

[Displaced civilians in South Sudan's Upper Nile at risk of further violence, UN rights chief warns](#)

4 May 2017 – The United Nations human rights chief today urged the Government of South Sudan to halt any further military offensives towards Aburoc in the Upper Nile region.

“Civilians in Aburoc are at serious and imminent risk of gross human rights violations, inter-ethnic violence and re-displacement,” [said](#) UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein.

He said these people fleeing from towns like Tonga and Kodok were forced to walk through the bush for up to 150 kilometres in searing temperatures. Many reportedly died along the way, but the rest ended up in Aburoc where they face grave violence and shortages of food, water and healthcare.

“These are women, children and men at the mercy of military commanders, on both sides of the political divide, who have consistently shown little or no regard for the protection of civilians,” he added.

RELATED: [UN calls for protection of civilians sheltering in South Sudan's Upper Nile area](#)

Despite the August 2015 peace agreement, South Sudan slipped back into conflict due to renewed clashes between rival forces – the Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLA) loyal to President Salva Kiir and the SPLA in Opposition backing former First Vice-President Riek Machar.

Aburoc, a town on the west bank of the River Nile, holds between 35,000 and 50,000 people, most of whom arrived in recent weeks after SPLA attacks on areas to the south.

Civilians in Aburoc now find themselves in areas controlled by the opposition armed group, facing a military offensive by the Government forces.

The High Commissioner urged the Government to adhere to the pledges made by President Kiir on 25 March, when he committed to declare a unilateral ceasefire, and to work towards political engagement to bring the conflict to an end.

Mr. Zeid called on all parties to the conflict to comply with international humanitarian law, including taking all feasible precautions to prevent civilian casualties.

He also called on the Government to grant the UN Mission in South Sudan ([UNMISS](#)) access to Aburoc and Kodok, and to ensure that humanitarian agencies are able to deliver crucial aid to the internally displaced population.

Myanmar: Displaced Rohingya at risk of 're-victimization' warns UN refugee agency

4 May 2017 – The tens of thousands of members of Myanmar's Rohingya community who fled inter-communal violence in north of the country and sought refuge in Bangladesh remain highly vulnerable and risk being "re-victimized even in exile" unless urgent action is taken, a senior United Nations refugee protection official has warned.

According to Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees ([UNHCR](#)) estimates, as of February, some 74,000 Rohingya members were living in camps and makeshift sites in Bangladesh, many in need of adequate shelter before the rainy season starts.

"Without proper support, they also face risks such as child labour, gender-based violence and trafficking," said Shinji Kubo, UNHCR Representative in Bangladesh, in a [news release](#) issued by the Office.

While Rohingya displacement has persisted for decades, it made headlines last October when attacks on border posts in Myanmar's northern Rakhine province triggered a security clearance operation that drove an estimated 43,000 civilians into neighbouring Bangladesh by the year's end.

In a [report \(issued in February\) into the violence](#), the UN human rights wing ([OHCHR](#)) had documented mass gang-rape, killings, including that of babies and young children, brutal beatings, disappearances and other serious human rights violations by Myanmar's security forces.

Many witnesses and victims interviewed by OHCHR had also described being taunted while they were being beaten, raped or rounded up, such as being told "you are Bangladeshis and you should go back" or "What can your Allah do for you? See what we can do?"



A boat off the coast of Myanmar's Rakhine province. (file) Photo: OCHA

Inter-communal violence, economic hardship driving desperation

The latest findings released by UNHCR in its new report on mixed movements in south-east Asia indicate that more than 168,000 Rohingya members could have fled Myanmar in the last five years. The total number of Rohingya refugees in the region and those internally displaced is estimated at 420,000 and 120,000 respectively.

Prior to the recent violence, Malaysia was the preferred destination for many Rohingya.

Between 2012 and 2015, an estimated 112,500 of them risked their lives on smuggler's boats in the Bay of Bengal and Andaman Sea in the hope of reaching Malaysia, with hopes of finding work in the informal sector.

Those who made this difficult sea journey ranged from individuals fleeing the 2012 inter-communal violence in Rakhine to those who grew increasingly desperate amid restrictions back home on their freedom of movement and access to services and livelihoods.

However, after regional Governments increased action against maritime smuggling networks in 2015, the route has been disrupted, with no confirmed boat arrivals in Malaysia last year. Furthermore, among those who tried to reach Malaysia overland in 2016, more than 100 – about half of them Rohingya – were reportedly arrested in Myanmar and Thailand.

The UNHCR report also explores other routes taken by the Rohingya, including to India via Bangladesh. It notes a steady but slowing stream of arrivals since 2012 numbering at least 13,000 people.

"Looking at the declining arrival numbers in India, it is safe to assume that this overland route has not replaced the maritime one," said Keane Shum of UNHCR's Regional Mixed Movements Monitoring Unit.

"Compared to those who went to Malaysia by sea, the Rohingya in India travelled in larger family units and chose the route as it was cheaper and safer."

VIDEO: Learning to Hope – Virtual reality film in Myanmar (Click and drag within the video to navigate). Credit: [OCHA](#)

Young women, girls at particular risk

In addition to analyzing displacement patterns, the report also looked at the situation of Rohingya women and girls in Malaysia, India and Indonesia, using a snapshot of some 85 women and girls. The findings revealed that majority among them were married young (at 16 or 17) and gave birth at an average age of 18. Almost a third of them reported facing domestic violence and many said that while they would like to earn their own income, only a few were doing so despite having skills.

Those in India appeared to be more literate and educated, and were more likely to have chosen their own husbands. In contrast, those in Malaysia were more likely to have married someone chosen by their families or by brokers or agents.

On its part, the UN agency has been working with host countries on temporary stay and protection of Rohingya refugees, including supporting them to access basic services and legal work to help them become more self-reliant until

longer-term solutions are found as well as advocating with the Myanmar authorities for the full resumption of humanitarian access to vulnerable people in northern Rakhine state.

“We stand ready to support Government efforts to promote co-existence and address issues related to citizenship,” said UNHCR.

Europe: 24,600 refugee children ‘in limbo’ at risk of mental distress, UNICEF warns

4 May 2017 – Nearly 75,000 [refugees and migrants](#), including an estimated 24,600 children, currently stranded in Greece, Bulgaria, Hungary and the Western Balkans are at risk of psychosocial distress caused by living in a protracted state of limbo, the United Nations Children’s Fund ([UNICEF](#)) warned today.

“We are seeing single mothers and children stranded in Greece, Serbia and Bulgaria who have not seen their husbands and fathers for months or even years,” [said](#) Afshan Khan, UNICEF Regional Director and Special Coordinator for the Refugee and Migrant Crisis in Europe.

“The family reunification process is slow, and its outcome uncertain and it is this uncertainty which can cause significant emotional distress and anxiety for children and families, setting them back for years to come,” she added.

In many cases, adult males are the first family members to make the trip to Europe, with the rest of the family following later.

Most stranded asylum seekers do not know whether or when they will be permitted to move forward. The situation is particularly acute for single mothers and children stuck in Greece or the Balkans waiting for reunification with family members in other EU countries.

But with the 2016 border closures and implementation of the EU-Turkey statement, other family members are being held up in transit countries from where they must apply for family reunification with their loved ones – a process that typically takes between 10 months and two years.

UNICEF and its partners in Greece are monitoring mental health and general depression among single mothers and children waiting for family reunification and providing psychosocial support.

“Keeping families together is the best way to ensure that children are

protected, which is why the family reunification process for refugee and migrant children is so important," said Ms. Khan. "With the number of those stranded continuing to rise, it is incumbent on member states to alleviate procedural bottlenecks so that families can get back together as quickly as possible."

Most of the family reunification requests originate from children and separated family members stranded in Greece, but because of the caseload and involvement of destination countries, the process can be painstakingly slow.

In 2016, nearly 5,000 family reunification requests, out of which 700 from unaccompanied and separated children, were made from Greece, with only 1,107 successful applicants having reached their destination country by the end of the year.

Meanwhile, the number of refugees and migrants stranded in Greece, Hungary and the Western Balkans continues to grow – increasing by around 60 per cent over the past year from 47,000 in March 2016 to nearly 80,000 at the end of April.

FEATURE: 'Overwhelming majority' of women experience some form of harassment, sexual violence in their daily journeys

3 May 2017 – From rude comments and unwanted touching and groping to rape and murder, sexual violence and harassment has reached pandemic proportions, according to the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women ([UN Women](#)), which recently launched a campaign in Mexico City to tackle the issue on public transport.

Studies show that a large majority of women worldwide have been victims of sexual harassment and other forms of sexual violence in public spaces; in Mexico City, a recent national survey found that nearly 90 per cent of women feel unsafe on buses and on the subway.

These behaviours have been so normalized and naturalized within societies that women themselves don't often consider it important enough to report

For Ana Güzmes, UN Women's representative in Mexico, the figures point to nothing less than an epidemic. "From a very young age women experience sexual

violence and harassment in public spaces, in transport, walking on the streets, and it consists of anything from rude words, unwanted touching, obscene glares, to rapes, murders and feminicide.”

The alarming data prompted UN Women, in partnership with the local government, to launch the campaign *#NoEsDeHombres*, which translates to “this is not what being a man is about.” The campaign promotes what the agency says is a more respectful form of masculinity.

Yeliz Osman, Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces Programme Coordinator at UN Women in Mexico, notes that the capital is no different to other cities around the world. “The overwhelming majority of women who participated in focus groups said that they experience some form of sexual harassment in their daily journeys.”

“These behaviours have been so normalized and naturalized within societies that women themselves don’t often consider it important enough to report and men don’t even realize in many cases that this is actually a form of violence and the impact that it has on women and girls.”

VIDEO: Responding to sexual harassment and other forms of sexual violence against women and girls in public spaces

According to a survey on the issue carried out by the National Institute for Statistics and Geography, the forms of violence that were most frequently reported were offensive or sexualized comments (74 per cent), unwanted touching and groping (58 per cent) and fear of being assaulted or abused (14 per cent).

Example of the campaign. Click for large. Photo: UN Women

The fear women and girls feel ends up changing the way they live, Ms. Osman continued. “Women’s perceptions of their safety in Mexico City, as in many cities in the world, has an impact on decisions to go out at night or to take part in leisure activities; also women have to change the way they dress, they need to go out accompanied by other people, and that’s simply not acceptable.

“Women should be free to move around, to go to work, to go to school, free from constant harassment and violence,” she stressed.

The campaign targets men between the ages of 20 and 50 that use public transport on a daily basis, and was divided into two stages.

During the first stage, the Mexico City Metro was strategically used to undertake social experiments that were filmed and made into two videos which challenge the normalization of sexual violence by placing men in situations that give them an idea of what women experience in their daily lives.

The videos were then released with the goal of generating empathy and creating change in male attitudes and behaviours. To date, the videos have been viewed more than 10 million times on social network platforms, reaching more than 108 million users on Twitter with the hashtag #NoEsDeHombres.

The second stage consists of posters that aim to raise awareness of the sexual violence experienced by women and girls on public transport every day and seek to deter men from committing these acts by informing them of the possible sanctions for sexual violence. At the same time, women were encouraged to report incidents. The posters were placed in different public spaces including the metro, buses and under bridges.

This is the first time that UN Women and Mexico City have implemented such an innovative campaign that targets men, the objective of which is to create relationships between men and women that are more equal and free of violence.

VIDEO: Encouraging innovative, locally owned and sustainable approaches to prevent and respond to sexual harassment and other forms of violence against women in public spaces.

“Sexual harassment is almost considered a natural part of male behaviour and we need to transform the notion that it’s natural,” stated Ms. Osman. “It’s not natural and not all men harass women, not all men are violent. We don’t want to perpetuate stereotypes about what is to be a man or a woman.

Sexual harassment is almost considered a natural part of male behaviour and we need to transform the notion that it’s natural

“However, what we are trying to say is that there are forms of masculinity that are less harmful, more positive, more respectful towards women, and more equal. That’s what we are trying to promote: a masculinity that is based on women’s rights and equality.”

While the campaign #NoEsDeHombres was created specifically for Mexico, UN Women’s global flagship initiative “Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces,” which was launched in 2010 with the goal of preventing and responding to sexual violence against women and girls in public spaces, has a growing list of champion cities.

These include Cairo, New Delhi, Kigali, Port Moresby, Quito, Cape Town, Rabat, Marrakech, Quezon City, Guatemala City, Medellin, Dushanbe, Maputo, Tegucigalpa, Dublin, Winnipeg, Reykjavik, Sakai, New York, and Brussels.

According to UN Women, studies showed that 43 per cent of young women in London experienced some form of street harassment in 2011; over 90 per cent of women and girls in Port Moresby have experienced some form of sexual violence when accessing public transportation; and 55 per cent of women in Kigali reported that they were concerned about going to educational institutions after dark.

As part of the “Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces” initiative, cities commit to identify gender-responsive, locally relevant and owned interventions; to develop and implement laws and policies to prevent and respond to the issue of sexual violence in public spaces; to invest in the safety and economic viability of public spaces and to change attitudes and behaviours to promote women’s and girls’ rights to enjoy public spaces free from violence.

AUDIO: What is life like for women and girls in Mexico’s most populous city? Yeliz Osman, Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces Programme Coordinator at UN Women in Mexico, speaks with *UN News*.

[Perpetrators, not victims, should be shamed for conflict-related sexual violence – UN report](#)

3 May 2017 – Survivors of sexual violence in war zones need to be recognized as legitimate victims of conflict and terrorism, and not blamed, stigmatized or shamed, the United Nations has said in an annual report to be presented to the Security Council.

“[Shame and stigma](#) are integral to the logic of sexual violence being employed as a tactic of war or terrorism: aggressors understand that this type of crime can turn victims into outcasts, thus unravelling the family and kinship ties that hold communities together,” according to the latest report of the Secretary-General on conflict-related sexual violence, which is prepared by the Office of the UN Special Representative on the issue.

The report calls on traditional, religious and community leaders to address harmful social norms and help to redirect the stigma of rape from the victims to the perpetrators. If not, the victims may face lethal retaliation, “honour” crimes, suicide, untreated diseases, unsafe abortion, economic exclusion and indigence.

Of particular concern in the report are children born of rape, which “may themselves face a lifetime of marginalization, owing to stigma and uncertain legal status.”

“Unless those who have suffered sexual violence and the children born of rape are reintegrated into their societies and economies, they will remain susceptible to exploitation and recruitment,” the report cautions.

The report calls for national legal and policy frameworks to ensure that survivors of conflict-related sexual violence can benefit from reparations and redress, and have access to urgent support and services, such as sexual

and reproductive health care “including measures for the safe termination of unwanted pregnancies.”

Protection from sexual violence and access to sexual and reproductive health care was also pledged at the 2016 [World Humanitarian Summit](#) last May.

The annual report reviews 13 conflict settings, four post-conflict countries and two additional situations of concern. It also lists government and non-government actors who are credibly suspected of committing or being responsible for patterns of rape or other forms of sexual violence.

This year, for the first time since the Security Council created the position of the Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict, there has been a delisting. The Ivorian armed forces (FACI) have been removed after the Government adopted measures in accordance with resolution 1960 (2010) and 2106 (2013). These measures include issuing orders through chains of command and adopting codes of conduct prohibiting sexual violence, or investigating alleged incidents.

“The measures taken by the Government of Côte d’Ivoire have resulted in the first delisting pursuant to this mandate, namely that of the Forces armées de Côte d’Ivoire. Continued monitoring and technical assistance will be required to consolidate these gains,” the report noted.

The report is due to be presented to the Security Council on 15 May.