

Philippines: UN experts urge Government to address spiralling rights violations

31 July 2017 – A group of United Nations experts has urged the Government of the Philippines to immediately address reported human rights violations, including murder, threats against indigenous peoples and the summary execution of children.

“Attacks are spiralling against many groups in society and we are making an urgent appeal for Government action,” said a joint statement issued by Agnes Callamard, Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions; Michel Forst, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders; and Maud de Boer-Buquicchio, Special Rapporteur on the sale and sexual exploitation of children.

They said attacks target indigenous peoples and human rights defenders, including children.

The experts noted that a number of villagers, farmers and human rights defenders seeking to protect the ancestral land of Lumad indigenous peoples against businesses have been reportedly killed, or executed outside the ordinary legal proceedings.

Last week, President Rodrigo Duterte, speaking in a televised news conference on 24 July, threatened to bomb Lumad schools on Mindanao.

“We urge the Government to ensure effective protection of individuals and groups who may be subject to extra-legal, arbitrary or summary executions, or those who received death threats,” the experts said.

“The Government must also prevent incitement to violence or killings against indigenous communities, human rights defenders and farmers,” they concluded.

The group of UN human rights experts has been in contact with the Government of the Philippines regarding these concerns.

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

'Act now' to help and protect trafficking victims, UN urges on World Day against the scourge

30 July 2017 – Criminal groups feed off the instability created by conflicts, and as links between wars, trafficking and migrant smuggling become more widely known, the United Nations is calling on the international community to act now to help and protect trafficking victims and to end this crime forever.

“Conflict is a breeding ground for criminal activity,” said Yury Fedotov, Executive Director of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime ([UNODC](#)). “People forced from their homes are [falling prey to human traffickers](#) as they try desperately to escape the violence.”

In Syria, for example, women and children there were less likely to be trafficked before 2011, according to the latest UNODC [Global Report on Trafficking in Persons](#).

“Since the start of the Syrian crisis, however, an increasing number of countries in Europe, Asia and the Middle East have detected trafficking victims from this country,” Mr. Fedotov said.

“As evidence grows of conflict’s ability to nourish crime, the international community is increasingly recognizing the need to confront people’s vulnerability to trafficking during conflicts,” Mr. Fedotov said, recalling that in 2016, UN Security Council passed its [first-ever resolution](#) on this issue, and last year’s [New York Declaration](#) calls for the need to vigorously combat human trafficking and migrant smuggling, as well as provide support and assistance under the [UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime](#).

His comments come on the World Day against Trafficking in Persons, which is being held this year under the theme of “Let’s act now to protect and assist trafficking victims.”

In line with this year’s theme, the UN is promoting the Trust Fund for trafficking victims, as well as the Blue Heart Campaign, which is being adopted across the world.

“Resources, well-supported advocacy, cooperation under international law, and action on the ground are the starting points for tackling this dehumanizing crime that shames everyone,” said Mr. Fedotov.

The Trust Fund facilitates effective, on-the-ground assistance and protection to victims of trafficking, through grants to specialized NGOs. Victims coming from areas of armed conflict and those identified among large refugee and migration flows are being prioritized.

Human trafficking is the acquisition of people by force, fraud or deception to exploit them, including for sex and forced labour. Smuggling of migrants is considered part of human trafficking.

Victims of trafficking have been targeted for sexual exploitation and pornography, organ removal, forced begging, forced criminality and other crimes.

Children among main targets of human traffickers

Every country in the world is affected by human trafficking, whether as a country of origin, transit, or destination for victims, UNODC has said.

Children make up almost one-third of all human trafficking victims worldwide, according to the UN agency's latest report on trafficking. In addition, women and girls comprise 71 per cent of human trafficking victims.

Two UN human rights experts are also taking the opportunity provided by the World Day to warn that current systems designed to protect migrant children are failing, leaving many at risk of trafficking, sale and other forms of exploitation.

“So many children have died in conflict zones and along their perilous journey,” said Special Rapporteurs Maria Grazia Giammarinaro and Maud de Boer-Buquicchio, in a [statement](#) issued ahead of the Day.

The experts warned that all children fleeing conflict, especially those traveling alone, are vulnerable to abuse of different kinds: sexual and labour exploitation including as a consequence of trafficking, being sold and being coerced into marriage, in their homes, communities, society or in places where migrants and/or refugees reside – including reception centres, refugee camps or informal settlements at source, transit and destination countries.

The UN General Assembly will discuss trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants in a special session in Vienna, Austria – where the UNODC is headquartered – in early September.

The event is part of preparations for a global compact on migration that is expected to be completed and adopted in 2018.

The World Day was established by the UN General Assembly in 2013 to raise awareness of the situation of victims of human trafficking and for the promotion and protection of their rights.

The UN International Labour Organization ([ILO](#)) estimates that 21 million people are victims of forced labour globally. This estimate also includes victims of human trafficking for labour and sexual exploitation.

While it is not known how many of these victims were trafficked, the estimate implies that currently, there are millions of trafficking in persons victims in the world.

[UN chief condemns DPR Korea's latest launch of ballistic missile](#)

28 July 2017 – United Nations [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres condemned today's launch of a ballistic missile of possible intercontinental range by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK).

“This is [again a manifest violation](#) of Security Council resolutions. The DPRK leadership must comply fully with its international obligations and work together with the international community to resolve the outstanding issues on the Korean Peninsula,” said the Spokesman for the Secretary-General.

In the statement, Mr. Guterres reiterated his call for DPRK leadership to respond to the Republic of Korea's proposals to reopen communication channels, particularly military-to-military, to lower the risk of miscalculation or misunderstanding and reduce tensions.

On Monday, Seoul announced that its Defence Ministry had proposed to meet with DRPK representatives with the goal of ending hostilities.

[UN peacekeeping chief warns Security Council about insecurity in Central African Republic](#)

28 July 2017 – The head of the United Nations peacekeeping operations has warned that the increased intensity of attacks on civilians and peacekeepers is bringing Central African Republic (CAR) to the tipping point.

Addressing the Security Council in a closed-door session, the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, Jean-Pierre Lacroix, yesterday cited the [worsening security and humanitarian](#) situation in Bangassou, in the south-eastern part of the country, where three UN peacekeepers have been killed in recent days.

The attacks took place [against](#) the backdrop of sustained fighting in the south-east of the country, heightened inter-ethnic tensions and efforts by spoilers to manipulate communities along religious lines and undermine the stabilization process in the country,” Mr. Lacroix told the 15-member Council, according to a note from the UN Spokesperson's Office.

Mr. Lacroix is scheduled to travel to the CAR over the weekend to convey a message of support to the UN stabilization mission known by its French acronym, MINUSCA, and to meet with national authorities.

In his address yesterday, Mr. Lacroix also raised concerns about the deteriorating security in the border town of Zemio, 290 km east of Bangassou, with the risk of further clashes between the Muslim community and elements affiliated with anti-Balaka, which had already led to the displacement of more than 22,000 civilians.

He also mentioned that the security situation in the town of Bria, in the north of the country, remains fragile and that the departure of the Ugandan and American forces from the eastern part of the country this spring has created a vacuum leading to the emergence of hostile 'self-defence' groups.

The violence has led to a worsening humanitarian situation in the country, with the numbers of internally displaced persons up about 40 per cent since last year.

Clashes between the mainly Muslim Séléka rebel coalition and anti-Balaka militia, which are mostly Christian, have plunged the country of about 4.5 million people into civil conflict since 2012. According to the UN some 2.3 million people, over half the population, [in dire need of assistance](#). In addition to those displaced within the CAR, more than 484,000 people from the country have been forced to seek refuge in neighbouring nations.

The senior UN official also reiterated that a military solution to the problem of the armed groups will not suffice to address the root causes of the conflict: "The absence of tangible progress in the peace process risks further worsening the situation."

He noted the importance of operationalizing the July 17 roadmap by the members of the African Initiative for Peace and Reconciliation and underlined the importance of prioritizing the implementation of the ceasefire agreed upon in the Rome agreement of 20 June.

[Venezuela: UN rights wing urges calm ahead of controversial weekend polls](#)

28 July 2017 – The United Nations human rights office expressed deep concern today at the risk of further violence in Venezuela, where elections for a Constituent Assembly convened by President Nicolas Maduro are due to be held on Sunday.

"The [wishes of the Venezuelan people](#) to participate or not in this

election need to be respected,” Elisabeth Throssell, spokesperson for the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights ([OHCHR](#)) told reporters at the regular press briefing in Geneva.

“No one should be obliged to vote, while those willing to take part should be able to do so freely,” she added.

The OHCHR spokesperson pointed out that demonstrations considered by the authorities to be “disturbing the elections” have been banned until 1 August.

“We urge the authorities to manage any protests against the Constituent Assembly in line with international human rights norms and standards,” she continued, calling on those opposing the election and the Assembly to do so peacefully.

“We hope that the poll scheduled for Sunday, if it goes ahead, will proceed peacefully and in full respect of human rights,” she said.

Responding to questions, Ms. Throssell said the situation in the country is “very tense and difficult.” As such, OHCHR reiterated the call for calm and for peaceful protests and for all sides to use only peaceful means to make their views heard.

With regard to the legitimacy of the vote itself, the spokesperson noted that it is “a hugely controversial issue” amplified by the fact that there had been an unofficial consultation by the opposition on the constituent assembly.

“[Our] Office is concerned about the environment in which the elections are to take place and believes that a constitutional process can only be successful if based on a broad consensus and the participation of all sectors of society,” Ms. Throssell said.