

[New UN report cites violations of rights to freedom of opinion and expression in South Sudan](#)

Undue restrictions on freedom of expression are having a “chilling effect” and “further shrinking the space for debate and dissent” in war-torn South Sudan, a new United Nations human rights report has revealed.

Co-authored by the UN Mission in the country ([UNMISS](#)) and the Organization’s human rights wing, [OHCHR](#), the report also warned that incitement to hatred continues to cause mistrust, fear and violence as well as of a growing climate of self-censorship in the world’s youngest country.

“[South Sudan’s] people have been denied the right to life, the right to justice, and, as this report details, the right to freedom of opinion and expression – [rights that are not luxuries but are essential to bring about peace](#) and development,” said the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein, in a news release announcing the findings.

Across South Sudan, five years of ongoing conflict has uprooted more than four million people but peace efforts are under way both internationally and at grassroots level to end violence.

“It is vital that the voices of all the people of South Sudan are heard so that genuine, inclusive and durable peace can be achieved,” said the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and head of UNMISS, David Shearer.

“All parties to the conflict must respect people’s right to freedom of expression regardless of their ethnicity, beliefs or political views,” he stressed.

Rights are not luxuries but are essential to bring about peace and development – *High Commissioner Zeid*

The [report](#) identifies 60 verified incidents – including killing, arbitrary arrest and detention, closure, suspension or censorship of newspapers, and blocking of websites – in the period from July 2016 to December 2017.

It also found that Government security forces, including the National Security Service, Sudan People’s Liberation Army, and the South Sudan National Police Service, were responsible for two-thirds of the verified cases of human rights violations.

However, many victims said they had not lodged formal complaints because of fear of reprisals by influential people and a lack of trust in institutions including law enforcement and the judiciary, notes the report.

To address the situation, the report urges amendment to legislation to decriminalize defamation and ensure that powers given to security forces do not infringe on the legitimate exercise of the right to freedom of expression.

It also calls on all armed forces to guarantee the protection of journalists, civil society, and human rights defenders and respect their right to monitor and report on the armed conflict; as well as urges the Government to ensure that violations of the right to freedom of expression are promptly investigated and prosecuted.

In the news release, OHCHR also noted that the violations contained in the report include only those within the Government-controlled territory and not those in the opposition-held areas due to insecurity and access restrictions.

[Lack of funding for aid operations means ‘people will die’ in Central African Republic – UN official](#)

A senior United Nations relief official is urging the international community to boost support for humanitarian efforts in crisis-gripped Central African Republic (CAR), where nearly half the population requires assistance.

UN Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator Ursula Mueller made the appeal in the capital, Bangui, on Thursday at the end of a four-day visit to the country.

[“CAR is facing a large-scale humanitarian crisis,”](#) she said. “Violence is fast spreading across the country while urgent and critical needs are increasing and should be covered. Civilians continue to bear the brunt of violence and insecurity.”

Clashes between the mainly Muslim Séléka rebel coalition and anti-Balaka militia, which are mostly Christian, plunged the country into civil conflict in 2013.

The UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs ([OCHA](#)) has described the CAR as [“a fragile country”](#) that has been devastated by years of conflict and faces both structural and economic challenges.

Ms. Mueller, the Office’s second-in-command, said protection will “remain central” to its action there in 2018.

The UN and its partners are seeking [\\$516 million](#) to meet the needs of nearly two million people in the CAR this year, or roughly half the population.

However, as Ms. Mueller pointed out, funding for humanitarian operations in the country has declined over the past three years. Meanwhile, the number of internally displaced people nearly doubled in 2017 to 694,000.

Ms. Mueller witnessed the human face of the humanitarian crisis when she visited the northern town of Paoua.

Clashes between armed groups have forced more than 65,000 people to flee there from surrounding villages.

“I have seen people who are hungry. I call on the international community to support the humanitarian response for Paoua. If we do not receive funding, people will die,” she stated.



OCHA

Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator, Ursula Mueller, meets with returnees in Boulata and Boeing, Central African Republic., by OCHA

Meanwhile, residents have also been affected.

The displaced people are living with local communities in Paoua which has depleted the limited resources available there.

Ms. Mueller also expressed appreciation to humanitarian workers in the town and across the CAR.

“They’re doing incredible work under very difficult conditions. Targeted attacks prevent them from delivering life-saving assistance. Fourteen humanitarian workers were killed last year alone. This is unacceptable,” she

said.

While in Paoua, Ms. Mueller met with displaced women, and marvelled at their strength and dignity amid what she described as “incredible hardships.”

She said: “They want safety, peace, and schools. What any mother wants for their children.”

One of the women, Veronique, fled to Paoua with her six children after her husband was killed. Another woman, Esther, spoke about her struggle to access food, health care and education.

During her meeting with CAR President Faustin Archange Touadéra, Ms. Mueller underlined the need to ramp up efforts to protect civilians. She also shared concerns expressed by the displaced people in Paoua, namely the need for security to help them return to their homes.

The CAR is one of three countries that Ms. Mueller is [visiting](#) in West and Central Africa.

She will also visit Cameroon and Chad in a mission that will wrap up next Tuesday, 27 February.

[**Afghanistan: UN mission welcomes new penal code, urges measures to protect women against women**](#)

While welcoming the entry to force of a new Penal Code in Afghanistan as a having the “potential to trigger real change,” the United Nations mission in the country said on Thursday that it is concerned by the removal of the chapter penalizing violence against women.

The penal Code entered into force last week, placing the country, for the first time, into compliance with international treaty obligations in criminal justice, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan ([UNAMA](#)) said.

“Together with international partners and experts from UN agencies, UNAMA supported Afghan authorities in [drafting the code](#),” the UN Mission said.

“UNAMA will continue dialogue with stakeholders so that the application of the new code does not result in impunity gaps and in particular that there is a robust legal framework in place to protect women from violence,” it added.

The new Penal Code reinforces Afghanistan’s compliance with international human rights and criminal justice standards and incorporates all mandatory

crimes under the UN Convention against Corruption, the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crimes (UNTOC) and its three protocols.

Moreover, it incorporates the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court – covering war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide – and establishes command responsibility for those who fail to prevent or punish subordinates who commit these crimes.

Reforming the sanctions regime, the new Penal Code introduces alternatives to imprisonment, which judges impose for imprisonment sentencing below five years, and are mandated to impose for incarcerations less than three months. The code also significantly reduces the number of crimes for which the death penalty applies.

“The coming into force of the Penal Code will bring significant positive developments and a real potential to trigger societal transformation,” UNAMA stated.

Women’s protection in jeopardy

However, removing the chapter penalizing violence against women causes concern over safeguarding the strongest possible legal protection of women.

Technical amendments to the Code will be essential to ensure that the criminal provisions of the Law on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (the EAW Law) still apply.

UNAMA noted that the current EAW law remains in place and continues to provide overall legal protection for women, and remains committed to facilitating dialogue on ways to strengthen the criminalization of violence against women.

“UNAMA looks forward to the full implementation of the revised Penal Code, with a view to achieving accountability for those who violate national and international laws,” concluded the UN mission.

Evidence-based approach crucial to migrants and migration – top UN officials

As Governments begin to negotiate a global compact on migration, an accurate portrayal of migrants, and of migration, is needed more than ever before to help shape public discourse and policy, senior United Nations officials said Wednesday, underscoring the importance of an evidence-based approach to the issue.

“Over the long-term [the evidence is clear](#): the benefits of migration vastly outweigh the challenges. And without a clear understanding of migration, negative narratives surround migrants,” Louise Arbour, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for International Migration told a multi-stakeholder event held at the UN Headquarters.

“We must not allow xenophobic political narratives about migration distort our objective to enhance international cooperation on migration,” she added, stressing that “it is only with facts and context that we can have a respectful and realistic discussion about migration, one that pushes back on the many inaccurate and negative narratives being touted for short-term political gains and misguided policies.”

The event, titled ‘Facts instead of Perceptions: Promoting an Evidence-Based Discussion on Migration,’ comes on the heels of the start of intergovernmental negotiations on the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration – the first such international instrument on the issue – to be adopted later this year.

Ms. Arbour said that there are currently 258 million international migrants today, 3.4 per cent of the global population, an increase from 2.8 per cent in 2000, and the figure is expected to increase in the coming decades.

The McKinsey Global Institute estimates that migrant workers in higher-productivity settings contributed \$6.7 trillion – or 9.4 per cent – to global GDP in 2015, \$3 trillion more than they would have produced in their countries of origin.



UN Photo/Manuel Elias

Louise Arbour, Special Representative for the Secretary-General on Migration (centre) and Miroslav Lajčák, President of the General Assembly (centre right) address the fourth informal interactive multi-stakeholder hearing of the Intergovernmental Conference and its preparatory process to adopt a global compact for migration.

In 2017, nearly \$600 billion was remitted internationally – three times greater than all development assistance. Some \$450 billion of that was sent to developing countries. And even with these large sums, migrants put 85 per cent of their earnings back into host countries through taxes and spending, Ms. Arbour said.

“Migrants are frequently presented as security threats, but they are statistically less likely to be involved in crime than local populations,” she stressed, adding that there are, of course, those instances when international migration might have negative impacts: when large inflows of migrants have short-term destabilizing effects on local labour markets if they are not properly regulated.

For his part, General Assembly President Miroslav Lajcak said that Governments should make decisions and policies on migration based on the latest, and most concrete analysis and information, also underscoring the important roles the UN and other partners can play in promoting an [evidence-based approach](#) to the issue.

“I want to stress that migration is a fact. It is not an idea. It is not a theory. It is not a trend. It is a fact,” Mr. Lajcak said.

“And we need to respond accordingly. Not with ideas or theories. But with facts. Data. Information. And evidence,” he added.

Mr. Lajcak said that during the Compact’s consultation phase, there were repeated calls for more disaggregated data on migration.

He warned when facts and information are absent, a vacuum develops in their place, and the vacuum can quickly be filled by emotional rhetoric, politicized messaging, or even hate speech.

The private sector, civil society, regional organizations and the UN can act as crucial sources of data and facts needed for Governments to make decisions and policies on migration, he stressed.

Furthermore, an objective media is key because it can distil sometimes technical, or complex, data down to information products, which are accessible to wider audiences.

“We must do more to build partnerships between all these key players,” Mr. Lajcak said, highlighting the need to ensure that data collection and disaggregation receives proper funding and support.

[Job creation around agriculture can](#)

spur youth employment in Africa – UN agency

Agriculture will continue to generate employment in Africa over the coming decades, but businesses around agriculture, including processing, packaging, transportation, distribution, marketing and financial services, could also jobs for young people, especially those in rural areas, the United Nations top agriculture official said Thursday.

“Countries need to promote a rural and structural transformation that fosters [synergies between farm and non-farm activities](#) and that reinforces” the linkages between rural areas and cities, José Graziano da Silva, Director-General of the [Food and Agriculture Organization](#) (FAO), told a regional conference on employment being held from 19 to 23 February in Khartoum, Sudan.

FAO [Regional Conference for Africa](#) primarily focuses on the theme of creating decent and attractive employment in the world’s “youngest” continent in terms of the average age of its population.

Estimates suggest that up to 12 million new jobs will have to be created every year to absorb new labour market entrants over the next 20 years. Today some 54 per cent of Africa’s work force relies on the agricultural sector for livelihoods, income and employment, especially in family farming.

With more people moving to cities, demand on urban food markets will grow, which in turn can generate job opportunities in all agriculture-related activities. But FAO believes that more must be done to create non-agricultural employment in rural areas, including agro-tourism and other services.

“More than ever, strategic partnerships are needed to bring together the African Union, the African Development Bank and the UN system and other development partners,” Mr. Graziano da Silva said.

He warned however that more profitable urban markets can lead to a concentration of food production in large commercial farms, and also the creation of value chains dominated by large processors and retailers.

“In this contest, smallholders and family farmers need specific policies and regulations. This includes providing access to inputs, credit and technology and improving land tenure,” he added, stressing how social protection programmes, including cash transfers can link public food purchase to family farmer’s production.