

[UN announces special probe into attacks on peacekeepers in eastern DR Congo](#)

6 January 2018 – The United Nations is launching a special investigation into attacks on peacekeepers in restive eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), one month after 15 ‘blue helmets’ were killed and dozens wounded in the deadliest single assault on a UN mission in nearly a quarter century.

According to a UN spokesperson, [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres on Friday announced the appointment of veteran UN peacekeeping official Dmitry Titov of Russia to lead a Special Investigation into recent attacks on peacekeepers and bases in the Beni territory of North Kivu Province, in the DRC.

The probe will include a focus on the 7 December attack on a base of the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the DRC (MONUSC) in Semuliki that killed 15 Tanzanian peacekeepers and wounded 43 others. One blue helmet remains missing.

The UN said the special probe will examine the circumstances surrounding these attacks, evaluate MONUSCO’s overall preparedness and response to the events and provide recommendations on how to prevent such attacks from occurring in the future or when they do occur, from having such lethal consequences.

RELATED: [In Tanzania, UN peacekeeping chief pays tribute to ‘blue helmets’ killed in DR Congo](#)

The investigation team will head to the DRC early in January and will also visit relevant countries in Africa’s Great Lakes region. Alongside officials of the United Nations, the team will also include two military officers from Tanzania.

Having joined the United Nations in 1991, Mr. Titov served as Assistant Secretary-General for Rule of Law and Security Institutions in the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) from 2007 – 2017. He also served as Africa Director in DPKO’s Office of Operations.

[In wake of violent protests in Iran, UN Security Council meets to take](#)

stock of situation

5 January 2018 – Even though days of anti-Government protests across Iran appear to have ebbed, a senior United Nations political official said Friday the UN will continue to monitor the situation and engage with Iranian authorities on addressing the legitimate concerns of the population through peaceful means.

“The Secretariat will continue to [...] engage Iranian authorities with a view to addressing, as the Secretary-General underscored in his [statement of 3 January](#), the legitimate concerns of the population through peaceful means and avoid violence or retribution against peaceful protestors,” Tayé-Brook Zerihoun, the Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs told a Security Council meeting this afternoon.

He [briefed](#) the Council on the situation since demonstrations broke out on 28 December 2017 when hundreds of Iranians gathered, in a largely peaceful manner, in Mashhad, the country’s second-largest city, chanting slogans against economic hardship.

“According to reports carried by official Iranian media, more than 20 Iranians, including a teenage boy and a policeman, have died during the protests,” said Mr. Zerihoun, adding that Iran’s Ministry of the Interior stated that over 1,000 protesters have been detained, although many may have since been released.

Demonstrations took place in other urban centers, including the capital, Tehran, as well as in many rural areas. Some of the slogans also expressed disappointment at the slow or limited change in social constraints and political freedoms, and criticized what the protesters see as the privileged position of the clergy and elements of the country’s security establishment, reported Mr. Zerihoun.

“As the demonstrations intensified, some became violent,” he said, but noted that the UN has a very limited presence in Iran and could neither confirm nor deny the extent of the violence.

Mr. Zerihoun told the Council that on 31 December 2017, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani told a Cabinet meeting that the Iranian people should be allowed “space” to protest and criticize the government. At the same time, he stressed that violence would not be tolerated.

Two days later, on 2 January, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei accused Iran’s enemies, without naming them, of “stirring” the unrest. On 3 January, the Permanent Representative of Iran to the United Nations wrote to the Secretary-General, accusing the United States of stepping up “its acts of intervention in a grotesque way in Iran’s internal affairs under the pretext of providing support for sporadic protests” in Iran, he recalled.

He went on to say that also on 3 January, the Iranian Revolutionary Guards

announced the end of anti-Government protests. Recent reports indicate smaller and more dispersed protests. Meanwhile, from 3 to 5 January, large pro-Government rallies were reported across the country, with participants expressing their support for the Supreme Leader and condemning the violence.

[UN approves largest-ever emergency funding allocation to scale up response in war-torn Yemen](#)

5 January 2018 – Despite progress over the past month in opening Yemen’s Red Sea ports to commercial and aid shipments, the United Nations relief chief on Friday approved the largest-ever emergency relief allocation – \$50 million – amid concerns that the humanitarian catastrophe in the war-ravaged country is being made worse by the recent increase in fighting and airstrikes.

“These funds will help to save lives,” declared UN Emergency Relief Coordinator Mark Lowcock as he [announced](#) that the funding would rapidly bolster the response for some 22 million people in Yemen who need humanitarian assistance, including more than eight million who are “a step away from famine.”

At the same time, he emphasized that to roll back the unfolding catastrophe, three things need to happen.

“First,” he began, “there must be reduction both in fighting on the ground and airstrikes, which have greatly intensified in recent weeks.”

Armed conflict is killing and injuring people and destroying critical infrastructure. Danger and bureaucratic impediments hamper humanitarians’ ability to reach those in need, including those at risk of diphtheria – a growing outbreak now in most of Yemen’s governorates.

Mr. Lowcock maintained that “the parties to the conflict must comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure,” and facilitate humanitarian partners.

“Second,” he continued, “we need all ports to remain open without interruption. Yemen imports about 90 per cent of its staple food and nearly all of its fuel and medicine [...] a lifeline for millions of people.”

Moving forward, sustained and higher levels of food, fuel and medicines must be imported.

“Third,” he said, “we need faster and more generous donor financing.”

While aid saved millions in 2017, recent restrictions and intensified fighting have forced more reliance on aid.

“The CERF allocation today will ensure a comprehensive, integrated response across life-saving humanitarian sectors for the most vulnerable people in 27 high-priority districts at risk of famine, as well as in areas where conflict has recently escalated,” he said.

“The Yemeni people need an end to the conflict so that they can begin to rebuild their lives. For this to happen, the parties to the conflict must cease hostilities and engage meaningfully with the UN to achieve a lasting political settlement,” he concluded.

[UN rights office warns DR Congo authorities against use of excessive force when policing protests](#)

5 January 2018 – Amid ongoing political tension in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), violent actions by the security forces during recent protests in Kinshasa and other cities suggest “deliberate intention to suppress civil and political rights,” the United Nations human rights office reported on Friday.

“From the latest information we have managed to gather, at least five people are known to have been killed and 92 injured,” Liz Throssell, spokesperson for the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights ([OHCHR](#)), told reporters at the regular news briefing in Geneva.

In addition, some 180 people were arrested – most have now been released.

“The security forces allegedly fired live ammunition, rubber bullets and tear gas grenades, in some cases at point blank range,” she added.

At the same time, Ms. Throssell said OHCHR believes the casualty figures from the 31 December demonstrations may be higher.

“Our colleagues on the ground were denied access to morgues, hospitals and detention centres. They were sent away from these sites by defence and security forces, and so were unable to fully conduct their human rights monitoring work,” she elaborated.

Security forces were also reported to have fired tear gas inside churches, stopped people attending religious services and stolen their personal property.

“This is an alarming development that impinges on freedom of religion or belief,” she underscored, adding: “We call on the authorities to ensure that the security forces do not resort to excessive force when policing demonstrations, and that protests are handled in line with international standards.”

Pointing out that “necessity, proportionality, non-discrimination and accountability are key principles that underpin the use of force for the management of peaceful assemblies,” Ms. Throssell maintained that the DRC Government must ensure that everyone is able to exercise their right to freedoms of association and peaceful assembly, opinion and expression.

There should also be credible and independent investigations into alleged use of excessive force, and those responsible for human rights violations should be brought to justice.

“We once again urge the authorities to engage in a constructive dialogue with the opposition and to ensure that the right of all Congolese to participate in the public affairs of their country are respected,” she concluded.

Shocked at executions in Egypt, UN rights office raises concerns over due process guarantees

5 January 2018 – The United Nations human rights wing on Friday expressed deep shock that 20 people were reported to have been executed in Egypt since last week, amid concerns that due process and fair trial guarantees did not appear to have been followed.

According to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights ([OHCHR](#)), on 2 January, five men who had been sentenced to death by an Egyptian military court were hanged in Alexandria, four of whom had been convicted for an explosion near a stadium in Kafr al-Sheikh on 15 April 2015 that killed three military recruits and injured two others.

“We understand the defendants were tried by military judges on the basis of legislation that refers cases of destruction of public property to military courts and in view of the victims being from the Egyptian Military Academy,” OHCHR spokesperson Liz Throssell told reporters on Friday at the regular news briefing in Geneva.

On 26 December, 15 men convicted on terrorism charges were reportedly executed, found guilty by a military court of killing soldiers in Sinai in 2013.

“Civilians should only be tried in military or special courts in exceptional cases,” she continued.

Further, Ms. Throssell said it is important that all necessary measures are taken to ensure that such trials take place under conditions which genuinely afford the full guarantees stipulated in Article 14 of the [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#), to which Egypt is a State party.

Noting that these include a fair and public hearing by a competent, independent and impartial tribunal, she expressed concern that this did not appear to have been followed as military courts typically deny defendants’ rights accorded by civilian courts.

“In cases of capital punishment, trials must meet the highest standards of fairness and due process. Reports also indicated that the prisoners who were executed may have been subjected to initial enforced disappearance and torture before being tried,” she asserted.

Despite security challenges facing Egypt, particularly in Sinai, Ms. Throssell maintained, “executions should not be used as a means to combat terrorism.”

AS such , she said the UN human rights office called on the Egyptian authorities to reconsider the use of death penalty cases in accordance with their international human rights obligations and to take all necessary measures to ensure that violations of due process and fair trial are not repeated.