

DR Congo: UN report finds 47 protestors killed, freedom of assembly curtailed by use of force

The security services and defence forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) killed at least 47 people during anti-government protests over a 13-month period through 31 January 2018, a United Nations human rights report has found.

“It is particularly disturbing that security services and defence forces carry out this violence with almost [full impunity](#) which can be perceived as encouraging such repression,” Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein, the UN human rights chief, said in a press release on the report, which concluded that freedom of peaceful assembly was “severely restricted and often violently suppressed” by the authorities in 2017.

“We are seeing the quashing of dissent at all costs – even at the cost of human life – in the DRC by the systematic deployment of armed forces alongside the Police Nationale Congolaise to handle protests,” added the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights.

While some people armed with sticks and broomsticks attempted to perpetrate violence during some protests, the vast majority of demonstrators were peaceful, according to the report published on Monday by the UN human rights wing and the UN peacekeeping mission in the African country.

The report concluded that the use of excessive force – including lethal force – by the authorities was thus “unlawful, unjustified and disproportionate.”

Between 1 January 2017 and 31 January 2018, at least 47 people, including women and children, were killed in the context of demonstrations and there are indications that Congolese security services have attempted to cover up these serious human rights violations by removing the bodies of victims and obstructing the work of national and international observers, the report states.

The report describes the lack of compliance with national law and international standards related to the use of force during the suppression of peaceful demonstrations.

For her part, Leila Zerrougui, the UN Secretary-General’s Special Representative in the DRC, said the report highlights a continued shrinking of the democratic space in the country since the beginning of 2015.

“Demonstrations are intrinsically related to freedom of expression and it is absolutely necessary that all voices can be heard in the context of the forthcoming elections,” said Ms. Zerrougui, also the head of the UN peacekeeping mission, known as its French acronym [MONUSCO](#).

The two UN officials urged the Government to allow the exercise of the rights to peaceful assembly and expression, warning that repression would only breed frustration, could lead to serious deteriorations in the security situation in the country and could pose a threat to the electoral process.

For credible elections to be held at the end of this year, the Government has an obligation to ensure that people's civil and political rights are respected and their exercise is facilitated, they said.

UN condemns attack that kills dozens near shrine in Kabul

The United Nations strongly condemned the deadly attack earlier Wednesday in the Afghan capital, Kabul, near a major religious shrine where people had gathered to celebrate Nowruz – the traditional New Year and the arrival of spring.

In a [statement](#) attributable to his spokesperson, [Secretary-General António Guterres](#) offered his condolences to the families of the victims and wished a speedy recovery to those injured.

“[Nowruz](#) is a time of renewal and celebration, and should be a time for promoting the values of peace and solidarity,” he said, reiterating that those organized the attack “must be brought to justice.”

The UN chief also expressed his solidarity with the Government and the people of Afghanistan in the aftermath of the violence.

According to the UN Assistance Mission in the country, UNAMA, initial reports indicate that at least 25 civilians were killed and many others injured. There are fears the numbers could rise. Media reports suggest a suicide blew himself up near the shrine.

In a separate statement, Tadamichi Yamamoto, the head of the UN Mission, echoed the Secretary-General's condemnation.

“I reiterate that [under no circumstances are such attacks justifiable](#), and I once again call on all parties to uphold their obligations under international humanitarian law, at all times.”

As cities boom, forests key to meeting demands for water, food and energy – UN

With two-thirds of the world's population expected to live in urban areas by 2050, forests are critical part of the solution to the unprecedented demand for water, food and energy that these cities will face, senior United Nations officials said Wednesday, on the International Day of Forests.

"How we manage forests [will determine how we meet this demand](#)," said Manoel Sobral Filho, Director of the UN Forum on Forests Secretariat (UNFFS).

He noted that growth and shifts in population, changes in climate, and innovation in knowledge and technology will undoubtedly impact future forests. "One thing I am certain of, investing in forests is essential for securing a sustainable future for communities the world over," he added.

In his video message for the Day, José Graziano da Silva, Director-General of the [Food and Agriculture Organization](#) (FAO), said that "[well-managed forests and trees](#) in and around cities provide habitats, food and protection for many plants and animals, helping to maintain and increase biodiversity."

This year, the [International Day](#), observed annually on 21 March, will focus on the interlinkages between the sustainable management of forest and sustainable cities.



Source: FAO

The theme provides an opportunity to highlight the benefits forests and trees provide to urban communities.

It is estimated that by 2050, more than half of the world's population will face water stress. Given that forested catchments provide three-quarters of all freshwater used worldwide, safeguarding the water-providing capacity of forests is even more urgent.

Trees in cities help regulate climate, store carbon, and reduce flooding and storm water runoff. Sustainable forest management and sustainable forest products offers some of the most effective and cost-competitive natural carbon capture and storage options available.

Forests are home to over 80 per cent of biodiversity on land, and urban forests and city parks can provide important habitat for migratory birds and other fauna and flora.

[Sustainable Development Goal 15](#) of the 2030 Agenda, adopted in 2015 by world leaders, calls for action to “protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss” by 2030.

[The UN Strategic Plan for Forests 2030](#) envisions “a world in which all types of forests and trees outside forests are sustainably managed, contribute to sustainable development and provide economic, social, environmental and cultural benefits for present and future generations.”

At UN Headquarters in New York, the Day is being celebrated with a [special event](#) featuring speeches by prominent officials, including Liu Zhenmin, UN Under-Secretary-General for Social and Economic Affairs.

Acts that undermine the Libyan State must not become the ‘new normal,’ UN Security Council told

Libya's shaky financial position, looming humanitarian crisis and the inability of State authorities to provide services have created a “vicious cycle” where groups with vested interests are trying to step in and undermine the Government, the United Nations envoy to the north African warned on Wednesday.

“For many Libyans this abnormal state of affairs has become the new normal. This vicious cycle must stop,” Ghassan Salamé, the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Libya, told the Security Council Wednesday via

teleconference from capital Tripoli.

In his briefing, Mr. Salamé informed the 15-member Council that the UN Support Mission in Libya ([UNSMIL](#)), which he heads, remains focused on conducting free, fair and credible elections before the end of 2018 and in that process, recently concluded voter registration process, adding one million new voters to the rolls (taking the total number of voters to 2.5 million).

At the same time, the country continues its efforts to adopt a permanent national constitution, including the approval of a draft by the Constitution Drafting Assembly in July last year.

However, challenges persists vis-a-vis a constitutional referendum and the question of referendum legislation remains hotly debated, added the senior UN official, noting that the political process must progress and a status quo is untenable.

In addition, Libya remains fraught with violence and localized conflicts, and armed groups – including those formally integrated in State structures – continue to operate outside the law and perpetrate human rights abuses.

There has also been a sharp rise in crime, human trafficking, and illegal flow of arms into the country continues unabated.

“In a country awash with arms [...] the arrival of more arms will only hamper such efforts and damage the political process,” warned the senior UN official, calling on the Security Council to exert its utmost influence to stop arms from entering into Libya.

Also in his briefing, Mr. Salamé spoke of the challenges confronting migrants – both those originating from Libya as well as those using the country as a transit – and called for the issues to be addressed taking into account its trans-boundary nature.

He also informed the Council of the Libyan [Humanitarian Response Plan](#) launched in January that aims to reach over a million people with assistance.

[To cultivate art and mind is also to cultivate peace, UNESCO chief says on World Poetry Day](#)

Not merely limited to beautiful and poignant words and phrases, poetry holds the extraordinary power to open new horizons, bridge differences and illuminate a path to peace and dialogue, the head of the United Nations

cultural agency said on [World Poetry Day](#).

In a [message](#) paying tribute to all who bring the art to life, Audrey Azoulay, the Director-General of the UN Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (UNESCO), recalled the words of poet Langston Hughes which illustrate a person's desire for freedom despite all adversities:

"Dreams

Hold fast to dreams

For if dreams die

Life is a broken-winged bird

That cannot fly.

Hold fast to dreams

For when dreams go

Life is a barren field

Frozen with snow " – Langston Hughes

Poet Hughes, who was also a writer, playwright and leader of the Harlem Renaissance – an artistic, social and intellectual movement that took place in the Harlem district in New York, in the 1920s – placed his art at the service of the fight against the discrimination suffered by the African American community.

"His poetry is inseparable from his commitment to civil rights and it remains a source of inspiration for all the advocates of fundamental freedoms around the world," added Ms. Azoulay.

Commemorated every year every year on 21 March, World Poetry Day recognizes the prominent art as one of humanity's most treasured forms of cultural and linguistic expression as well as identity.

It also draws attention to the challenges confronting its traditions and forms, many of which are in danger of disappearing, as is the case for many lesser-used and minority languages.

To maintain living traditions, UNESCO has included a number of poetic forms in the intangible heritage of humanity.

These include the poetic art of Ca trù singing from Viet Nam, Al'azi from the United Arab Emirates, Baul songs from Bangladesh and the oral heritage of Gelede shared by the Yoruba-Nago community living in Togo, Benin and Nigeria.

Poetry also a tool to promote education

Not just limited to art and culture, poetry is also a conduit for formal and

informal education, highlighted the UNESCO chief in her message, noting that it provides effective support for lifelong learning.

“This is why [we] encourage and support artistic education since it strengthens intellectual, emotional and psychological development, shaping generations that are more well-rounded and capable of reinventing the world,” she added.

Finally, since poetry is an act of creating and sharing, UNESCO invites everyone, on this World Day, to create, invent, share, and be open to other languages and other ways of naming the world, to rejoice in all that is different in our diversity. Since to cultivate art and cultivate the mind is also to cultivate peace.