

UN rights chief warns of potential 'witch-hunt' as Tanzanian official plans to track and arrest LGBT people

The United Nations human rights chief has warned that an official campaign in and around the capital of Tanzania to identify and detain anyone suspected of being lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT) “could turn into a [witch-hunt](#).”

On Friday, Michelle Bachelet, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), expressed apprehension over a statement earlier this week by the Regional Commissioner of Dar es Salaam that a committee would soon be put in place to track and arrest gays, and to encourage member of the public to report people suspected of being gay.

According to news reports, the regional commissioner made the request on Monday, pledging that a special team would be up and running by next week. By Tuesday, he reportedly said he had already received 5,763 messages from the public which included more than 100 names. With homophobic attitudes in Tanzania already rife, activists fear the statement will serve to further fuel violence.

“Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people in Tanzania have already been subjected to growing violence, harassment and discrimination over the past two years,” said the High Commissioner. “And those defending their rights to health, to a life free from discrimination, violence and arbitrary arrest have themselves been increasingly targeted, even arrested.”

This could turn into a witch-hunt and could be interpreted as a licence to carry out violence – *UN High Commissioner for Human Rights*

“This could turn into a witch-hunt and could be interpreted as a licence to carry out violence, intimidation, bullying, harassment and discrimination against those perceived to be LGBT,” Ms. Bachelet stressed.

She urged the Tanzanian Government to fulfil its duty to protect the human rights of all its people, including by holding individuals accountable who advocate hatred, violence and discrimination.

The Government needs to ensure that human rights defenders, journalists and health providers can carry out their work, free from attacks and persecution, she added.

The regional official’s plan also includes an effort to “cure” gay people into being straight – a practice condemned as harmful, unethical and without

scientific basis by the [Committee against Torture](#) and the [World Health Organization](#).

Ms. Bachelet warned that this could further stigmatize LGBT individuals.

“I call on the Government and all the people of Tanzania to stand up for the human rights of everyone in the country, regardless of who they are or whom they love,” she said. “Political, religious and other leaders should work to combat prejudice based on sexual orientation and gender identity.”

Noting that Tanzania has ratified the [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#), the [International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights](#), and the [Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women](#), which set out the rights of everyone to freedom from discrimination, the High Commissioner also called for a review of national laws which continue to criminalize consensual same-sex relations.

[‘Colossal human loss’ threatens Asia, Pacific as hunger fight stalls – UN agencies](#)

Well over half the world’s undernourished people live in the Asia-Pacific region, making it a critical part of the global push to end extreme hunger and malnutrition in line with the [Sustainable Development Goal](#) (SDGs), [cautioned](#) a new United Nations report on Friday.

The [Regional Overview of Food Security and Nutrition](#), warns of “colossal human loss” to Asia and the Pacific, and its economies, if countries do not recommit themselves to ending malnutrition and achieving zero hunger by 2030.

Published by the [Food and Agriculture Organization](#) (FAO), the [UN Children’s Fund](#) (UNICEF), [World Food Programme](#) (WFP) and the [World Health Organization](#) (WHO), the report reveals that the decline in hungry and malnourished people has come to a virtual standstill in many parts of the region, with its population of nearly half a billion-undernourished people.

While [recently released global figures](#) indicate a rise in hunger worldwide, returning to decade-old levels, the report points out that in the Asia-Pacific, the effort has essentially stalled.

The sense of urgency cannot be overstated –*UN agency heads*

The report highlights a legion of converging challenges threatening [SDG 2](#) to

end all forms of malnutrition by 2030.

“The report’s estimates show that the number of hungry people has barely changed during the past two years, making it increasingly difficult to achieve the Zero Hunger target of, SDG 2,” the four UN agencies’ regional heads wrote in their joint foreword.

In addition to having half the world’s underfed children, around 79 million under-five suffer from stunting, while 34 million children suffer from “wasting”, a debilitating disease that causes muscle and fat tissue to waste away – drastically increasing the risk of death.

Although some progress has been made towards reducing stunting, wasting has seen little improvement over the past decade.

“The sad reality is that an unacceptably large number of children in the region continue to face the multiple burden of malnutrition despite decades of economic growth,” the regional UN heads said.

“This is a colossal human loss given the association between undernutrition and poor cognitive development, with severe lifelong consequences for the future of these children,” they continued.

This is the first time that the four UN agencies have jointly published such a report, underlining the urgency of the situation, representing a united front and a call to action on the part of governments to reach their SDG commitments.

The UN agency heads note that the world cannot meet the 2030 target of zero hunger, if Asia and the Pacific is not leading the way: “The sense of urgency cannot be overstated.”

UN urges more protection for Nigeria’s most vulnerable after deadly attack on camp

Hundreds of people already forced to flee their homes by violence in Nigeria’s troubled north-east have been uprooted once again after deadly attacks in and around a camp where they were sheltering, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, [OCHA](#), said on Friday.

“In the attacks the armed group killed at least eight and injured dozens more, kidnapped women and burned and looted homes, shelters and food stocks,” Jens Laerke, OCHA spokesperson, told journalists in Geneva.

Mr. Laerke said the attack happened two days ago at a Government-run facility a few kilometres from Borno state capital Maiduguri, and on communities close to the village of Dalori.

The humanitarian crisis in Nigeria's north-east that has spilled over into the Lake Chad region is one of the most severe in the world today, with 7.7 million people in need – *Jens Laerke, OCHA*

The camp is home to 12,600 people who fled clashes in recent months, the UN official said – a reference to fighting between Government forces and violent extremists that have claimed 29,000 lives since 2009 and contributed to one of the world's worst humanitarian crises.

"This attack happened late Wednesday night," Mr Laerke said. "We know, the information that I have, is that hundreds were displaced as a result. Where they are right now this morning I don't have specific information about that."

Reiterating condemnation of the incident by the [UN Humanitarian Coordinator in Nigeria](#), Edward Kallon, the OCHA spokesperson repeated his appeal for authorities to ensure the safety of vulnerable communities.

"It really is a blanket call to beef up security for civilians in Borno and also the other two states, but particularly Borno," Mr Laerke said. "It's really the epicentre of this displacement and humanitarian crisis."

Dalori village, which is closest to the camp that was attacked earlier this week, was almost totally burned to the ground during an attack in January 2016 that killed more than 100 people.

There are another eight camps for internally displaced people nearby.

Construction began on them in 2015 and they are now home to more than 47,000. At least 20 aid organizations provide food, water, sanitation, medicine and shelter, but the needs remain massive throughout Nigeria's north-east, OCHA said in a statement.

The number of civilians displaced in the region is estimated to be 1.8 million. More than sixty per cent of these vulnerable people live outside Government-run camps and most stay in Maiduguri.

"The humanitarian crisis in Nigeria's North-East that has spilled over into the Lake Chad region is one of the most severe in the world today, with 7.7 million people in need of humanitarian assistance in the worst affected states of Borno, Adamawa and Yobe this year," Mr Laerke said.

Death penalty concerns highlighted in Sudan, Belarus, by UN Human Rights Committee

Countries should heed the “clear pro-abolitionist spirit” towards the death penalty of one of the world’s most important treaties, a key UN independent human rights panel said on Thursday, while highlighting concerns about right-to-life violations in Belarus and Sudan.

The Human Rights Committee’s comments followed its scheduled review of both countries at its 124th session in Geneva, which also covered Belize, Bulgaria and Guinea.

The 18-member body of [independent experts](#) began work more than four decades ago to monitor people’s right to life, freedom of expression and freedom of conscience – obligations for State signatories to the 1966 [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#) (ICCPR).

Together with the [International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights](#) (ICESCR), the two Covenants are the cornerstone of an extensive series of internationally binding rights treaties.

On Sudan, the Human Rights Committee highlighted its concerns that the death penalty is still imposed for crimes other than those involving “intentional killing”.

Panel member Sarah Cleveland told journalists that this could include a “wide range” of offences, such as blasphemy, adultery and same-sex relationships.

“Sudan has a wide range of crimes on the books that are subject to the death penalty including crimes which do not qualify as the ‘most serious crimes’ under the Covenant,” she said. “It has a mandatory death penalty for a number of crimes and it also retains on the books punishments including execution by stoning and by crucifixion.”

Noting that Sudan had “indicated that they do not apply the latter two punishments”, Ms Cleveland explained that the committee had recommended that they be removed from the criminal code nonetheless.

On Belarus, the UN panel noted with concern that the death penalty “continues to be imposed and enforced”, including in six cases where the Human Rights Committee had requested a stay of execution.

“We intervened and asked them not to execute a person until we have heard his allegations about the due process and other violations of his process,” said panel chair Yuval Shany.

He explained that the Government had said it was examining a move towards the

abolition of the death penalty, but that a majority of the population was not in favour of doing so.

“We already know that three out of those six persons have been executed despite our requests,” Mr Shany added. “We do not have information about the fate of the other three, so we are still hoping that they were not executed.”

Denying families an execution date, clearly ‘inhumane treatment’

Among the committee’s other concerns about Belarus with regard to the Convention was the practice of preventing families of condemned prisoners from knowing the date of their execution – one of a series of measures which the authorities maintained were there to shield relatives.

“The argument from the State has been that these provisions in the Penalties Enforcement Code are actually in a way to protect the family,” said panel member Ilze Brands Kehris. “But it is the view of the Committee and every time we have had other countries where we have dealt with this as well, is that the traumatic experience of not knowing what has happened to a loved one and not knowing the time of even an execution and certainly not being able to then bury the body...actually does amount to inhumane treatment.”

Beyond its country-specific recommendations, the UN panel also took the significant step of issuing updated, detailed guidance on the right to life, which is covered in the Covenant under Article 6.

The Committee last published two such documents more than 30 years ago, and each of those was only 10 paragraphs long.

The latest version was nearly four years in the making and is more than seven times as big – reflecting the input of dozens of States and civil society – and the impact of modern-day threats to people’s civil and political rights, such as weaponized drones and environmental degradation.

According to the panel’s rules, Member States have two years to report back on their progress in implementing its main concluding observations, or recommendations.

Asked whether the panel would comment on the case of journalist Jamal Khashoggi, who Saudi officials reportedly say was killed in the Saudi Arabian consulate in Istanbul, chair Yuval Shany said that the country was not a signatory to the Convention.

Turkey was a signatory however, Mr Shany, explained, before adding that it had yet to report back to the Committee, although it was expected to do so next year.

At its 125th meeting in March, the panel is due to discuss people’s civil and political rights in Equatorial Guinea, Mauritania, Nigeria, Tajikistan and Trinidad and Tobago.

As South Sudan celebrates, UN envoy cites trust as future 'key ingredient'

Thousands of elated citizens gathered in South Sudan's capital of Juba on Wednesday to celebrate an agreement signed in September between the President and his former deputy, which it is hoped will finally end years of brutal conflict across the world's youngest country.

"To see parties that have previously been divided by violence coming together here in Juba, in a [public sign of unity](#), sends a strong signal to the citizens of this country that you are genuinely committed to end the suffering and building durable peace," remarked David Shearer, UN Special Representative and Head of the [UN Mission in South Sudan](#) (UNMISS).

In a gesture of reconciliation, President Salva Kiir announced the imminent release of former deputy and opposition leader Riek Machar's spokesperson, who has been detained since late 2016 on charges of treason.

Alongside President Kiir and Mr. Machar, other Heads of State, high-level representatives and leaders from other opposition groups attended the event marking the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict, which was billed as a celebration of "the Dawn of Peace, Appreciating Friends, Cherishing Reconciliation and Unity".

Mr. Shearer also paid tribute to heads of the East African Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and the governments of neighbouring Sudan and Uganda for their critical role in securing the peace agreement.

We will prove sceptics wrong by sincerely implementing the agreement fully, in letter and spirit – *South Sudan President Kiir*

After several "false starts" to the protracted peace process, which began with an agreement in 2015, some questioned whether the September deal signed would hold. The UNMISS head cited trust as "the key ingredient needed at every step" moving forward.

"The big challenge ahead is to build trust and confidence between the parties – and between the parties and the people," Mr. Shearer said, adding that it was the responsibility of "all of us here today; officials, civil society, religious leaders and the international community" to do so.

The signatories unanimously stressed their commitment to translating peace-promoting words into action while underscoring the need for the international community to politically and economically support the way forward.

"We will stand alongside the parties as they move forward in peace," Mr. Shearer said. "We will use our resources and our presence across the country to support reconciliation and peacebuilding."

President Kiir offered the South Sudanese people something of a mea culpa, saying that "as president, I want to apologize to all the parties of the conflict, and to the people of South Sudan, for our betrayal of the promise of our struggle for independence."

"We will prove sceptics wrong by sincerely implementing the agreement fully, in letter and spirit," he said.