

UN rights expert calls on Mexico to investigate killing of state-level Ombudsperson

24 November 2017 – Strongly condemning the attack on a state-level Ombudsperson and his family in Mexico, the United Nations expert on human rights defenders has called on the authorities to investigate the incident and bring the perpetrators to justice.

Silvestre de la Toba Camacho, the Ombudsperson in Mexico's Baja California Sur state, along with his son died in the 20 November attack and his wife and daughter were seriously injured.

"I condemn the killing of Silvestre de la Toba Camacho in the strongest possible terms, and am equally outraged by the assault on his family," said Michel Forst, the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, in a news release issued by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights ([OHCHR](#)).

"I call on the [state and federal authorities to ensure that a thorough investigation is conducted](#) and the perpetrators are brought to justice."

Earlier this year, at the end of his [mission](#) to Mexico, Mr. Forst had underscored that ending the country's current cycle of impunity was one of its biggest challenges.

"The best way to ensure the safety of human rights defenders is by bringing those who attempt to harm them to justice," the rights expert added in the news release today.

Further, Mr. Forst also underscored the importance of the role of national human rights institutions in the protection of human rights and stressed that governments should put in place protection schemes to ensure that persons who work for them are able to perform their functions in a safe and autonomous manner.

In particular, he urged the Government of Mexico to set up protection mechanisms for defenders at risk, including people working in national human rights institutions.

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.

Mediterranean crossing still world's deadliest for migrants – UN report

24 November 2017 – Crossing the Mediterranean to Europe is “by far the world’s deadliest” journey for migrants, with at least 33,761 reported to have died or gone missing between 2000 and 2017, a United Nations report finds.

The report, released Friday from the International Organization for Migration ([IOM](#)), notes the highest number of fatalities, at 5,096, was recorded in 2016, when the short and relatively less dangerous route from Turkey to Greece was shut, following the European Union-Turkey deal.

“Shutting the shorter and less dangerous routes can open longer and more dangerous routes, thus increasing the likelihood of dying at sea,” said Professor Philippe Fargues of the European University Institute, who authored the report, [Four Decades of Cross-Mediterranean Undocumented Migration to Europe](#).

The report reviews available evidence on trans-Mediterranean irregular migration to Europe along various routes going back to the 1970s, particularly on the magnitude of the flows, the evolution of sea routes to Southern Europe, the characteristics of migrants, the extent to which one can separate between economic and forced movements, and mortality during the sea journey.

More than 2.5 million migrants have crossed the Mediterranean in an unauthorized fashion since the 1970s.

Irregular sea journeys started rising in those years in response to the introduction, by Western States grappling with rising levels of unemployment during the 1973 oil crisis, of visa requirements for people who until then had been exempted – most of them temporary labour migrants from North Africa and Turkey.

These policies encouraged those who were already in Europe to stay, increased irregular migration of family members to join their relatives in Europe and gave way to the smuggling business, the report states.

The report also highlights differences between the modern pattern of migration from Africa to Italy, mostly via Libya, and that from the Middle East to Greece via Turkey.

Arrivals to Italy from North Africa largely originate across sub-Saharan Africa in response to deep migratory pressures – population growth coupled with limited livelihood opportunities, high unemployment and poor governance and political and economic instability.

Arrivals to Greece from Turkey since 2009 have been primarily of nationals from origin States affected by conflict and political instability, such as

Iraq, Afghanistan and Syria.

Noting the limitations of available data on irregular migration, the report says the numbers of deaths at sea may grossly underestimate the real number of people who die or go missing while crossing the Mediterranean, as they are based on numbers of bodies found and survivors' testimonies.

Conditions in Myanmar's Rakhine not in place to enable safe returns – UN refugee agency

24 November 2017 – Amid reports of an agreement between the governments of Bangladesh and Myanmar on return of Rohingya refugees to Myanmar, the United Nations refugee agency has underscored that the returns must be voluntary, and take place in safe and dignified conditions.

At present, conditions in Myanmar's Rakhine state are [not in place to enable safe and sustainable returns](#). Refugees are still fleeing, and many have suffered violence, rape, and deep psychological harm, Adrian Edwards, a spokesperson for the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees ([UNHCR](#)), told journalists at a regular media briefing in Geneva Friday.

It is critical that returns do not take place precipitously or prematurely, without the informed consent of refugees or the basic elements of lasting solutions in place, he stressed.

Over the past three months, widespread inter-communal violence in Myanmar's northern Rakhine state resulted in some 622,000 people fleeing into neighbouring Bangladesh. Prior to this latest crisis, Bangladesh was already hosting well over 200,000 Rohingya refugees as a result of earlier displacements.

According to the UN refugee agency, some of those who fled witnessed the deaths of family and friends, and most have little or nothing to go back to with their homes and villages destroyed.

Deep divisions between communities remain unaddressed UNHCR spokesperson
Adrian Edwards

Deep divisions between communities remain unaddressed, added Mr. Edwards, underscoring that progress towards addressing the root causes of flight, including lack of citizenship for members of the Rohingya community, as recommended by the Rakhine Advisory Commission, will also be crucial.

Furthermore, humanitarian access in northern Rakhine state remains negligible.

At the briefing, the UNHCR spokesperson also noted that the UN agency looks forward to seeing details of the agreement between the two countries, and that it stands ready to help both governments work towards a solution for the Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh that meets international refugee and human rights standards.

“Refugees have the right to return [and] a framework that enables them to exercise this right in line with international standards, will be welcome,” he said.

[At UN, over \\$2 billion pledged to help hurricane-affected Caribbean nations ‘build back better’](#)

22 November 2017 – The international community mobilized over \$1.3 billion in pledges and more than \$1 billion in loans and debt relief to help Caribbean nations recover from the strong hurricanes that pummelled the region a few months ago, during a meeting at United Nations Headquarters on Tuesday.

“I think we’re extremely happy with the results of the conference,” said Stephen O’Malley, the UN Resident Coordinator and Resident Representative of the UN Development Programme ([UNDP](#)) for Barbados and the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States.

The powerful category-5 hurricanes Irma and Maria hit the Caribbean in September causing a number of deaths and widespread devastation in the Caribbean. According to the latest needs estimates, recovery costs are expected to surpass \$5 billion.

Barbuda, the smaller of the two-island State of Antigua and Barbuda, and Dominica were among the most severely affected, along with Anguilla, British Virgin Islands, The Bahamas, Turks and Caicos Islands. Haiti and St. Kitts and Nevis also suffered damage, while St. Maarten/St. Martin as well as Cuba, the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico were also impacted.

“It is a very long road to recovery,” Mr. O’Malley said in an interview with *UN News*, noting that while the roads in the capital, Roseau, are more or less clear and water is back, only three per cent of the country currently has electricity. In addition, agriculture has been badly affected. “It’s still a hard time.”

Meanwhile, on Barbuda, water was restored yesterday and people are trickling

back to the island. The roads have been cleared and people are beginning to repair their homes, and trying to determine whether they can come back and resettle or wait longer until the conditions are right for returning. Schools have not re-opened and medical services are very limited, Mr. O'Malley noted.

Nearly 400 high-level representatives from governments, multilateral and civil society organizations and the private sector [gathered](#) in New York, along with the Secretaries-General of the UN and the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) to help the affected countries "build back better."

"They want to be a climate-resilient region," Mr. O'Malley stated, explaining that this involves practical steps from the way a country's road network and electricity grid are designed to ensuring that schools and hospitals are built to withstand the impact of climate change.

"It's your infrastructure. It's also better planning and preparedness by the governments so that they can respond more quickly," he pointed out. "They have the capacity to do that [...] there's a variety of different things there to make everybody more climate resilient."

Addressing the conference yesterday, [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres noted that countries in the Caribbean need support now to rebuild, and to take effective climate action.

"We need a new generation of infrastructure that is risk-informed, to underpin resilient economies, communities and livelihoods," he told the gathering.

Find out more about the UN's efforts to assist countries impacted by the 2017 Atlantic Hurricane Season [here](#)

[ISIL 'down but not out' in Iraq; UN envoy urges efforts to defeat group's extremist ideology](#)

22 November 2017 – The military victory against the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da'esh) is only one component of a complex battle that addresses the root causes of extremist ideology, the United Nations envoy for Iraq said Wednesday.

"Da'esh remains able and determined to continue devastating random attacks against the Iraqi civilian population, against civilians globally," Ján Kubiš, the Secretary-General's Special Representative and Head of the UN Assistance Mission in Iraq ([UNAMI](#)), [told](#) the Security Council.

“Da’esh is down but not yet out even in Iraq,” he stressed, adding that “only by defeating its loathsome ‘takfiri’ ideology, choking off its external support, and addressing the causes that prompted so many Iraqis to join or tolerate Da’esh can this terrorist organization finally be eliminated.”

He noted that on 17 November, the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) fully recaptured Rawa, the last remaining densely settled area under Da’esh control in Iraq. Since summer 2014, Da’esh has lost 95 per cent of the territory it once controlled in Iraq and Syria and more than 7.5 million people have been liberated from its grasp.

But “this victory has come at a very high cost,” said Mr. Kubiš, noting that thousands of fighters and civilians were killed or wounded, hundreds of thousands of children brainwashed, entire cities in ruins, and some six million people have been displaced.

Further, Da’esh has exterminated or enslaved thousands of Muslims, as well as minority communities, particularly women and girls, in action amounting to war crimes and crimes against humanity, perhaps even genocide.

Mr. Kubiš encouraged the global coalition against Da’esh to continue both military and non military efforts to help Iraq ensure the lasting and sustainable defeat of Da’esh.

He said that inside Iraq, priority must be accorded to facilitating the voluntary return of internally displaced persons, stabilization, reconstruction and rehabilitation. It would also be crucial to reform the security sector and to enforce law and order against armed groups outside State control, including criminal gangs, militias and tribal elements.

Tensions between Central Government and Kurdistan Regional Government

He went on to state that among the prominent current concerns are the tensions between the Central Government and the Kurdistan Regional Government in the wake of a decision by the Kurdistan Region of Iraq to hold a unilaterally-declared independence referendum. The central authorities have rejected the referendum as unconstitutional and have taken steps to re assert federal authority over Iraq’s external border crossings, including the international airports in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

On 6 November, he reported, the Federal Supreme Court issued an opinion stating that the constitution does not provide for authorizing the secession of any component of Iraq’s federal system, and that the referendum was illegal.

All outstanding issues between the Federal Government and the Kurdistan Regional Government must be resolved through sustainable solutions based on the constitution, he emphasized, noting that UNAMI has also called for immediate negotiations with Government representatives on such issues as the budget, salaries and oil exports.

Turning to elections, he said the new Board of Commissioners for the Independent High Electoral Commission has a herculean task ahead, including

holding two simultaneous elections, a tight timeline and security concerns.

He called upon the Council of Representatives to pass legislation to ensure that elections are held on 15 May 2018, adding that a United Nations electoral needs assessment mission has been deployed to help in identifying priority areas for support. UNAMI has also completed a draft law on the Establishing of National Specialized Court on Most Serious Crimes, to be discussed with relevant authorities.

Turning to the question of missing Kuwaiti and third country nationals and missing Kuwaiti property, including that country's national archives, he said Iraq and Kuwait served as models of good neighbourly relations in a region fraught with instability. Iraq's Government has made impressive efforts to identify grave sites, but efforts to identify missing Kuwaiti property has met with limited success.

Although there has been no progress in locating the national archives, the Government of Iraq has identified more than 6,000 Kuwaiti books. The United Nations and the international community will continue to pursue the matter and to support Iraq on that question until that chapter could be closed, he said.