

[UN chief condemns attack on church near Cairo, calls for perpetrators to be brought to justice](#)

29 December 2017 – United Nations [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres has condemned the attack that took place earlier Friday outside Mar Mina church in the Helwan district, south of Cairo, Egypt.

In a statement from his spokesman, the Secretary-General [extended his deepest condolences](#) to the families of the victims and to the Government and people of Egypt and wishes a swift recovery to those who have been injured.

According to media reports, at least nine people were killed when gunmen opened fire on a Coptic Orthodox Church on Friday, in the southern Cairo neighborhood of Helwan.

“The Secretary-General calls for those responsible for today’s horrific attack to be swiftly brought to justice,” the statement concluded.

[Peacekeepers saved many lives despite challenges, UN officials stress at year’s end](#)

29 December 2017 – Despite a particularly deadly year for United Nations peacekeepers – with more than 60 ‘blue helmets’ killed in hostile acts – the Organization in 2017 completed its peacekeeping objectives in Côte d’Ivoire, refocused its work in Haiti and will soon complete its mandate in Liberia.

“We do protect civilians every day. We do save lives every day. We often do it under very difficult and stressful circumstances,” Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations Jean-Pierre Lacroix said in a recent interview with *UN News*.

He added that “many lives were saved” because of peacekeepers’ actions this year in the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mali, South Sudan and other places.

“I think it’s more than warranted to pay tribute to them and their achievements,” Mr. Lacroix said. “But certainly we have to work hard to overcome the challenges we are facing.”

Challenges in 2017

One of the challenges facing UN peacekeepers, as they operate in increasingly complex and dangerous areas, is the need for better training and equipment, particularly when it comes to intelligence gathering and enhancing situational awareness.

This includes the use of modern technologies, such as unmanned aerial services, radars and tethered balloons.

The head of the UN Department of Field Support, Atul Khare, said the UN is also looking to borrow or purchase more equipment related to security reinforcements, accommodations, vehicles and communications tools, among others.

In Mali, for example, one out of four military hospitals is without staff or equipment, and in the Central African Republic, one in three, he said.

The needs also extend to gaps in working closely with local communities, which means that in some areas more peacekeepers are needed who speak French.

“We must do even more on the side of prevention and risk mitigation when seeking to protect our colleagues. Providing for the safety and security of deployed personnel in volatile environments is an absolute necessity,” Mr. Khare told *UN News*.

Sexual exploitation and abuse

One of the main challenges in peacekeeping operations has been grappling with allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse by UN peacekeepers.

Earlier this year, [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres unveiled his strategy for eradicating the scourge, and appointed Jane Connors as the first Victims' Rights Advocate.

“It is about dignity for the victims, compassion, a real feeling of empathy, a feeling that they are not forgotten,” Ms. Connors [said](#) in early December. “That their hurt, their pain is acknowledged, and we do as much as we possibly can do to make their situation better.”

Ms. Connors made the comments during a visit to South Sudan, where four of last year's 103 allegations were filed. This year, the UN recorded 54 allegations – roughly half the number.

“This is a result of the many robust efforts put in place to train our personnel, raise awareness among communities on the risks associated with SEA [sexual exploitation and abuse], promote and enforce the zero-tolerance policy and partner with Member States,” said Mr. Khare.

The new UN strategy to prevent sexual exploitation and abuse puts more pressure on governments to investigate and prosecute wrong-doing. In addition, 17 countries volunteered some \$1.8 million for a trust fund to aid victims get medical, psycho-social, legal or socio-economic support.

“We can see that information about allegations are coming more with less obstacle than before,” Mr. Lacroix said. “At the same time, we need to do more to fully implement the policy and it has to have strong awareness at every level.”

Protecting the environment

UN peacekeeping is also managing its impact in another way within the countries that host its operations – by preserving natural resources and not damaging the environment during the physical deployments.

“‘Do no harm’ must include both communities and the resources upon which they depend: water, land, cultural heritage,” Mr. Khare said.

Plans to reduce the peacekeeping footprint and energy consumption also saves time and resources, allowing peacekeeping missions to focus on implementing their core mandates.

All UN peacekeeping operations this year launched Environmental Action Plans which have, for example, led to 80 wastewater treatment plans being installed in peacekeeping operations.

“We are constantly looking into keeping our own house in order, and leave the place better than we found it,” said Mr. Khare.

Looking ahead to 2018

If the year 2017 brought ambitious reform, then 2018 must be the year that these reforms are implemented, Mr. Lacroix said.

He noted that this will be particularly important in the field, where colleagues must be informed and empowered to act.

Mr. Khare echoed the idea that reforms are ongoing, noting that the goal is to “ensure that we are stronger in prevention, more agile in mediation, and more nimble, efficient and cost-effective in our operations.”

He pointed to improved efficiency and effectiveness of peacekeeping, including also by strengthening engagement with Member States and regional organizations to better serve the most vulnerable people around the world.

“We approach 2018 with a sense of hope. We will do our best to successfully implement these reforms and certainly we will do our best to support our colleagues in the field,” said Mr. Lacroix.

[UN chief welcomes exchange of](#)

prisoners and detainees in eastern Ukraine

29 December 2017 – United Nations [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres has welcomed the recent exchange of prisoners and detainees in eastern Ukraine and commended all those who helped bring about the exchange.

[The Secretary-General] hopes that this humanitarian act could serve as [a positive step towards strengthening the confidence among the sides](#), read a statement attributable to his spokesperson Thursday.

[He also] urges all parties to take further measures in this spirit, including by fully respecting and upholding the ceasefire agreement and continuing to work together to fulfil all of their commitments under the Minsk agreements, it added.

On 27 December, more than 300 detainees were released with the participation of the UN partner, International Committee of the Red Cross ([ICRC](#)). The operation took place near the town of Maiorsk and is the largest since the beginning of the conflict.

[According](#) to the ICRC, this is the first time in 2017 that, at the request of the parties concerned, the ICRC has participated in the release and transfer of detainees held in relation to the conflict in Ukraine.

In late February 2014, the situation in Ukraine transcended what was initially seen as an internal Ukrainian political crisis into violent clashes in parts of the country, later reaching full-scale conflict in the east. Nevertheless, despite a September 2014 ceasefire agreed in Minsk, the situation deteriorated and the crisis is now slipping into its fourth year.

Peru: Pardon of former President Fujimori a 'slap in the face' for victims, say UN rights experts

28 December 2017 – Condemning the pardoning of former President of Peru, Alberto Fujimori, a group of United Nations independent human rights experts have said that the move undermines the work of the judiciary and the international community to achieve justice.

["It is a major setback for the rule of law in Peru](#): a humanitarian pardon has been granted to someone convicted of serious crimes after a fair trial, whose

guilt is not in question and who does not meet the legal requirements for a pardon," said the experts in a news release issued by the UN human rights office.

"We are appalled by this decision. It is a slap in the face for the victims and witnesses whose tireless commitment brought him to justice."

The experts voicing their concern include Agnès Callamard, the UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions; Pablo de Greiff, the UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion of truth, justice, reparation and guarantees of non-recurrence; and the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances.

In the news release, the experts stressed that the Peruvian President's constitutional right to pardon people could not be seen in isolation from the international conventions ratified by the country.

"International human rights law restricts the granting of amnesties, pardons or other exclusions of responsibility in cases of serious human rights violations including extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances," they said, noting that a request of habeas corpus on Mr. Fujimori's health condition was already rejected by the judiciary.

Mr. Fujimori was serving a 25-year jail term for serious human rights violations, including extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances and kidnapping. His conviction had been hailed as a major achievement in the fight against impunity.

The announcement of his pardon by current President Pedro Pablo Kuczynski, on December 24, has sparked protests in the capital, Lima, and elsewhere in the country.

Government should not give in to political pressure – rights experts

Also in the release, the experts said that the Government should not give in to political pressure and must honour its domestic and international obligations.

"Mr. Fujimori must be treated like any other person convicted of serious human rights crimes. His treatment should be compatible with his state of health and in accordance with the established standards and procedures," added the experts.

The Government should respect the victims and witnesses who fought for justice and should adopt a comprehensive transitional justice strategy as a matter of priority, the experts added.

UN Special Rapporteurs and independent experts are appointed by the Geneva-based 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.

Legacy of UN Mission in Liberia tied to former President Johnson Sirleaf, says senior UN official

28 December 2017 – The legacy of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, the outgoing President of Liberia, is connected to the legacy of the United Nations Mission in the country ([UNMIL](#)), which will wind down in March after 15 years of operations, a senior UN official said.

In an interview with *UN News*, Farid Zarif, the head of UNMIL, said that UN peacekeepers, working with national authorities, managed to bring peace and stability to the country, to help it rebuild and to pave the way for renewed economic growth.

“We are very confident that with the departure of UNMIL Liberia will be in a far better situation to meet the challenges of the future,” Under-Secretary-General Zarif said, despite continued vulnerabilities and fragilities.

Liberia is a very rich country endowed with many natural resources, he added. With improved management of those resources, along with a diversification of the macroeconomy and support from the international community, the country has the potential.

“[Ms.] Sirleaf should be credited for providing a vision for the future of Liberia. And if elements of that vision are implemented, Liberia will soon become a self-sustaining society,” Mr. Zarif said.

“Her legacy is very much connected to the legacy of the UN mission in Liberia.”

Ms. Sirleaf will step down in January after two terms in office. Liberians are still waiting for the official announcement of her successor following Tuesday’s second round of vote.

Former Nigerian leader Olusegun Obasanjo, who is a member of the UN Secretary-General’s High-Level Advisory Board on Mediation, is due to arrive in the capital, Monrovia, today.

[Secretary-General](#) António Guterres requested Mr. Obasanjo to travel to Liberia as part of the UN’s continued good offices engagement – a term for third-party assistance in mediating a conflict – and to help support an orderly and peaceful transition of power. This would be the first time one democratically elected leader in Liberia hands over power to another in more than 70 years.

Ahead of the 26 December election, as well as the first round of vote on 10

October, UNMIL supported national election officials, even delivering voting materials by plane. Other branches of the UN provided technical assistance. All security duties were transferred over to Liberian officials in June of last year.

UNMIL also carried out its good offices engagement with community members, bringing together local leaders, faith-based organizations, the media, women and youth, among others.

“We thought that based on past experiences of violence, we need to really invest in preventive diplomacy,” Mr. Zarif said.

“Together we have been very successful in avoiding all forms of violence. Even demonstrations did not happen, let alone mortalities or casualties. So we are very happy with the success of the good offices.”