

UN chief condemns attack that leaves dozens of peacekeepers dead in volatile eastern DR Congo

8 December 2017 – Dozens of United Nations ‘blue helmets’ in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) have been killed and many more injured, in what the [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres described as the ‘worst attack’ on UN peacekeepers in recent history.

Late Thursday, a MONUSCO (the UN Stabilization Mission in the DRC) Company Operating Base at Force at Semuliki in Beni territory, North Kivu, was attacked by suspected Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) elements, resulting in a protracted fighting between the suspected armed group elements and MONUSCO and Armed Forces of the DRC, known by the French acronym, FARDC.

‘These deliberate attacks against UN peacekeepers are unacceptable and constitute a war crime’ said Secretary-General António Guterres, adding: ‘I condemn this attack unequivocally.’

Further, calling on the DRC authorities to investigate the incident and swiftly bring the perpetrators to justice, the UN chief stressed: ‘There must be no impunity for such assaults, here or anywhere else.’

In his remarks, he also said that the attack is another indication of the challenges faced by UN peacekeepers around the world and acknowledged the sacrifices made by troop contributing countries in the service of global peace.

‘These brave women and men are putting their lives on the line every day across the world to serve peace and to protect civilians,’ he noted, offering condolences to the families and loved ones of those killed and a speedy recovery to those injured.

He also informed that military reinforcements, including the Force Commander from MONUSCO, have arrived on the scene and medical evacuation of casualties is ongoing.

The volatile North Kivu region, located in eastern DRC, has witnessed a number of attacks on UN peacekeeping forces. In October, two UN ‘blue helmets’ were killed and another 18 were injured their base was attacked by the ADF armed group.

[Podcast: Peacekeeping and protection in South Sudan](#)

7 December 2017 – Defending the vulnerable from attack is one of the important duties of a UN peacekeeper, but what do you do when you come across a secret safe that may contain weapons, hidden away in a camp designed to protect civilians?

That's one of the real-life dilemmas facing a UN police patrol in this [latest edition](#) of our podcast series from *UN News*, 'The Lid Is On.'

We'll be taking you inside one of the Protection of Civilian sites, where thousands of South Sudanese civilians have been sheltering during years of conflict, under the watchful eye of UN 'blue helmets,' as peacekeepers are widely known, from countries across the world.

Daniel Dickinson has been working as the Spokesperson for the UN Mission in the country, known as [UNMISS](#), since early this year, and we asked him to report on the behind-the-scenes work that its troops and police get involved in every day, to try and ease the suffering of the world's youngest nation.

AUDIO: Peacekeeping and protection in South Sudan.

[FEATURE: Seizing on global trend, Afghan women reporters empower voices against violence](#)

7 December 2017 – In a year when the [#metoo](#) hashtag has inspired women across the globe to tell their personal tales of harassment and unwanted sexual advances in the workplace, a team of female television reporters in northern Afghanistan is promising to "leave no sister behind" by telling the often harrowing stories of Afghan women and girls trapped by abuse and gender-based violence.

In Afghanistan, the challenge of helping women tell these stories is fraught with peril. It requires the use of confidentiality and anonymity to protect women and girls who choose to speak out. Those who report abuse – from simple harassment to severe beatings and rape – risk retribution and often more violence, sometimes including murder, for speaking out.

"Our first step is to gain the trust of survivors," says Raihana Rasoly, an

anchor and reporter at Ariana Television in the city of Mazar-i-Sharif. “When we report on abuse, we are careful to follow up and stay in contact with those who want to tell their story through the media.”

She went on to say that the media outlet also works to help get the women to safety, including, if necessary, to the local women’s shelter.

“I would also say that when it comes to sexual harassment, female journalists know a lot about this problem,” adds Ms. Rasoly, who heads up the regional bureau of the Afghan Journalists Safety Committee. “In Afghanistan, if a woman or girl tells her story, she can be saddled with a stigma for life.”

Though women in developed countries are also subject to ostracism and further abuse for speaking out, in Afghanistan that can also be accompanied by societal perceptions that the violations of a woman or girl have tainted her for life. She, in turn, can be abandoned by her own family.

The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan ([UNAMA](#)) has taken a special interest in providing support for media organizations keen to help Afghan women, men and marginalized groups tell their stories.



Ariana TV reporters in Mazar, seizing on global trends, help expose abuse and violence. Left to Right: Anosha Ansari; Raihana Rasoly; Wahida Faizy. Photo: Philip Smucker

The UN has sponsored forums and athletic events to promote conversation and awareness of gender-based violence and harassment, and has worked with local media outlets to extend the messages coming out of these events to surrounding communities. The UN also has conducted traditional and social media campaigns to promote women’s rights, including through the participation of religious leaders, academics, elders and other public figures.

The best way to confront gender-based violence is to empower women, girls, and all others to speak up, according to Sayed Barez, a UNAMA public information officer. “When survivors are allowed to speak out – with the help of the media – it holds perpetrators accountable, turns lives around, and sensitizes society to all forms of gender-based violence, including sexual harassment.”

In the end, he says, although obstacles remain, “the UN hopes to help in Afghanistan’s transformation by focusing efforts around enforcing laws that defend women and by insisting on the view that all and any violence against women and girls is wrong.”

In Mazar, where efforts have been made to provide space and shelter for female survivors of violence and abuse, women who have sought protection have also been able to speak out through the media.

“Though it can be dangerous even for the shelters, depriving women of contact

to the outside world and the media is illegal,” says Sayed Abdul Safwat, Director of Independent Cooperation for Change, an Afghan group instrumental in setting up women’s shelters across Afghanistan.

“Anything less than access to the media makes a shelter more akin to a prison,” he says. “Women should not be required to talk to the media, but they certainly should have the right to do so.”



Afghan woman in traditional cover, known as a burka, at the Blue Mosque in Mazar. Photo: Jawad Jalail

In social media across Afghanistan, one trending hashtag is #wheresmyname, which highlights the effort of women to be heard and recognized by men. “Women are often ignored in Afghan society, and their interests fall on deaf ears, so this hashtag is a kind of a cry for recognition,” said Anosha Ansari, also a reporter at Ariana TV in Mazar.

“Even when women are losing hope, they still want to be heard,” she added, pointing out that women and girls can often go unnamed even on their gravestones, which merely read, “Wife of someone” or “Daughter of another.”

Social media is a way not only for abused women and girls to learn more about their rights with regard to gender-based violence, but also to highlight the plight of survivors, particularly in distant locales across Afghanistan.

Even when women are losing hope, they still want to be heard
Anosha Ansari

Yet Afghan women are usually reluctant to identify themselves with a real photo on Facebook, Twitter or elsewhere. “Of course, there is also self-censorship on social media,” said Ms. Ansari. “Women and girls usually want to avoid confrontation, so they often choose to keep stories of violence and abuse to themselves, but not always.”

Afghanistan’s media culture remains one of the most open and vibrant in the region, but breaking down conservative customs and taboos about discussing gender-based violence is a constant challenge. “There are still a lot of male leaders in society who say that this is not a subject that needs discussion,” said Ms. Rasoly. “That is a mindset that we are dealing with and trying to change.”

Each year, the international community marks 25 November as the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. Beginning on that date, and running through Human Rights Day on 10 December, are the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence Campaign.



Women demonstrating for rights. The banner reads: “Human rights are your

rights! Human rights are my right! Human rights are our rights!" Photo: Farzana Wahidy

The theme for the 2017 campaign is "Leave No One Behind." Civil society activists across the world, including those in Afghanistan, are calling for all governments to use laws and policies as tools to confront and punish the perpetrators of violence against women, and better protect everyone. Led by UN Women, the agency leading the global effort for gender equality, which also works on the ground in Afghanistan, the UN focuses attention on vulnerable groups.

Relentless fighting in the hinterlands of Afghanistan prevents reporters, including the team of women at Ariana TV, from covering the issue from the countryside where vulnerable groups are at their greatest risk.

"When we hear stories about rape or torture in the villages and try to report them in the villages, we are often stopped by elders or militants from gaining access to the story," says Wahida Faizi, an Ariana TV reporter. "I would also add that women are sometimes more muted when they know they can be killed just for speaking out about violence and abuse against women in the countryside."

UNAMA has a mandate to support the Government of Afghanistan and its citizens in a shared goal of becoming a stable, open, and peaceful nation. This feature piece is meant to tell a human interest story related to how Afghanistan and the UN are working together to overcome the many challenges to achieving this goal.

[‘Zero tolerance’ to sexual exploitation and abuse by UN staff in South Sudan, underscores senior official](#)

7 December 2017 – The relationship between United Nations peacekeepers and civilian staff and the vulnerable people in South Sudan they are working for must be one of mutual trust and confidence, said a senior UN official, noting that instances of sexual exploitation and abuse by UN personnel not only breaks down that relationship, it also destroys the trust communities have in the Organization.

"It is conduct which is absolutely abhorrent and a conduct which is extraordinarily painful to its victims and undermines the UN itself and, of course, dents the trust that communities should have in the UN," [said](#) Jane

Connors, the UN Victims' Rights Advocate, at the end of her visit to the country.

"It is about dignity for the victims, compassion, a real feeling of empathy, a feeling that they are not forgotten – that victims feel they can tell their story to someone like myself and, if they're lucky, to the Secretary-General as some have been able to do," she said, adding: "That their hurt, their pain is acknowledged, and we do as much as we possibly can do to make their situation better."

The Victims' Rights Advocate is visiting South Sudan to promote the importance of the "no excuses, zero tolerance" approach to UN personnel.

During her visit, she has met with victims and local authorities and spent time listening to the concerns of internally displaced persons residing at the UN Mission in South Sudan ([UNMISS](#)) Protection of Civilians' Sites.

"There should be no victims. Women and girls should not feel pain," she told crowds of people at the Malakal camp, in the north of the country.

"All I can say is the UN entities, funds, programmes, agencies and the Mission stand with you but you are in the lead to say no and act."

Globally there were 103 allegations made last year with four in South Sudan.

The low number could be due to reluctance on part of victims to report abuse because of the stigma attached. Therefore it is vital to encourage reporting to ensure perpetrators are held accountable.

"Many victims are focused on their lives, as you know, legal processes take a long time and many victims wish to move on. They are interested in justice, but at the same time, they wish to rebuild their lives, move into a scenario whereby they feel valued, they are not stigmatized, and that is the approach we need to take," said Ms. Connors.

"We need to ask the victim what she or he wants and not substitute our judgement, not say you need to do this, you need to do the other."

Jane Connors was [appointed](#) the UN's first Victims' Rights Advocate by [Secretary-General](#) Antonio Guterres in August 2017 in line with his pledge that the UN will put the rights and dignity of victims at the forefront of its prevention and response efforts.

[South Sudan: Security Council urged to](#)

do more to protect civilians, help end violence

7 December 2017 – With the conflict in South Sudan entering its fifth year, senior United Nations officials on Thursday expressed concern about the precarious security situation and bleak humanitarian conditions in the world's youngest country.

"The people of South Sudan have simply suffered far too much for far too long and we must not take their resilience against incredible odds for granted," Jean-Pierre Lacroix, the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, told the Security Council today, about a week before the current mandate of UN peacekeeping force in the country expires.

Focusing his remarks on developments over the past year, Mr. Lacroix said the UN's sustained efforts to effect change on the ground will require the continued support of the 15-member Council.

"Now, more than ever, I urge this Council to remain vigilant and exert more effort to condemn and stop the violence, protect civilians, and urgently facilitate a political settlement of the conflict," he said.

The UN Mission, known as UNMISS, he said, has endeavored to be more robust, nimble and proactive in its approach to mandate delivery. Its peacekeepers have helped protect humanitarian facilities, facilitated aid delivery in areas plagued by insecurity, and on many occasions contributed to the evacuation of humanitarian personnel caught in active hostilities.

To further deter violence and human rights abuses, they have intervened to protect civilians from abduction, recruitment, sexual violence and harassment.

Shortly, UNMISS will establish a permanent presence in Yei and has already reinforced its presence in Yambio and Torit. The Mission is also working with partners to stem the increasing number of local-level conflicts through reconciliation and peaceful coexistence activities.

"This young nation struggles to define a path towards inclusive governance," said the peacekeeping chief.

As the dry season sets in, there is a possibility that the military conflict will escalate, as well as intercommunal fighting. The economic crisis also continues to have serious repercussions for the security environment. Civilians will suffer the consequences of any escalation of violence.

"We cannot continue to stand by and watch," he said.

Prompted by the rapidly deteriorating situation in the country, regional partners stepped up their efforts to revitalize the peace process. In particular, he welcomed and expressed full support for the Intergovernmental

Authority on Development (IGAD)-led High-level Revitalization Forum (HLRF), which aims to secure a cessation of hostilities, implementation of the 2015 Peace Agreement, and the development of a revised and realistic timeline for its implementation.

He also welcomed the efforts of the African Union, and its Peace and Security Council's expression of intent to consider punitive measures against those who aim to spoil the peace process.

Humanitarian needs assessment paints bleak picture

Also briefing the Council was Mark Lowcock, the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, who said comprehensive needs assessment paints a "bleak" picture.



Mark Lowcock, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, addresses the Security Council on Sudan and South Sudan. UN Photo/Manuel Elias



Jean-Pierre Lacroix, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, addresses the Security Council on Sudan and South Sudan. UN Photo/Rick Bajornas

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Even though more than two million people have fled South Sudan as refugees over the past four years of conflict, seven million people inside the country – that is almost two-thirds of the remaining population – still need humanitarian assistance, he said, adding that as the end of 2017 approaches, 1.25 million people are just one step away from famine, almost doubling from a year earlier.

In early 2018, half of the population will be reliant on emergency food aid. The next lean season beginning in March is likely again to see famine conditions in several locations across the country, he said.

Only one in 10 people currently has access to basic sanitation which helps prevent deadly diseases. Only half of the country's schools are functioning and two million children are currently out of school.

Reported rates of violence against women and girls in South Sudan are double the global average and among the highest in the world.

"The fact remains that until international humanitarian law is complied with, until the fighting ends and until basic services are established, humanitarian needs will remain dire," Mr. Lowcock stressed.

This year the UN and its humanitarian partners halted famine, but that took

enormous resources and involved substantial risk to staff, with some losing their life in the endeavor, he said.

Lastly, he called upon the Council members to use their influence to ensure that the parties comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law to respect and protect civilians, including humanitarian workers, and to ensure that the parties allow and facilitate humanitarian relief operations and people's access to assistance and protection.