

At least seven killed at a religious gathering in northern Ethiopia – UN rights office

23 January 2018 – The United Nations human rights arm on Tuesday voiced deep concern over the deaths of at least seven people celebrating a religious festival in Ethiopia as security forces reportedly tried to stop them from shouting anti-Government chants.

Speaking to the media at the regular news briefing in Geneva, Ravina Shamdasani, a spokesperson for the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights ([OHCHR](#)) said that the event was “[all the more regrettable](#)” as it occurred just two weeks after the country’s ruling coalition, the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front, officially announced its intention to undertake reforms.

According to OHCHR, the incident occurred in Woldiya City in Amhara regional state on Saturday as security forces reportedly tried stop a group of people, who were celebrating the Ethiopian Orthodox festival of Epiphany, from chanting anti-Government songs and allegedly opened fire on them.

In addition to the those killed, a number of individuals were also injured. The deaths and injured have been confirmed by the regional government.

Afterwards, protesters reportedly blocked roads and destroyed a number of properties.

“We call on the authorities to ensure that the security forces take all feasible measures to prevent the use of force,” said Ms. Shamdasani, noting that the Office been informed that the President of Amhara regional state said, in his terms, that a “careful examination” of the incident will be undertaken.

“We urge for this to be a prompt, independent, impartial and effective investigation to ensure those responsible for any violations are held accountable,” she added.

OHCHR also called on the Government to undertake legal and policy reforms as well as implement guidance and training programmes to ensure that the conduct of law enforcement officials is in line with international standards.

Conditions in Myanmar not yet suitable for Rohingya refugees to return safely – UN agency

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The necessary safeguards for Rohingyas to return to Myanmar are absent, and there are ongoing restrictions on access for aid agencies, the media and other independent observers, the United Nations warned on Tuesday, two months after Myanmar and Bangladesh agreed on a plan for voluntary repatriation of the refugees.

“To ensure the right of refugees to return voluntarily, and in safety and in dignity, we call again on Myanmar to allow the necessary unhindered humanitarian access in Rakhine State and create conditions for a genuine and lasting solution,” Adrian Edwards, a spokesperson for the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees ([UNHCR](#)) [told](#) the regular news briefing in Geneva, Tuesday.

Access would allow for assessment of the actual conditions and the long-term viability of the returns, as well as help address the legitimate safety concerns for any refugees contemplating their return there, he emphasized.

In addition, refugees also need to be properly informed and consulted about such conditions in order for returns to be safe, voluntary and sustainable added the UNHCR spokesperson.

Also vital is the full implementation of the recommendations of the Rakhine Advisory Commission [a panel led by former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan], including the call for peace and security for all communities in Myanmar’s Rakhine state, inter-communal dialogue, freedom of movement, access to livelihoods and achieving solutions for the legal and citizenship status of Muslim communities.

“Turning these recommendations [...] into a reality on the ground is essential to building confidence for returns and addressing the tense inter-communal situation that has built up over many years in Rakhine state,” said Mr. Edwards.

“Without this, the risk of dangerous and rushed returns into a situation where violence might reignite is too great to be ignored,” he stressed.

Over 650,000 members of the minority Muslim Rohingya community have taken refuge, and more continue to arrive, in Cox’s Bazar in southern Bangladesh after having been forced to flee their homes in Myanmar’s northern Rakhine province [following an outbreak of brutal violence](#) in late-August 2017.

UNHCR remains prepared to work with both governments towards finding a long-term solution to this crisis in the interest of the refugees themselves, of both governments, the host community in Bangladesh and all communities in Rakhine state.

[Fresh violence in Central African Republic sparks 'unprecedented' levels of displacement – UN](#)

23 January 2018 – Surging violence in the Central African Republic (CAR) has put unprecedented numbers of people on the run, the United Nations refugee agency said Tuesday, reporting that hungry, desperate arrivals being registered in neighbouring Chad say their houses have been torched and that armed groups are “killing anyone in their way.”

Overall, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees said the violence has pushed displacement to its highest levels since the start of the violence in 2013, moreover, estimates show that almost half the population is now food insecure and some 2.5 million people need humanitarian assistance.

“Data as of the end of December shows that [688,700 people were displaced internally](#) – 60 per cent more than just a year ago,” Adrian Edwards, UNHCR spokesperson told reporters at today’s regular press briefing in Geneva.

Meanwhile, 542,380 CAR refugees are in neighbouring countries, a 12 per cent increase compared to last year.

“For a country whose population is estimated at around 4.6 million, these two figures combined represent an astonishing level of suffering and people in need,” he added.

Clashes between the mainly Muslim Séléka rebel coalition and anti-Balaka militia, which are mostly Christian, plunged the country into civil conflict in 2013. Hundreds of thousands of people have been uprooted and have fled to neighbouring Cameroon, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Chad and the Republic of Congo for safety.

The recent surge in violence, particularly in the country’s north-west, has led over 17,000 Central Africans to flee to Chad since end-December – some ten times more than during the whole of 2017 – making it the biggest refugee influx since 2014.

UNHCR and the authorities are identifying host villages away from the border in Chad to relocate the refugees, and teams are distributing food and basic relief items, including blankets and mosquito nets, provided by the UN World

Food Programme ([WFP](#)).

The UN refugee agency and its partners are also providing medical assistance to new arrivals, some of whom are affected by malaria, diarrhoea and respiratory infections. In total Chad hosts 77,122 refugees from CAR.

The conflict in CAR's north-west has also displaced some 65,000 Central Africans to the city of Paoua, which has seen its population tripling.

"The newly displaced told UNHCR that armed groups attacked their villages, torching houses, looting food and killing anyone in their way," updated Mr. Edwards.

While local authorities report that some 15,000 houses have been burned and 487 people killed across the northwest, UNHCR fears the number could be higher as some places are still inaccessible.

Describing the situation as "one of the world's most forgotten displacement crises," Mr. Edwards shared humanitarian community estimates that almost half of all Central Africans will face food insecurity in 2018."

"In 2017, against needs we estimated at \$209.2 million for the CAR situation, only 12 per cent was funded – barely more than a dollar for every 10 required. In 2018, UNHCR's financial requirements for the CAR situation amount to \$176.1 million," he concluded.

[DR Congo: UN rights office urges probe into use of force against protestors, UN personnel](#)

23 January 2018 – At least six people died and 68 were wounded during weekend demonstrations in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) capital, Kinshasa, the United Nations human rights office reported Tuesday, urging the Government to investigate all incidents where security forces may have used excessive force against protestors and UN personnel.

"The rights to freedom of religion, expression and [peaceful assembly](#) must be fully respected, in line with the DRC's obligations under international law. The authorities must also ensure that UN human rights personnel are able to carry out their essential monitoring work," Ravina Shamdasani, Spokesperson for the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights ([OHCHR](#)), told reporters in Geneva.

On Sunday, the UN Joint Human Rights Office in the DRC recorded at least six deaths during demonstrations in the nation's capital, Kinshasa, with 68

people wounded, 121 people arrested and the firing of tear gas into churches in various parts of the African country.

A UN rights officer trying to conduct human rights monitoring of the demonstrations was kicked and punched by security forces in Kinshasa, while military police also fired tear gas towards at least three UN patrols.

“Violent dispersal of protestors will not resolve the political tensions but will only serve to heighten them,” she said, calling on the authorities to work constructively with political opponents, religious leaders and civil society to ensure that the right of all Congolese to participate in the public affairs of their country is upheld.

Throughout the country, Internet and SMS [text message] services have been suspended since midnight on Saturday, 20 January night, following a similar 48-hour suspension around the 31 December protests.

Tear gas was fired into and around churches in Kinshasa, Goma, Kisangani, Lubumbashi and Bukavu, while heavy deployments of national police and armed forces, were reported in Mbandaka, Beni, Mbuji-Mayi and Butembo, particularly around places of worship.

Sunday’s events followed the killing of nine people and the injuring of at least 98 others during the 31 December 2017 protests.

“Those held responsible for the killings and injuries must be brought to justice without delay,” Ms. Shamdasani said.

The protests have been taking place in the vicinity of churches.

The political agreement at the heart of the demonstrations – facilitated by *Conférence Episcopale Nationale du Congo* (CENCO) mediators – allowed President Joseph Kabila to stay in power beyond the end of his term and stipulated that peaceful, credible and inclusive elections would be organized in the DRC by the end of December 2017.

Record 22.2 million people need humanitarian assistance in Yemen – UN aid chief

23 January 2018 – The top United Nations relief official has expressed his deep concern about the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Yemen, noting that a record 22.2 million people are now in need of assistance – 3.4 million more than last year.

I remain [deeply concerned](#) by the humanitarian situation in Yemen, which has continued to deteriorate because of on-going conflict, collapsing basic services and economic decline," said Mark Lowcock, the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator, in a statement issued overnight by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs ([OCHA](#)).

Mr. Lowcock, also the UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, encouraged all donors to contribute to the recently launched 2018 Yemen Humanitarian Response plan, which requires \$2.96 billion to provide life-saving assistance and protection to more than 13 million people across the country this year.

He welcomed the nearly \$1 billion pledge by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates as well as an additional \$500 million in commitment from regional donors.

He also noted the importance of keeping all of Yemen's ports, including Hudaydah and Saleef, open to humanitarian assistance and commercial imports of food, fuel and medicines. Over 70 per cent of people in need of assistance live in proximity to those two Red Sea ports.

Since the decision to re-open Hudaydah and Saleef last month, the United Nations and its partners have successfully delivered large volumes of food, medicines and fuel to people in need, he said.

"Yemenis have suffered for too long," Mr. Lowcock said, calling on all parties to cease hostilities and engage meaningfully with the UN to achieve a lasting political settlement.

On Monday, UN Spokesman Stéphane Dujarric told the press that the UN Special Envoy for Yemen, Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed, intends not to continue in his position beyond his current contract ending in February 2018.

Since the uprisings in Yemen began in early 2011, the United Nations has been actively engaged in mediation efforts to help Yemenis to find a peaceful solution to the conflict and enable the resumption of a peaceful, orderly and inclusive political transition.