

## [Libya: UN rights arm sounds alarm for safety of prisoners at imminent risk of torture](#)

18 July 2017 – The United Nations human rights arm today voiced deep concern for the safety of individuals taken prisoner by members of the Libyan army after recent fighting in Benghazi, noting that they may be at imminent risk of torture and even summary execution.

[“Our concern is based on reports](#) suggesting the involvement of the Special Forces, a unit aligned with the LNA [Libyan National Army], and in particular their field commander, Mahmoud al-Werfalli, in torturing detainees and summarily executing at least 10 captured men,” Liz Throssell, a spokesperson for the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights ([OHCHR](#)), told journalists at a media briefing in Geneva today.

“We urge the LNA to ensure there is a full, impartial investigation into these allegations and also call on the group to suspend Mr. al-Werfalli from his duties as a Special Forces field commander pending the conclusion of such an investigation,” she added.

According to OHCHR, on multiple occasions, there have been videos circulating on social media which allegedly show Mr. al-Werfalli executing kneeling men, or ordering them shot.

The latest video, which was posted on social media this month, seems to show LNA fighters kicking and taunting prisoners, while Mr. al-Werfalli is apparently heard accusing two men who have their hands tied behind their backs of belonging to terrorist groups, added the OHCHR spokesperson.

“The fight against terrorism cannot be used to justify summary executions or other grave violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law,” she stressed.

Also at the briefing, Ms. Throssell stated that, in March, the LNA announced investigations into alleged rights abuses but added that it has not shared any information regarding the status of the inquiries.

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## [Children increasingly targeted for murder, rape in Central African](#)

## Republic – UNICEF

18 July 2017 – Renewed fighting in the Central African Republic (CAR) is increasingly targeting children, while there are concerns that the humanitarian needs in the country could escalate to levels not seen since the crisis four years ago, United Nations humanitarian officials today said.

Months of renewed fighting have led to an “increasing number of violent acts” targeting the youngest population, including murders, abductions, rape and recruitment into armed groups, the UN Children’s Fund ([UNICEF](#)) said.

Christine Muhigana, UNICEF Representative in CAR warned that “armed groups and parties to the conflict must cease these flagrant violations of children’s rights and make every effort to keep children safe.”

The exact numbers of attacks on children is unknown because fighting prevents humanitarian access to many areas, the UN agency said, but “is almost certain to be much higher than officially reported figures.”

In addition to brutal crimes, the intensified violence is preventing children from going to school or even getting basic vaccines.

In the southern areas of CAR, the fighting is driving people to flee into remote areas of northern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), where they are nearly out of reach of the humanitarian community.

As of the end of June, some 103,000 CAR refugees were registered in the DRC, said William Spindler, spokesperson for the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees ([UNHCR](#)).

“Refugees are staying [everywhere they can](#) – in churches, in buildings used as schools, in the only health centre, or sleeping in the open. People desperately need more healthcare, food and shelter,” Mr. Spindler told journalists in Geneva about the situation in Ndu, which is barely more than a village.

Also today, the UN’s top humanitarian official expressed extreme concern about the upsurge in fighting since the start of the year, and warned that it puts at risk the gains made since 2015.

“If we do not act now and keep the faith, we will see [increasing need and even greater vulnerability](#) of already weakened people. We risk seeing even greater stress on the capacities of humanitarian actors and funding mechanisms,” said the UN Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Stephen O’Brien.

Speaking to reporters in Bangui on the last of his three-day visit, Mr. O’Brien urged the international community to sustain its efforts for the sake of CAR’s people and the future of the country.

The continued deterioration has led the humanitarian community to revise its

Humanitarian Response Plan, which now requires \$497 million, but is only 24 per cent funded, he said.

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## Japanese YouTube star Piko Taro makes first UN appearance, promotes Global Goals

18 July 2017 – Japanese entertainer Piko Taro, famous for his “Pen-Pineapple-Apple-Pen” (PPAP) viral music video, has joined the ranks of celebrities who promote the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) on behalf of Governments, the United Nations, civil society and other actors in the global development community.

“I knew SD Gundam, but I had no idea what the [SDGs](#) stand for,” the comedian said jokingly referring to the Japanese anime television series, while visiting the UN Headquarters on Monday. He noted that he had been surprised when the Japanese Government asked him to assume this promotional role and perform at the UN.

Piko Taro’s PPAP dance music video has gone worldwide, having scored more than 100 million views since its release in August 2016. At a reception the Japanese Government hosted on the sideline of the High-Level Political Forum on sustainable development, Piko Taro presented both the original song and the rearranged version, whose lyrics stand for “Public-Private Action for Partnership” on SDGs.

Schoolchildren from the UN International School joined him on stage, singing and dancing along the revised version. The event was also attended by Japanese Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida. Earlier that day, he swung by “Spotlight on SDGs” exhibition featuring prize-winning photos taken by students around the world. He said he was convinced of the power of visuals to convey the key concepts of the SDGs.

Likewise, he hopes that his rejiggered PPAP song can help people around the world better understand the SDGs, which were adopted by UN Member States in 2015, with 2030 as a target year to eradicate poverty, address climate change and build peaceful, inclusive societies for all.

“The Sustainable Development Goals, if people remember these words, they may get curious. What are the SDGs? They learn – oh, 17 Goals,” he said.

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## Despite some improvements, food security remains dire in Syria – UN agencies

18 July 2017 – In spite of improvements in wheat production in war-torn Syria – about 12 per cent more than last year’s record low – the overall food security situation remains far worse than before the conflict, the United Nations food security and emergency food relief agencies have said.

According to UN Food and Agriculture Organization ([FAO](#)) and the World Food Programme ([WFP](#)), total wheat production estimates for 2017 stand at 1.8 million tonnes, in part due to an improved security situation. The estimate is, however, less than half of the pre-conflict ten-year average.

“The small improvement in the availability of food for Syrians is promising, but the needs remain high and more must be done to provide food for families affected by the crisis,” said Jakob Kern, WFP Country Director in Syria, said in a joint news release from the two UN agencies.

“With the evolving security situation, more farmers are expected to have access to cultivate their land again. Now is the time to step up our support, as agriculture is more important than ever for the livelihoods of many,” added Adam Yao, Acting FAO Representative in the country.

The improvements are also in part due to better rains which have increased water flows and water levels in many reservoirs, benefiting crops like wheat and barley, however high cost or unavailability of inputs, such as seeds and fertilizer, and the destruction of irrigation and storage infrastructure have added to the already complicated challenges before food growers.

Furthermore, opening of some supply routes have allowed trade to slowly recover but in many parts such as in eastern Aleppo, where the entire infrastructure and markets were devastated, the recovery has been at a very slow pace.

In the news release, the two UN agencies also noted that humanitarian access to some besieged areas has improved compared to last year but access to some places such as Deir-ez-Zor and Raqqa remain severely constrained.

Across the country, food prices continue to remain at record highs and an estimated 6.9 million Syrians are still food insecure and an additional 5.6 million people are likely to become food insecure without the regular food assistance they receive every month, they added.

The information provided by the UN agencies was gathered during their latest [Crop and Food Security Assessment Mission \(CFSAM\)](#), which visited Syria in May, this year. This is the fourth food security mission to the country since the onset of the crisis and each mission provides an impartial and balanced

assessment of the agricultural and food security situation.

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## As ‘drivers’ of innovation, youth need skills and capacity – UN General Assembly President

17 July 2017 – Underscoring the importance of well trained and capable youth to realize the opportunities offered by advances in technology and innovation, the President of the United Nations General Assembly today called for building their capacities to ensure that they can fulfil their potential as well as support sustainable development.

“As the main beneficiaries of the Sustainable Development Goals ([SDGs](#)), and as the drivers of innovation and change, [it is vital that the enthusiasm and ingenuity of youth are harnessed to transform the world for the better](#),” Peter Thomson said at an event held at UN Headquarters in New York on the theme *Skills for the future of work*.

“Just as youth need education and training to access decent jobs in and of the future, they also require skills development to fulfil their vital role in SDG implementation,” he added.

In his remarks, Mr. Thomson called for targeted policies and resources to develop the digital skills of today’s youth, as well as for specific programmes to ensure that women and girls have access to education, health and employment opportunities.

Doing so, he said, would make sure they secure decent jobs and are never left behind again.

“We must see investing in quality education and training as fundamental for a world of sustaining peace and sustainable development,” he noted.

In particular, Mr. Thomson highlighted the need to work cooperatively with all stakeholders in building the education and training systems that are responsive to the needs, and given the complexities involved, called for international cooperation, strategic partnerships, and transfer of technology.

“The multilateral system has a responsibility to bring together governments, youth, employers, educators, and innovators to demystify the labour markets of the future, and to find innovative ways of building digital skills across the world, all in support of the implementation of the [2030 Agenda](#) for Sustainable Development,” he stressed.



Peter Thomson, President of the seventy-first session of the General Assembly, makes remarks during the opening of the Ministerial segment of the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development. Photo: UN Photo/Manuel Elias

Speaking alongside Mr. Thomson, Jayathma Wickramanayake, the UN Envoy on Youth, also called for greater and more coherent efforts to better forecast the skills that will be needed in the future.

“We must adapt existing policies and initiatives to be fit for the digital era and ensure that we remain flexible enough, to adapt these further in the future,” she said, citing the example of the technological advances made since the turn of the millennium and signs that this will not slow down in the years ahead.

“We must [also] ensure that national youth policies are integrated, holistic and funded,” she added.

In her remarks, the Youth Envoy also underscored the need for holistic education to address evolving technical skills as well as impart competencies required to adapt to changing and demanding workplaces.

In this regard, she highlighted that formal education alone would not be enough, and stressed the importance of non-formal and informal education.

“With all this talk of change in such little time, one truth remains: there is no better investment a country can make than in the capacities and potential of its young people,” she stated.