

## 2,300 migrant children in Central American 'caravan' need protection, UNICEF says

As some 7,000 mostly-Honduran migrants continue their journey northwards toward the United States, governments must prioritize the needs of migrant children when it comes to applying immigration laws and procedures, said the UN Children's Fund ([UNICEF](#)) on Friday.

Highlighting the vulnerability of children on the move, the agency advised all transit and destination countries, to consider alternatives to immigration detention.

According to the UN Human Rights Office ([OHCHR](#)), thousands of men, women, and children, including unaccompanied children, are still making their way through Mexico toward the southern border of the US.

Their journey is arduous, especially when opting for irregular migration routes. The dangers of inclement weather, including soaring temperatures and lack of shelter are high, especially for children, say UN agencies.

Some have already fallen ill or are suffering from dehydration, said UNICEF, while the danger of extortion by criminal smuggling gangs, or threats of robbery and sexual violence are also present; perils from which many are already fleeing.

### **'When I saw our house burning...it was time to flee' Eduardo, 16**

Eduardo, a sixteen-year-old from Honduras, told UNHCR that the gang violence in his hometown of Colon had become so intense, he felt he had no other option but to leave the country.

Describing his reaction after gang members torched his family home, he said, "When I saw our house burning, I knew our number had been called, our luck had run out, it was time to flee."

Eduardo and his cousins joined the caravan, fearing forced-recruitment by gangs. They first crossed into neighboring Guatemala, when authorities closed the border. The group was able to cross into Mexico along with 1,500 other migrants, but Eduardo admitted he was anxious about whether they would be granted entry.

"I felt helpless, unwanted by any country. I thought they would send us back, and then my real nightmare would start," he recalled.

A priority for UNHCR, which has mobilized extra staff and resources to help those making the journey in Mexico's southern borderlands, is ensuring migrants are informed on their rights to asylum. In an agency video, a UNHCR

protection associate said many migrants were simply unaware asylum was an option.

UNHCR spokesperson Adrian Edwards [told reporters in Geneva](#) earlier this week that transit and destination countries must consider their human rights obligations ahead of immigration status.

“UNHCR would like to remind countries along this route that this caravan is likely to include people in real danger,” Edwards said.

“In any situation like this it is essential that people have the chance to request asylum and have their international protection needs properly assessed, before any decision on return or deportation is made.”

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## [Over 330,000 Congolese migrants at risk after mass deportations from Angola – UN rights chief](#)

The United Nations human rights chief, Michelle Bachelet, on Friday [warned](#) that the forcible mass expulsion of Congolese migrants from Angola has resulted in “serious human rights violations by security forces on both sides of the border” and left at least 330,000 returnees in an “extremely precarious situation”.

This month, some 330,000 people have reportedly crossed from Angola into the Kasai, Kasai Central and Kwango provinces of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), following an expulsion order by the Government of Angola targeting irregular migrants.

“International law and the African Charter of Human and Peoples’ Rights forbid the mass expulsion of non-nationals without individual assessment or other due process guarantees,” said the UN’s High Commissioner for Human Rights, [Michelle Bachelet](#). “In expelling such a massive number of people in such a short time, Angola has placed tens of thousands of families at severe risk,” she regretted.

In interviews with people in the border town of Kamako in Kasai, the UN human rights office ([OHCHR](#)) received reports indicating that security forces in Angola used “excessive force in their operations to deport the Congolese nationals”.

The team has verified information concerning six deaths, reportedly at the hands of security forces, but has also received many other allegations of killings that it has not been able to fully verify. Reports also suggest that

at least 100 people have been injured during confrontations.

According to OHCHR, several migrants also alleged that upon their arrival in Kamako, they were subjected to extortion, illegal taxation, and arbitrary detention by the DRC defence and security forces. Some of the migrants are being hosted by families or in improvised shelters, but many are sleeping in the streets, with inadequate access to health and food, severe water shortages and lack of proper sanitation.

Angola currently hosts some 68,000 refugees and asylum seekers.

“I call on the Government of Angola to halt any ongoing deportations until it can be assured that any returns will be carried out in full respect of the rule of law and the human rights of all affected migrants,” said Ms. Bachelet, calling for security forces and others responsible for violations in the course of these expulsions to be held accountable.

Warning of the risk of inter-communal violence “if the situation is not handled carefully”, she called for the Congolese authorities to ensure that the returnees are protected from extortion and violence, particularly given the continued lack of accountability for grave human rights violations that occurred in the Kasais between 2016 and 2017.

“I urge the Government of the DRC to ensure that members of security forces that may be responsible for violations, past and present, against people – regardless of their ethnic affiliations – are subjected to investigations, with a view to ensuring justice for the victims,” she said. “Failing this, I fear we could see a repeat of the cycles of terrible violence that erupted in the Kasais in 2016.”

Ms. Bachelet also urged DRC and the international community to redouble efforts to address the urgent humanitarian needs of the returnees in Kasai, Kasai Central and Kwango.

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## **Jordan flash flooding: UN chief ‘saddened’ by loss of life**

The United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres said on Thursday that he was “deeply saddened by the loss of life and extensive damage” that occurred from large-scale flash flooding near the Dead Sea, in Jordan, which reportedly swept away a bus carrying pupils and staff on a school trip.

According to news reports, at least 18 have been killed, and dozens of others injured. The victims were washed away by the floods in the Zara Maen hot springs area, following heavy rains on Thursday. Many are being treated for

serious injuries, and search and rescue efforts are ongoing.

Mr. Guterres conveyed his “condolences and deepest sympathy to the families of the victims” and the Government of Jordan.

He added that the “the United Nations stands ready to support ongoing rescue and relief efforts”.

The Dead Sea valley is prone to flooding as it lies below sea level and flash floods tend to occur when rain water rushes down from the adjacent hills.

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## **‘Deteriorating’ human rights in Belarus amounts to ‘wholesale oppression’: UN expert**

A crackdown on free speech is the latest worrying development amid the deteriorating, “wholesale oppression” of human rights in Belarus, an independent expert told the UN General Assembly, on Thursday.

The UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Belarus, [Miklós Haraszti](#), referred to the “sad fate of freedom of expression”, specifically pointing to legislation that ends anonymity for contributors to online media, and forcing all online platforms to register with the State.

Mr. Haraszti’s, whose six-year tenure is coming to an end, said that human rights abuses that had prompted international scrutiny when he took up his role, were worsening in important areas.

“Given the impossibility of complete content control over the internet, the new regulations are bound to be exercised in an arbitrary, selective, and politicised manner, with the aim of intimidating those who would express critical views and expose abuses” he said.

“Meanwhile, remaining are all the infamous systemic violations that the Human Rights Council deplored when founding the mandate in 2012,” Haraszti said, adding that “the entrenched oppressive legal system is backed-up through cyclically recurring violent mass crackdowns and frequent incarceration of political opponents on bogus criminal charges, as if reminding...new generations of the status quo.”

Mr. Haraszti pointed out that Belarus remains the only country in Europe which still applies the death penalty.

Progress in Belarus, he said, is being hampered by a lack of political will, concluding with a tribute to the “courageous women and men who continue to

ask for their basic human rights contained in the 70-years old [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#)".

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## [UN rights chief denounces Burundi for 'belligerent and defamatory' attack on inquiry team](#)

The top United Nations human rights official has called on Burundi to "immediately retract" its threat to try and prosecute members of a UN Commission of Inquiry into rights abuses in the central African nation.

High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, said on Thursday that comments made by Burundi's UN ambassador the previous day, were "deeply regrettable in both tone and substance".

"Burundi's belligerent and defamatory response to the findings of the Commission of Inquiry, and its repeated and wholly unsupported assertions that the commission was the puppet of mysterious external forces [...] are reprehensible," said Ms. Bachelet, in a [statement](#).

She also raised concern over the Burundian Government's "complete failure" to address the very serious findings of the [Commission of Inquiry](#).

On Wednesday, the Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Burundi to the UN, Albert Shingiro, attacked the independent international inquiry team, threatening to prosecute its members and compared Commission Chair, Doudou Diène, to a participant in the slave trade.

In the statement, Ms. Bachelet also called on Burundi, as a UN Member State, to "show respect" to its institutions and the various bodies, laws and mechanisms it has established. Burundi is also a current member of the Geneva-based Human Rights Council.

"I urge the Government of Burundi to issue an immediate retraction of this inflammatory statement and to offer a full apology to Mr. Diène and the other Commissioners, as well as to the Human Rights Council, which created the Commission, and its President who selected and appointed the three Commissioners," she said.

Established by the Human Rights Council in 2016, the Commission has been tasked with a thorough investigation into human rights violations and abuses in Burundi since April 2015 and identify perpetrators with a view to ensuring full accountability.

The Commission was also asked to engage with the Burundian authorities and all other stakeholders, including national, regional and global rights bodies, to provide the support and expertise for the immediate improvement of the situation of human rights and the fight against impunity.

[Burundi](#) has been embroiled in crisis since April 2015 when widespread protests erupted after the country's President announced he would seek a third term in office, in defiance of constitutional law at the time. The protests were followed by an attempted coup, disputed elections, and alleged crackdown on political opponents.