

UN rights office calls for action to end 'repression and retaliation' in crisis-torn Nicaragua

The United Nations on Wednesday called for urgent action to address the human rights crisis in Nicaragua, where "repression and retaliation against demonstrators continue ... as the world looks away."

A new [report](#) from the UN human rights office has detailed what it describes as numerous violations carried out by the Nicaraguan Government after mass protests erupted in mid-April over planned social security reforms.

"The violence and impunity of these past four months have exposed the fragility of the country's institutions and the rule of law, and created a climate of fear and mistrust," said UN [High Commissioner](#) for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein.

The report covers the period from when protests against planned social security reforms began on 18 April, up to 18 August.

The disproportionate use of force by police, sometimes resulting in extrajudicial killings; enforced disappearances; widespread arbitrary detentions; torture and ill-treatment; and rights violations to freedom of opinion, expression and peaceful assembly have all been documented in the report.

The report notes that in the initial stage, the police and pro-Government armed elements responded harshly to protests. During the "clean-up" stage, from mid-June to mid-July, they forcibly dismantled roadblocks and barricades – according to information obtained, armed elements often acted in coordination with high-level State authorities and the National Police.

"The Government no longer denies the existence of pro-Government armed elements, [and] it condones their actions and allows them to operate with impunity," the report says.

Most of the violence took place from mid-April to mid-July and has reportedly left some 300 people dead and 2,000 others injured – mostly men under 30, including university students and young professionals.

The report also noted that 22 police officers were killed.

In the current stage, demonstrators and so-called Government opponents are being persecuted and criminalized. As of 18 August, information indicates that at least 300 protesters are being prosecuted, including on charges of terrorism and organized crime. These trials have serious flaws and do not observe due process, including the impartiality of the courts, the report says.

Civil servants, including teachers and doctors, have been sacked, and the authorities have been increasingly stigmatizing and discrediting protesters and human rights defenders as “terrorists” or “coup-mongers.”

“Rather than recognizing responsibility for any wrongdoing during the crisis, the Government has placed the blame on social and opposition leaders for what they have termed ‘coup-related violence,’” the report notes.

The report calls on the Government to immediately end the harassment, intimidation and criminalization; and to disarm pro-government elements, halt all unlawful arrests, and release all those arbitrarily detained.

Mr. Zeid urged the UN Human Rights Council and the international community “to take concrete action to prevent the current crisis from descending into deeper social and political turmoil.”

“Any such action should aim to ensure full accountability for human rights violations and abuses, enable victims to have effective access to justice and appropriate remedies, including reparations and the right to know the truth,” concluded the High Commissioner.

[Nuclear test ban treaty critical to global collective security – UN chief](#)

His appeal came in a message for [the International Day Against Nuclear Tests](#), observed annually on 29 August.

“The history of nuclear testing is one of suffering, with the victims of more than 2,000 nuclear tests often from the most vulnerable communities around of the world,” Mr. Guterres [said](#).

“The devastating consequences – which were not confined by international borders – encompassed impacts on the environment, health, food security and economic development.”

The UN has been pressing for the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban-Treaty ([CTBT](#)) to become law.

The treaty prohibits nuclear explosions anywhere – whether on the Earth’s surface, in the atmosphere, underwater or underground.

It also makes it difficult for countries to develop nuclear bombs for the first time, and prevents nations that already possess nuclear technology from developing even more powerful bombs.

More than 180 countries have signed the treaty, most of whom have also ratified it.

However, while nearly universal, the treaty will only enter into force after it is signed and ratified by eight countries with nuclear technology capacity: China, Egypt, India, Iran, Israel, North Korea, Pakistan and the United States.

“The Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty has an essential role within the nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation regime,” the UN chief said. “It fosters international peace and security by constraining the development of nuclear weapons. Our collective security demands that every effort should be made to bring this essential treaty into force.”

Lassina Zerbo, Executive Secretary of the UN commission which promotes the treaty, known as the [CTBTO](#), also [called on](#) the international community to “take the final steps” to ensure its entry into force.

“As long as the Treaty is not in force, the established international norm against nuclear testing and the global verification system that has been developed over the past two decades are at risk. I urge the last eight countries to ratify the Treaty and I appeal to others to renew their efforts in supporting it,” he said, also in a message to mark the International Day.

Mr. Zerbo said his conviction regarding the role the treaty can play on the Korean Peninsula was strengthened following a visit to the region last week.

The CBT0 is hosting [a meeting](#) in Kazakhstan this week, which brings together international experts and young people to look at key issues surrounding denuclearization.

“The significance of being in Kazakhstan on 29 August where nuclear testing has left a poisonous legacy is immense,” Mr. Zerbo added, recalling that the date also commemorates the 1991 shutdown of the Semipalatinsk test site, where the Soviet Union undertook what he called “one of the most extensive nuclear test programmes in history.”

[Half the world's refugee children not in school, UN agency finds](#)

With more and more children forced to leave their homes, over half of the world's school-aged refugees are now out of education, the United Nations refugee agency said in a new report released on Wednesday.

The agency's annual report on refugee children's education, this year called [Turn the Tide: Refugee Education in Crisis](#), warned that without investment, hundreds of thousands more children could miss out on the chance to health themselves and help their communities.

[According to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees](#) (UNHCR) out of a global population of 7.2 million school-age refugee children, four million do not attend lessons of any kind.

The report shows that, despite the efforts of governments, UNHCR and its partners, enrolment of refugee children in school is failing to keep pace with the growing refugee population.

By the end of 2017, there were more than [25.4 million refugees](#) around the world, 19.9 million of them under UNHCR's mandate. More than half – 52 per cent – were children. Among them, 7.4 million were of school age.

“Education is a way to help children heal, but it is also key to rebuilding their countries,” said Filippo Grandi, [UN High Commissioner for Refugees](#). “Without education, the future of these children and their communities will be irrevocably damaged.”

At a press conference in Geneva, Ita Sheehy, Senior Education Advisor for UNHCR, said that an “unprecedented” increase in refugees this past year has meant that despite committed efforts by governments, humanitarian organizations and donors to change the status quo, the total percentage of refugee children without access to education has in fact stalled.

“With the continued increase globally in the numbers of refugees, obviously the numbers of refugees needing to go to school are also increasing”, she said at a press conference in Geneva.

The report stresses the importance of allowing refugee children to enter national and regular school systems and obtain the same certificates as other children. After spending up to 10 years in parallel learning establishments, some refugee children have “very little with which to move ahead”.

The report notes that in order to address the crisis, investment in local educational institutions is needed to absorb refugee children into existing frameworks.

Some harsh statistics face refugee children trying to obtain an education: Refugee children are five times more likely never to go to school than non-refugee children on a global level. Among the ones that make it to school and finish primary school, only 23 per cent manage to progress to secondary school, compared to 84 per cent of children globally.

Finally, only one per cent of refugee children get enrolled into higher education, compared to 37 per cent globally. This last figure is “a chasm”, Ms. Sheehy lamented, noting that it hasn't changed in the past three years that the agency has published its reports.

She said that contrary to popular belief, 92 per cent of the global population of school-aged refugees live in developing countries. This is further complicating the work by UNHCR.

Ending the press briefing, Ms Sheehy explained how the UNHCR is helping refugees to educate themselves. Innovative options like online courses with a

curriculum and standardized certifications, but also collaborations with existing higher educational institutions, some of which are already offering entry courses with diplomas for refugees, are part of the solution.

However, financing remains the biggest challenge and what is needed is better funding, the Senior Education Advisor stressed.

[UN chief calls for Security Council to work with Myanmar to end 'horrendous suffering' of Rohingya refugees](#)

Despite the efforts made by the United Nations over the past year to help create safeguards for all communities in Myanmar's Rakhine state, it is clear that conditions are still not suitable for the safe, voluntary, and sustainable return of Rohingya refugees to their home, Secretary-General [António Guterres](#) said on Tuesday.

The UN chief was briefing the Security Council on [the situation in Myanmar](#), where 12 months ago a military operation in northern Rakhine state sparked an exodus of desperate Rohingya refugees that quickly became one of the world's worst humanitarian and human rights crises.

Mr. Guterres' remarks also follow the release of an independent UN investigation into alleged human rights abuses carried out against the mainly Muslim Rohingya and which called for the country's military leaders to be investigated and prosecuted for genocide and war crimes.

Cate Blanchett, the Academy Award winning actor and [Goodwill Ambassador](#) for the [Office of the UN High Commission for Refugees](#) (UNHCR), and [Tegegnework Gettu](#), Associate Administrator of the UN Development Programme (UNDP) also addressed the briefing, which was chaired by Lord Ahmad, Minister of State for the Commonwealth and the UN for the United Kingdom, which currently holds the presidency of the Security Council.

Over 700,000 Rohingya fled Myanmar to ramshackle refugee camps in neighbouring Bangladesh's Cox's Bazar area, Bangladesh after being forced from their homes by a military operation which UN human rights chief [Zeid Ra'ad al Hussein](#) compared, at the time, to ethnic cleansing.

Mr. Guterres, recounting his experience of visiting the camps this past July, said that he had heard stories of [horrendous persecution and suffering](#).



UN Photo/Evan Schneider

Secretary-General António Guterres addresses the Security Council meeting on the situation in Myanmar. The meeting commemorates the one-year anniversary of the beginning of the Rohingya crisis in 2017.

“One father broke down as he told me how his son was shot dead in front of him. His mother was brutally murdered and his house burned to the ground. He took refuge in a mosque only to be discovered by soldiers who abused him and burned the Quran,” he said.

One distraught woman gestured to a mother cradling her young baby who was conceived as a result of rape and told me: “We need security in Myanmar and citizenship. And we want justice for what our sisters, our daughters, our mothers have suffered.”

Ms. Blanchett, who visited Bangladesh last year at the invitation of the UNHCR, [said](#) she had witnessed similar scenes, and “nothing could have prepared me for the extent and depth of suffering I saw... I have heard gut-wrenching accounts...of grave torture, of women brutally violated, people whose loved ones have been killed before their eyes.”



UN Photo/Manuel Elias

Cate Blanchett, Goodwill Ambassador for the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), addresses the Security Council meeting on the situation in Myanmar.

“I am a mother, and I saw my children in the eyes of every refugee child I met. I saw myself in every parent. How can any mother endure seeing her child thrown into a fire?” she asked the Council.

Like you, I have heard the gut-wrenching accounts. Stories of grave torture, of women brutally violated, people who have had their loved ones killed before their eyes – **Cate Blanchett**

The trigger for the military crackdown one year ago was a series of attacks on Myanmar security forces by insurgents that were immediately condemned by the Secretary-General. Mr. Guterres said that the disproportionate use of force against civilian populations and the gross human rights violations that followed, could never be justified.

Since then, despite his direct engagement with the Myanmar authorities, and the launch of several UN system initiatives on the ground, the Secretary General has expressed concern regarding the dramatic humanitarian and human rights situations, as well as the risks to regional peace and security of further degeneration.

This engagement includes the advancement of a policy of engagement and unified action to defuse tensions and build trust, and the appointment of [Christine Schraner](#) as Special Envoy on Myanmar, which has led to a process of broad consultations with the Government, military, civil society and women’s groups.

Mr. Guterres said that, despite the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) by the Myanmar authorities and UN agencies in June, the country’s

leaders have not made the investment in reconstruction, reconciliation and respect for human rights necessary for all communities to live improved and resilient lives in Rakhine state.

UNDP's Mr. Gettu said the agency shares international concerns about the situation in Rakhine and the plight of the Rohingya, and he [emphasised](#) the need to address Rakhine's significant development challenges and to lift restrictions on free movement and access to services.

The UNDP, UNHCR and other UN agencies have been implementing the MOU, and working in Rakhine to put a wide-ranging development and humanitarian assistance initiative in place with support from major donors. He underlined that addressing the needs of the refugees in Cox's Bazaar, Bangladesh, is also of primary importance.



UN Photo/Evan Schneider

Tegegnetwork Gettu, Associate Administrator of the UN Development Programme (UNDP), briefs the Security Council meeting on the situation in Myanmar.

Mr. Guterres asked the Security Council to urge Myanmar's leaders to ensure immediate, unimpeded and effective access for the Organization's agencies and partners, and release journalists arrested for reporting on the human tragedy.

He added that there can be no excuse for delaying the search for dignified solutions that will allow people to return home, and benefit from freedom of movement, an end to discrimination and the re-establishment of the rule of law.

His call for action was amplified by Ms. Blanchett, who said that "the focus of all our efforts must be to provide much-needed support inside Bangladesh while working to ensure conditions in Myanmar are conducive to return."

Mr. Guterres concluded with a call for accountability as an essential

prerequisite for regional security and stability, and for the Security Council to give serious consideration to the [report](#) released on Monday by the UN-appointed Independent International Fact-finding Mission on Myanmar.

He added that effective, international cooperation will be “critical to ensuring that accountability mechanisms are credible, transparent, impartial, independent and comply with Myanmar’s obligations under international law.”

[As children in Ebola-affected areas of DR Congo head back to school, UNICEF ramps up support](#)

As the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) gears up for the upcoming academic year – with some 250 schools in [Ebola](#)-affected health zones – the United Nations Children’s Fund ([UNICEF](#)) is scaling up education; health and water; sanitation; and hygiene programmes to assist children and their teachers.

“Education is...essential for children to develop to their full potential. [Especially in times of crisis such as an Ebola outbreak](#), schools are vital for children to find stability, learn prevention measures and receive psychosocial support,” said Dr. Gianfranco Rotigliano, UNICEF Representative in the DRC following his visit to Mangina, the epicentre of the latest Ebola outbreak.

The Government of the DRC recently made the decision to proceed as planned with the start of the school year in the affected provinces of North-Kivu and Ituri, in the vast country’s eastern region, with more than 82,500 children getting ready.

“Every effort must go into ensuring a smooth and safe start to the new school year,” he added.

Principals and teachers will be trained on Ebola prevention and protection, and on how to teach children good hygiene practices to avoid the virus spreading.

To ensure schools in the 250 schools in the affected health zones are prepared for early detection and response, UNICEF is distributing supplies, including laser thermometers, hand washing units and prevention posters.

Meanwhile, according to the [UN refugee agency](#), violence continues to [escalate](#) in eastern DRC, forcing massive displacements and putting millions at risk.

In recent weeks, the disease has killed more than 60 people and infected dozens more.