

Central Africa Republic: Violence drives thousands of refugees into neighbouring DR Congo, says UN agency

The United Nations refugee agency is calling for urgent support for thousands of people arriving in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) after fleeing conflict in south-eastern Central African Republic (CAR).

According to the [Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees](#) (UNHCR), at least 7,000 people – most of them women and children – have reached DRC over the past week.

“The [speed of arrivals](#) and the very limited humanitarian presence in the area mean that people urgently need increased support,” said William Spindler, a UNHCR spokesperson, told media at the regular news briefing in Geneva.

The latest numbers are an addition to [more than 180,000 people](#) who have sought refuge in the remote Kanzawi village in DRC’s northern province of Bas-Uele.

Of particular concern, said Mr. Spindler, is the situation of elderly people, pregnant women and others with specific needs. There is only one water source in the village, forcing people to drink from the river. Most of the refugees are sleeping in the open, others in public buildings.

In response, UNHCR has worked to improve community infrastructure in some villages and towns that have taken in a large number of refugees, including drilling new wells, supporting local schools and health centres and providing shelter to the extremely vulnerable CAR refugees

It is also supporting the registration of refugees and providing them with necessary documents.

This response, however, has been hit by lack of resources.

“Our own capacity for an emergency response is severely stretched, with our DRC operation funded at \$1.6 for every \$10 needed,” said Mr. Spindler.

Teenage girl’s death sentence

spotlights Sudan's failure to tackle forced marriage, gender-based violence – UN rights office

The case of Noura Hussein Hammad Daoud, a Sudanese teenager convicted of fatally stabbing the man she was forced to marry, after he had allegedly raped her, highlights the country's failure to tackle the tragedy of early and forced marriage, marital rape and other discrimination and violence against women and girls, the United Nations human rights office said on Friday.

"We have received information that Hussein's forced marriage, rape and other forms of gender-based violence against her were not taken into account by the Court as evidence to mitigate the sentence, and that the most stringent [guarantees of a fair trial](#) and due process were not fulfilled in this case," said Ravina Shamdasani, spokesperson for the High Commissioner for Human Rights told the press in Geneva.

As the case has drawn international attention, the UN Human rights office said that it has become increasingly concerned for the teen's safety and that of her lawyer and other supporters.

"We urge the authorities to ensure full protection for Hussein's physical and psychological integrity during her detention, as well as full respect for her rights to a fair trial and appeal," Ms. Shamdasani stressed.

In trials of capital punishment, scrupulous respect for fairness is particularly crucial.

The UN expert on summary executions has argued that imposing the death penalty against clear evidence of self-defense constitutes an arbitrary killing, particularly where women have been charged with murder when defending themselves.

"We call on the authorities to fully take into consideration Hussein's claim of self-defense against the attempt by the man to rape her, after he had reportedly already raped her on a previous occasion with the help of three other people," Ms. Shamdasani continued.

With only 15 days to appeal the Court's decision – which was announced last week – the right for a conviction and sentence to be reviewed by a higher tribunal is particularly important.

"A review that is limited to the formal or legal aspects of the conviction – without any consideration of the facts – is not sufficient under the [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#), which Sudan has ratified," the spokesperson reminded the press.

The [UN Committee on the Rights of the Child](#) and the [UN Human Rights Committee](#) have expressed serious concern about the situation of women's human rights in Sudan.

"Hussein's tragic case is an opportunity for Sudanese authorities to send a clear message that gender-based violence will not be tolerated in the country," concluded Ms. Shamdasani, adding that the office would remain in contact with Sudanese authorities.

[DR Congo Ebola outbreak not yet a global 'health emergency', but strong response to disease vital – UN health experts](#)

An emergency meeting of United Nations health experts said on Friday that the Ebola outbreak in north-west Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) – where cases of the deadly disease have been confirmed in an urban area – does not yet meet the criteria to be deemed a "public health emergency of international concern."

But the [World Health Organization](#) (WHO) Emergency Committee advised the Congolese Government and all other actors to remain engaged in a "vigorous response" and called on the international community to support efforts on the ground.

["Without this, the situation is likely to deteriorate significantly,"](#) read the [Public Health Advice](#) issued by the Committee, which also called for global solidarity among the scientific community and for international data to be shared freely and regularly.

An outbreak of the Ebola virus disease (EVD) was declared in a remote town in DRC's Equateur province on 8 May. Since then at least one case has been confirmed outside the initial zone. On 17 May, a patient in the provincial capital, Mbandaka, was confirmed as having contracted the disease.

[According](#) to WHO, 45 cases have been reported, of which 14 had been confirmed, 10 were "suspected" and 21 "probable."

The Emergency Committee also decided that if the outbreak "expands significantly, or if there is international spread," it will reconvene to take further action.

Both the site of the outbreak and Mbandaka city are situated on the Congo

River, which many consider the “highway” for transport of goods and people in the region where connectivity is otherwise challenging.

No need for international travel or trade restrictions

In its Health Advice, the Committee underscored that while there should be no international travel or trade restrictions, the DRC’s neighbouring countries should strengthen preparedness and surveillance.

“Exit screening, including at airports and ports on the Congo River, [is considered to be of great importance](#); however, entry screening, particularly in distant airports, is not considered to be of any public health or cost-benefit value,” it said.

The WHO Emergency Committee is composed of 11 international technical experts from various parts of the world, nominated by WHO member States. It is convened under the International Health Regulations – the legally binding international instrument on protection of lives endangered by the global spread of diseases and other health risks.

Response continues

Meanwhile, UN agencies and their partners on the ground have scaled up the response to contain the outbreak and support treatment of those suspected of or having contracted Ebola virus.

WHO has also brought in vaccines against the disease, bringing the total number of doses available to 7,500, [according to the agency’s spokesperson Tarik Jašarević](#).

However, transporting them to affected areas in a safe and temperature controlled manner is a major challenge as roads are often impassable and electricity is limited.

This is the ninth Ebola outbreak in the DRC, a country where the virus is endemic. The virus causes an acute, serious illness, which is often fatal if untreated. [First symptoms](#) generally include the sudden onset of fever, fatigue, muscle pain, headache and sore throat. This is followed by vomiting, diarrhoea.

An outbreak in West Africa that began in 2014 left more than 11,000 dead across six countries, and was not declared officially over by WHO until the beginning of 2016.

[Force used against protestors in Gaza](#)

'wholly disproportionate' says UN human rights chief

A special session of the [UN Human Rights Council](#) has ended with a resolution by Member States to investigate weeks of violence on the Israeli border with Gaza, which has claimed the lives of more than 100 people in the enclave and left thousands wounded.

The draft text called for the Council to "investigate all alleged violations and abuses of international humanitarian law and international human rights law" in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and particularly the occupied Gaza Strip, since 30 March; the date when demonstrations along the border with Israel began, dubbed the Great March of Return.

The resolution was adopted by 29 votes in favour, with two against and 14 abstentions.

The development follows a request on Tuesday by Palestine and the Arab Group of States.

A day earlier, 60 demonstrators in Gaza were killed by Israeli forces, marking the highest one-day death toll in the territory since the 2014 hostilities. According to UN human rights chief, [Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein](#), who addressed the council, 87 Palestinians have been killed during the protests, including 12 children, and more than 12,000 injured; 3,500 of them by live ammunition fire.

They are, in essence, caged in a toxic slum from birth to death; deprived of dignity – *High Commissioner Zeid*

"Palestinians have exactly the same human rights as Israelis do. They have the same rights to live safely in their homes, in freedom, with adequate and essential services and opportunities" said the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

"And of this essential core of entitlements due to every human being, they are systematically deprived", he continued, adding: "They are, in essence, caged in a toxic slum from birth to death; deprived of dignity; de-humanised by the Israeli authorities to such a point it appears officials do not even consider that these men and women have a right, as well as every reason, to protest."

Zeid said that some demonstrators threw Molotov cocktails and used slingshots to throw stones at Israeli soldiers.

But this did not justify the use of lethal force and may be a breach of international law, he added.

Israel responded to the special session at the Human Rights Council saying that convening the meeting was evidence of its politically-motivated “anti-Israeli obsession”.

Ambassador Aviva Raz Shechter, Permanent Representative of Israel to the UN, said that the militant group Hamas, which runs the Gaza Strip, and the Palestinian Authority in the occupied West Bank, had incited people to violence, by placing “as many civilians as possible – including women, children and journalists – in the line of fire”.

Under the rules of the Human Rights Council, an extraordinary session can only be called by the body’s 47 Member States; it must also have the support of at least one-third of the membership. Friday marked the 28th time that there has been a special session of the Council.

[UN warns of ‘deteriorating climate’ for human rights defenders in Guatemala](#)

It’s becoming increasingly dangerous to defend the rights of indigenous people in Guatemala, the United Nations human rights office warned on Friday, following the murder of three activists over the past 10 days.

“We are concerned about what appears to be [a deteriorating climate](#) for the defence of human rights in Guatemala,” Ravina Shamdasani, Spokesperson for the [Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights](#) (OHCHR), told reporters in Geneva, urging the State to ensure a safe working environment free from threats and attacks.

On 9 May, a rights officer working on behalf peasants and indigenous peoples, was killed in the town of San Luis Jilotepeque Jalapa.

A community leader from the grassroots social justice group known as Comité Campesino de Desarrollo del Altiplano (CCDA), was murdered on 10 May, and another member of the organization was found dead on 13 May.

The two most recent killings took place in an area of Guatemala where CCDA, and other civil society organizations, have been working with the Government, on an agreement to address more than 50 land conflicts in the country.

Other rights defenders have also suffered threats and attacks in recent months, OHCHR said.

“We call on the authorities to promptly investigate these murders and other

attacks and threats against human rights defenders, and to ensure that those found responsible are held accountable,” Ms. Shamdasani said.

“We share the deep concerns about the protection of indigenous peoples who claim rights to land, as expressed by UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, during her visit to Guatemala earlier this month,” she added.