

UN expert warns of “stark increase” in hate crimes across UK, post-Brexit

Sounding an alarm over a “stark increase” in hate crimes across the United Kingdom as well as “widespread discrimination” faced by ethnic minorities, a United Nations independent rights expert has called on the country to “comprehensively” combat racism and bias.

“I am shocked by the criminalisation of young people from ethnic minorities, especially young black men. They are over-represented in police stop and searches, more likely to face prosecution,” said E. Tendayi Achiume, the UN Special Rapporteur on racism, xenophobia and intolerance, adding that they are also “over-represented in the prison system”.

Summarizing her initial findings at the end of a four day visit to the UK, the expert echoed calls for “a unified national policy that lays out a comprehensive strategy and benchmarks, for a systematic elimination of unlawful racial disparities.”

“The creation, implementation, and oversight of such policy must meaningfully include ethnic-minority communities in decision-making roles,” she insisted.

The UN rights expert’s visit to the UK came as it prepares to formally exit the European Union, commonly referred to as “Brexit.”

Ms. Achiume said that it was worrying that the anti-migrant, anti-foreigner rhetoric, developed around the campaign in favour of Brexit had become widespread in society, going as far as to add that a hateful and stigmatising discourse had become “normalised” – even involving some high-ranking officials.

She also said that some immigration policies have resulted in the exclusion, discrimination and characterization of groups and individuals on the basis of their race, ethnicity or related status.

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The Special Rapporteur highlighted that the UK’s Prevent programme – part of the government’s counter-terrorism strategy which requires faith leaders, teachers, doctors and others to refer suspects to a local body – enabled “life-altering judgments on the basis of vague criteria, in a climate of national anxieties in which entire religious, racial and ethnic groups are presumed to be enemies.”

Across the country, this has led to high levels of anxiety and mistrust affecting the Muslim community especially, she said.

There are, however, laws and policies in Britain that prohibit both direct and indirect forms of racial discrimination, and these are “commendable” said Ms. Achiume.

“This is a firm basis for tackling structural and institutional racism and discrimination on the basis of race, ethnicity, national origin, gender and other protected categories, even in the absence of prejudice,” she stressed.

The Special Rapporteur, whose visit came at the invitation of the UK, met with Government officials, parliamentarians, civil society groups, and religious, ethnic and racial community representatives, and visited several prisons.

Ms. Achiume will present a report on the findings and conclusions of her visit to a forthcoming session of the Geneva-based UN [Human Rights Council](#) – the highest global intergovernmental body on matters related to human rights.

Special Rapporteurs and independent experts are appointed by the Human Rights Council to examine and report back on a specific human rights theme or a country situation. The positions are honorary and the experts are not UN staff, nor are they paid for their work.

[New \\$10 billion funding plan, targets 260 million missing out on school](#)

Three youth activists from India, Kenya and Sierra Leone on Friday delivered a petition signed by 1.5 million of their peers to the United Nations Secretary-General that calls for more investment in education.

The Global Youth Ambassadors, from the charity organization TheirWorld, were at UN Headquarters in New York in support of a funding plan launched by Gordon Brown, the UN Special Envoy for Global Education.

The \$10 billion International Finance Facility for Education aims to get more than 260 million children into the classroom. It targets some of the world’s most marginalized youth and addresses issues which are denying them access to school, such as child labour, child marriage and discrimination against girls.

It also aims to help countries achieve [Sustainable Development Goal \(SDG\) 4](#), which calls on governments to deliver equitable, quality education for all.

UN chief António Guterres thanked Mr. Brown and the youth representatives for

the initiative, stressing that “[a huge investment](#)” is needed in global education.

Mr. Guterres, who had previously spent 10 years at the helm of the UN refugee agency, [UNHCR](#), expressed concern that priority is not given to children’s education during humanitarian crises.

“I remember that in emergencies there is this mentality of ‘move the trucks, pitch the tents, find the water, distribute the food, find the vaccines’, but the question of putting the schools to work, finding teachers comes later,” he said, adding that “the amount of humanitarian funding dedicated to education was, and – I believe – still is, extremely reduced.”

The Secretary-General also highlighted future education needs, pointing out that one billion young people will enter the labour market in the next decade and the kind of jobs they will perform may differ from those available today.

“Education has to be able to address the needs of today, but education needs to prepare us for the future,” he said.

[Afghanistan: End attacks on civilians, prosecute perpetrators, says senior UN rights official](#)

A top United Nations rights official has welcomed the Afghan Government’s “undeniable commitment” to improving an often “dire” human rights record, while also voicing concern over continued attacks on civilians ahead of key elections later in the year.

Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights, Andrew Gilmour, was speaking at the end of a four-day visit to Afghanistan in which he noted rising civilian casualties, due mainly to terrorist attacks, but also highlighted continuing discrimination against women at many levels of society.

“The Government has made significant progress in ending violence against women, but the use of ‘mediation’ for the gravest cases of violence, including murder; severe violence and harmful traditional practices, [is to be regretted](#),” said Mr. Gilmour.

“What would send a strong signal to those men who continue to violently abuse women with impunity, would be to start seriously prosecuting them,” he added.

While recognizing the Government’s work on human rights, particularly its ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture,

which reinforces Afghanistan's compliance with international human rights standards, he urged the authorities to investigate and prosecute military or civilian perpetrators of so-called "bacha bazi" – a form of sexual abuse against boys.

Turning to the vulnerability of civilians in recent days during the registration process for elections in October, he referred to a report released by the UN Assistance Mission ([UNAMA](#)) on Thursday, that detailed a disturbing pattern of [attacks at election-related facilities](#), which have resulted so far in 271 civilians killed and injured.

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Meeting with President Ashraf Ghani on Wednesday, Mr. Gilmour welcomed the President's clear commitment to take additional measures to protect civilians, despite extremely difficult circumstances.

At a conference on peace and reconciliation, he called the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) an impressive and crucial pillar of society, saying: "the people of Afghanistan want security and a lasting peace built on accountability and justice. I hope the Government hear these compelling voices."

Reduce civilian casualties during military operations

In the Kunduz province, Mr. Gilmour stressed to the provincial authorities the need to reduce civilian casualties during military operations.

He spoke with community representatives from Laghmani village, Dasht-e-Archi district about the Afghan forces' firing on 2 April of rockets and machine guns on a religious gathering – leading to the reported death and injury of more than 100 people, mainly children.

The UN rights official said he was deeply troubled by the incident and urged the Government at the highest levels to better protect civilians, hold perpetrators accountable in line with their obligations under international humanitarian law and restore trust between the residents of Dasht-e-archi and the Government.

"Accepting full responsibility for what clearly was a terrible mistake, and a sincere apology for the suffering caused, is always a useful step in advancing reconciliation and failure to do so provides great ammunition for terrorists and extremists," he said.

Mothers, children, lacking basic nutrition in North Korea: UN food aid chief

The head of the United Nations food relief agency said on Friday that many mothers and young children in North Korea are still relying on humanitarian assistance to meet their nutritional needs.

“I see a country that is working hard to achieve food security and good nutrition,” said the Executive Director of the [World Food Programme](#) (WFP), David Beasley, at the end of his four-day visit to the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK).

WFP aims to assist 650,000 women and children in DPRK every month, providing highly nutritious, fortified cereals and biscuits that can address crucial gaps in their diets.

Funding shortfalls, however, have meant that rations have had to be reduced and even suspended in some cases.

“I came to DPRK to listen, look and learn with an open mind. This visit has given me a first-hand opportunity to assess the needs and evaluate WFP’s operations on the ground,” he said.

“There is a real need for continued humanitarian assistance, especially when it comes to meeting the nutritional needs of mothers and young children,” he added.

Last month, UN Resident Coordinator in the north Asian country, Tapan Mishra, said that the UN and its partners are urgently requesting [\\$111 million in humanitarian funding](#) to assist millions of people in DPRK, including children whose growth has been stunted because they are not getting enough nutritious food to eat.

The appeal was based on the [Needs and Priorities Plan](#) 2018, which said that amidst political tensions, an estimated 10.3 million people across DPRK continue to suffer from food insecurity and poor nutrition, as well as a lack of access to basic services.

During his visit, Mr. Beasley spent two days in the capital, Pyongyang, meeting with senior government officials, and two days visiting WFP projects in different parts of the country.

He travelled to Sinwon County in South Hwanghae Province where he visited a “food-for-assets” project in Komchon Ri village as well as a WFP-supported children’s nursery.

He also travelled from Pyongyang to Sinuiju City in North Pyongan province,

visiting a local factory where WFP produces fortified biscuits for its projects.

WFP has had a long relationship with the country, stretching back 23 years.

“Much progress has been made, but much work lies ahead,” the WFP chief said.

[Service born from sacrifice: Rwanda's commitment to UN peacekeeping](#)

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Beginning with a modest contribution in May 2005 with the deployment of one military observer to the UN Mission in Sudan ([UNMIS](#)), Rwanda is currently the fourth largest contributor to UN peacekeeping operations.

After suffering its own genocide, Rwanda now contributes many personnel to missions that have protection-of-civilian mandates. There are nearly 6,550 Rwandan uniformed personnel currently serving with the UN, the majority of them in hot spots such as South Sudan, the Darfur region of Sudan and the Central African Republic (CAR).

“Peacekeeping is a noble, necessary but dangerous mission. The sacrifice and risk peacekeepers endure is always at the forefront of my thoughts,” [Secretary-General António Guterres said](#) last month during the commemoration at UN Headquarters of the [International Day of Reflection on the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda](#).

“It is particularly commendable that a nation that has endured the worst atrocities should risk its soldiers to ensure those atrocities cannot happen elsewhere,” he added.

The UN chief's remarks were particularly poignant coming as they did just days after the killing of a Rwandan peacekeeper and the wounding of eight others during an exchange of fire with armed elements in Bangui, the capital of the Central African Republic (CAR). Overall, 53 Rwandans have lost their lives while serving with UN peacekeeping operations.

Adama Dieng, the [UN Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide](#), noted that it is because the tragedy experienced on its soil that Rwanda moved quickly to send troops to places such as CAR and Darfur, where civilians were under threat.

“I can say that Rwanda knows exactly what genocide means,” Mr. Dieng told *UN News* in a recent interview. “That is why when I sounded the alarm in Central African Republic, in November 2013, Rwanda moved and sent troops to protect the population there.

For Inspector of Police Maurice Nyierema, a Rwandan peacekeeper serving with the [UN Mission in South Sudan \(UNMISS\)](#), the genocide in his own country has played an important part in his decision to serve as a peacekeeper.

“What happened in Rwanda makes my conviction stronger that we cannot allow something like that to happen ever again, in any place of the world,” he said.

Mr. Myierema was among the 183 Rwandan police officers, including 30 women, who received the UN service medal in South Sudan in February of this year. The officers, based in the capital, Juba, carry out tasks such as city patrols and public order management in the UN Mission’s protection sites for civilians seeking shelter from violence.

A huge amount is at stake. Since conflict broke out in 2013, thousands of civilians in South Sudan have been killed in targeted attacks, women raped, homes and means of livelihoods destroyed. More than 1.5 million South Sudanese are living as refugees in neighbouring countries and more than 300,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) are living under the protection of the UN Mission in Protection of Civilians (POC) sites across the country.

“People should learn to live together and to love each other, love their country and avoid divisions among themselves,” said Lt. Col. Kabera Simon, a Rwandan peacekeeper who served with UNMISS last year. “They should ignore what makes them different from each other and look at what brings them together and build their homes and nation.”

“This is my message: after war, after conflict, after misunderstanding, there is hope for the future if people are willing.”