing but their lives”.

Since late April, inter-communal clashes have flared up in the border zones of Gedeo, in the Oromia Region, and West Guji in the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples’ (SNNPR) Region. The recent violence came on the

heels of more than a year-long crippling drought and tensions over dwindling resources.

In June, humanitarian organisations and the Government of Ethiopia issued a [joint appeal](#) for this crisis for \$118 million, to cover the most critical needs of some 820,000 people, and ensure the protection of those displaced.

According to the UN [Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs \(OCHA\)](#), to date, the response in Gedeo and West Guji has enabled the provision of safe drinking water and latrines, food, treatment for severe acute malnutrition, emergency shelter and basic health care. The assistance, says OCHA, is currently being scaled up mostly thanks to “diverted resources from life-saving responses to drought, flood and conflict-displacements” elsewhere in the country. Funding has [also been provided](#) by the UN’s Central Emergency Response Fund ([CERF](#)).

However, according to UNHCR’s Spokesperson, the situation on the ground remains extremely dire. “Many sleep on the cold ground in public facilities, keeping warm with only the little clothing they have on them. Others live in makeshift shelters that cannot keep out the heavy rains of the season, leaving them at risk of serious health problems such as pneumonia,” explained Mr. Mahecic, who added that “families have been separated and the overcrowded conditions are leading to serious protection risks,” especially for women and children.

On 28 July, traditional leaders from both sides of the conflict convened a peace and reconciliation conference to address the Gedeo-Guji conflict. The event – attended by officials from the Federal government of Ethiopia, the Oromia and SNNP regions, religious leaders and elders – enabled “a consensus to end the ongoing inter-communal violence and return displaced people to their places of origin by 8 August”, said OCHA.

[‘Economy is society’s servant, not its master,’ say UN rights experts, urging Brazil to put human rights before austerity](#)

Marginalized groups suffer unduly harsh consequences due to Brazil’s economic policies of austerity, prompting United Nations rights experts to urge the Government to instead prioritize human rights.

“People living in poverty, and other marginalized groups, are [disproportionately suffering](#) as a result of the stringent economic measures

in a country once considered as an example of progressive policies to reduce poverty and promote social inclusion,” said a statement released by a group of seven UN human rights experts on Friday.

According to the experts, data recently made available, reveals a rise in child mortality rates for the first time in 26 years, attributable in part to the Zika disease virus epidemic and economic crisis of recent years.

This is a serious concern, especially considering public health system budgetary restrictions and other social policies that compromise the State’s commitment to guarantee human rights for all, especially children and women, the experts elaborated.

“Some of the financial and fiscal decisions made in the last years affect the enjoyment of several rights, including to housing, food, water, sanitation, education, social security and health, and are worsening pre-existing inequalities,” they added.

While the Government has underlined various measures to alleviate the adverse consequences, the experts find them largely insufficient.

“Women and children living in poverty are among those hit hardest, as are Brazilians of African descent, rural populations, and people living in informal settlements,” said the experts. “We regret that efforts in relation to targeted policies addressing systemic discrimination against women have not been sustained.”

Austerity measures should be taken only with the most careful analysis of their impact – *UN Human Rights Experts*

They stressed that austerity measures, which have been popular across the world since the 2008 economic crisis, should never be the only – or first – solution to tackling economic problems.

They explained that economic crises do not justify cuts to services and social rights.

“Austerity measures should be taken only with the most careful analysis of their impact, in particular as they would affect the most disenfranchised individuals and groups,” they stressed. “They must be considered only after a comprehensive human rights impact assessment.”

The experts added that such an assessment should consider less harmful policy alternatives, like raising taxes for the richest before placing bigger burdens on the poor: “Steps to reduce public debt and to regain not only financial but also social sustainability, should also be considered,” the experts stressed.

Once a champion in the fight against hunger and malnutrition, Brazil, is dramatically reversing major policies on food security; cutting housing; and, according to 2018 forecasts, reducing water and sanitation. Moreover, public

spending is expected to remain capped for 20 years, further underscoring the need to review economic policies with a human rights lens.

[Fresh Yemen hospital attack raises risk of new cholera epidemic](#)

A deadly attack on one of the last functioning hospitals in Yemen in the key port city of Hudaydah has put hundreds of thousands of people at risk and damaged efforts to prevent a third cholera epidemic in the war-torn country, top UN officials warned on Friday.

Early reports suggest multiple deaths and injuries after Yemen's largest hospital, Al Thawra, was hit on Thursday, said Dr. Peter Salama, who is in charge of Emergency Preparedness and Response at the [World Health Organization](#).

"We're particularly saddened at [WHO](#) by the attack on one of the major hospitals in the country yesterday, Al Thawra in Al Hudaydah," he said. According to latest news reports, at least 20 have been killed by several air strikes, which also hit a fish market in the city.

The attack on the hospital – which houses a major cholera treatment centre – is the latest outrage in the fight to capture the key Red Sea port from Houthi opposition militia.

Everything that we are trying to do to stem the world's worst cholera epidemic is at risk – *Humanitarian Coordinator Lise Grande*

Yemen's conflict has its roots in uprisings that date back to 2011, but fighting escalated in March 2015, when an international coalition led by Saudi Arabia intervened militarily at the request of President Abd Rabbuh Mansour Hadi. The coalition's objective was to secure the return of the Government to the Houthi-held capital, Sana'a.

The fighting is still raging and the ensuing humanitarian crisis has only deepened in a country that was already one of the world's poorest, with some eight million people believed to be on the brink of famine.

Sharing WHO's condemnation of the Hudaydah attack, [UN Humanitarian Coordinator for Yemen](#), Lise Grande, described the impact of the strikes as "appalling".

Hospitals are protected under international humanitarian law, the UN official insisted, adding that "hundreds of thousands of people" depend on the

hospital to survive.

“Everything that we are trying to do to stem the world’s worst cholera epidemic is at risk,” Ms Grande said, noting that new cholera cases have been identified in the city “every day this week”.

In a bid to prevent the disease spreading once again, WHO’s Dr. Salama explained that combatants have been asked to down their weapons, so that an oral vaccination campaign can take place. More than 500,000 people are expected to receive the vaccine in a three-day operation beginning on Saturday.

“We have requested, as the UN, three days of tranquility, associated with, first, our cholera vaccine campaign across August 4, 5 and 6 in the north of the country,” Dr. Salama said. “You will recall that we were able to start campaigns in the south of the country previously, but we’ve never before been able to do it in the north.”

Asked to assess the level of risk from cholera, whose symptoms include watery diarrhea and fever, the WHO official said that the level of infection this year is “not at the same massive level” as last year.

Nonetheless, many people are far weaker than 12 months ago and far less able to cope with infection, he added.

“We’ve had two major waves of cholera epidemics in recent years,” Dr. Salama said, “and unfortunately the trend data that we’ve seen in the last days to weeks suggest that we may be on the cusp of the third major wave of cholera epidemics in Yemen.”