

Spreading violence in Central African Republic sets off 'loud alarm bells' – UN human rights chief

16 May 2017 – The United Nations human rights chief today expressed grave alarm over the spread of violence by armed groups against the civilian population in several parts of the Central African Republic in recent months, as well as attacks against UN peacekeepers in the country's southeast.

“Violence and rising tensions are spreading to areas of the Central African Republic that had previously been spared the kinds of terrifying violence seen in some other parts of the country – this is highly worrying and should set off loud alarm bells,” said UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein in a news release from his Office (OHCHR).

“The hard-earned relative calm in Bangui and some of the bigger towns in CAR risks being eclipsed by the descent of some rural areas into increasing sectarian violence, with defenceless civilians – as usual – paying the highest price,” he added.

The latest in a series of attacks was an incident this weekend in Bangassou, in which armed men used heavy weapons to attack the base of the UN mission in CAR, known by its French acronym MINUSCA. The armed men also attacked the Muslim neighbourhood of Tokoyo where numerous civilians were killed and others wounded.

Investigations by MINUSCA's Human Rights Division suggest that between March and May 2017 more than 121 civilians and six peacekeepers were killed, excluding figures in the two latest incidents.

Mr. Zeid also noted the fact that the Special Criminal Court is preparing to start its work is a strong signal by the authorities and the international community that the continued climate of impunity is unacceptable.

Meanwhile, the Security Council issued a statement to the press overnight, strongly condemning the violence by anti-Balaka elements in Bangassou on 13 and 14 May 2017 that targeted MINUSCA's field office, civilian populations from particular communities, as well as humanitarian personnel.

The 15-member body reiterated that “attacks against peacekeepers may constitute war crimes and reminded all parties of their obligations under international humanitarian law.”

The Council called on the Government to swiftly investigate this attack and bring the perpetrators to justice.

[UN health agency deploying technical experts to site of Ebola outbreak in DR Congo](#)

15 May 2017 – The United Nations health agency is deploying technical experts to the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) amid an outbreak of Ebola virus near its northern border with the Central Africa Republic, the agency's regional director for Africa confirmed.

Matshidiso Moeti visited the capital Kinshasa on Saturday to discuss with national authorities and partners ways to mount a rapid, effective and coherent response in order to stop the ongoing outbreak.

"I encourage to public to work with the health authorities and take the [necessary preventive measures](#) to protect their health," Dr. Moeti said.

He noted that the UN World Health Organization ([WHO](#)) has already mobilized teams, and is also ready to provide the technical expertise and leadership required to mount a coordinated and effective response.

The visit follows notification by the Government of an outbreak in the Likati health zone, in the north. At least three people have died, as of Saturday, and eight additional people are reported to have Ebola.

A Ministry of Health team, supported by the WHO, is scheduled to arrive in the epicenter of the outbreak today.

"The health zone is situated in the remote, isolated and hard-to-reach northern part of the country, with limited transport and communication networks – factors that all impeded transmission of information about the suspected outbreak," WHO said in a press release.

In the meantime, WHO is recommending that travel and trade are not restricted with the DRC, based on information currently available.

"The full extent of the 2017 outbreak is still not yet clear. Extensive investigation and risk assessments are being conducted and the findings will be communicated accordingly," the UN agency said.

The Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network (GOARN) has been activated to provide additional support, if required. In addition, reinforcement of epidemiological surveillance, contact tracing, case management, and community engagement are under way.

This is the eighth outbreak of Ebola virus since it was discovered in the DRC in 1976.

Sexual violence in conflict 'legitimate threat' to peace and security – UN deputy chief

15 May 2017 – Although global understanding of sexual violence in conflict is shifting, there remains the need to tackle the root causes of such violations that lie in fundamental inequality and discrimination against women, Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed told the United Nations Security Council today.

“Sexual violence in conflict is no longer seen as ‘merely a women’s issue’ or as a ‘lesser evil’ in a false hierarchy of human rights violations,” she [said](#) during an open debate on the subject, in which some 70 speakers shared their views.

The debate, on [sexual violence in conflict as a tactic of war and terrorism](#), heard briefings from Adama Dieng, Under-Secretary-General, Acting Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict and Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, as well as Mina Jaf, Founder and Executive Director of Women’s Refugee Route.

“Instead, it is rightly viewed as legitimate threat to security and durable peace that requires an operational security and justice response, in addition to ensuring multi-dimensional services for survivors of such crimes,” Ms. Mohammed added.

She said that a robust legislative framework is now in place, including a series of precise Security Council resolutions with new tools to drive change and progress.

As for accountability at the international and national level, “there is a gradual shift from a reality in which it is cost-free to rape a woman, child or man in conflict, to one where there are consequences for anyone who commits, commands or condones such crimes,” the deputy UN chief said.



Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed addresses the Security Council on the topic, “Women and peace and security: sexual violence in conflict.” At her side is José Luis Cancela, Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs of Uruguay and President of the Security Council for May. UN Photo/Manuel Elias

However, too many women live with the spectre of violence in their daily lives, in their household and families, she noted.

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Sexual violence is increasingly used as a tactic of terrorism, employed by extremist groups in places like Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Somalia, Nigeria and Mali to advance their military, economic and ideological ends.

It is therefore essential that considerations of the protection and empowerment of women and girls feature in the UN's architecture for countering terrorism and violent extremism, she stressed.

The mass migration crisis and massive displacement of populations due to protracted conflicts worldwide has also heightened the risk of sexual violence.

"Let us also acknowledge that the response of the United Nations is undermined by unacceptable allegations and incidents of sexual abuse and exploitation by peacekeepers," she said, highlighting the Organization's focus on its zero-tolerance policy.

She pointed out that those who commit these heinous crimes often escape justice while their victims are often forced to live with the shame of having been raped, rejected by their families and communities.

Mental health issues such as depression, flashbacks, challenges in re-establishing intimate relationships, and fear are some of the long-term psychological consequences victims experience. Worst still, children born of rape experience discrimination, exclusion and stigma.

"All our words, and laws, and resolutions, will mean absolutely nothing if violations go unpunished in practice, and if we fail in our sacred duty of care to survivors," she said, adding: "In word and deed, let us commit to stand in solidarity with survivors and vulnerable communities, and replace horror with hope."

"This is a litmus test of our commitment and responsibility to protect the most vulnerable populations from the most egregious human rights violations," Ms. Mohammed told the meeting.

UN chief condemns DPR Korea's ballistic missile launch

15 May 2017 – United Nations [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres today urged Pyongyang to return to the path of denuclearization saying the latest ballistic missile launch by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK)

is a threat to peace and security in the region.

“The Secretary-General [condemns](#) the launch of another ballistic missile by the DPRK, the Spokesman said in a statement.

He added that that launch violates Security Council resolution, and said that Mr. Guterres calls on the DPRK to “ensure full compliance with its international obligations.”

DPRK fired the missile while the UN chief was in Beijing for the Belt and Road Forum. Addressing President Xi Jinping, Mr. Guterres highlighted the shared aims of China’s One Belt, One Road initiative and the Sustainable Development Goals ([SDGs](#)), such as deepening connectivity in infrastructure, trade and finance.

The missile was reportedly fired from a base in the north-west DPRK, near the border with China.

[Annual UN Asia-Pacific policy forum session spotlights poverty eradication, sustainable energy](#)

15 May 2017 – Asian and Pacific countries are discussing economic cooperation and integration this week at the United Nations regional office in Bangkok, whose annual session focuses on how regional countries can achieve the Sustainable Development Goals ([SDGs](#)).

Welcoming senior officials to the 73rd Session of the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific ([ESCAP](#)), Executive Secretary Shamshad Akhtar shared key achievements made in the past year in support of the [SDGs](#), the global goals set out in the UN [2030 Agenda](#).

“Together with you, we have made [considerable progress](#) in formulating strategies that seek to eradicate poverty and ensure that development balances the needs of economy, people and planet,” Ms. Akhtar told heads of Government and other high-level officials from Asia and the Pacific.

During the week-long session, participants will review and endorse a number of resolutions and policies, including a regional plan for implementing the SDGs. The plan – known as the Regional Road Map for Implementing the 2030 Agenda – sets out priorities for regional cooperation, calls for enhanced technical cooperation on areas such as disaster risk reduction and climate change, and discusses data and statistics, and other means of implementing the SDGs.

In addition, ESCAP is developing a regional resource facility on the SDGs, which will include analytical reports and online capacity building tools to teach policy makers and others about issues related to the SDGs.

“This is expected to be one of the key mechanisms to promote South-South, North-South and triangular cooperation on the 2030 Agenda in the Asia-Pacific,” said Ms. Akhtar.

In a video message to the Commission, [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres lauded ESCAP for its efforts to reduce poverty, protect the environment and help to realize the 2030 Agenda.

“Your [spirit of openness and willingness](#) to work beyond borders is critical to enhancing multilateralism,” the Secretary-General said.

Among the topics to be discussed this week is regional cooperation for sustainable energy in the region, which is a special theme of this year’s meeting.

In her speech, Ms. Akhtar said ESCAP’s flagship study, which will be presented on Friday to high-level officials but is now [available online](#), recommends developing a regional cooperation framework on sustainable energy to enable Governments to identify ways to transition its energy uses to more sustainable methods.