

# UN rights office appeals for peaceful Zimbabwe elections amid reports of intimidation

Zimbabwe's upcoming presidential elections must be peaceful and credible, the UN Human Rights Office, [OHCHR](#), said on Tuesday, amid increasing reports of voter intimidation and coercion linked to the ruling ZANU-PF party.

Ahead of the 30 July poll, OHCHR spokesperson Liz Throssell said that UN staff were not in a position to verify the reports, which have nonetheless surfaced in a context of a "widening of the democratic space" in the country.

"We note the signing of the peace pledge by the political parties on 26 June, under the auspices of the National Peace and Reconciliation Commission," she told journalists in Geneva. "We welcome their commitment to promote a climate of peace and tolerance, accept the results of the elections or challenge the results through the due process of law."

The frontrunners in the election are President Emmerson Mnangagwa from the ruling ZANU-PF party and his opponent, Nelson Chamisa, head of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC).

Robert Mugabe, the country's former leader, resigned under pressure last November after 37 years in power.

Noting a "cautious optimism" surrounding the elections amid political rallies and peaceful demonstrations in the capital, Harare, the OHCHR spokesperson added that it was to be welcomed that international human rights organizations and national rights monitors were present, too.

"The run-up to elections previously in Zimbabwe were very different, very much marred by violence. From what we have been seeing, what we have been monitoring, there has not been that scale of violence. In fact, civil society, people that our colleague has spoken to, have expressed this cautious optimism. It's far from perfect, but there are encouraging signs."

Despite these positive developments, several rural areas – Mashonaland Central, Mashonaland East, Mashonaland West, Midlands and Manicaland Province – have been linked to "an increasing number of reports" of harassment and coercion of voters, Ms. Throssell cautioned.

These reports of intimidation linked to ZANU-PF and traditional leaders who support the ruling party have been made by civil society organizations and cannot be verified by OHCHR, which has just one staff member in the country.

The issue of verbal attacks against women has also been a feature of the election campaign, taking place largely on social media and in local languages.

“From what I understand from information I’ve been given, there’s about 15 per cent of the candidates that are women,” Ms. Throssell told UN News. “Now the kind of disparaging language is really not going to come of any surprise to you – it’s targeting them on the basis of them being women. Calling them bra-burning feminists, calling them, sort of, substandard candidates, attacking them personally.”

The OHCHR appeal to Zimbabwe’s Government, political parties and other institutions follows concern over Zimbabwe’s alleged human rights violations and level of electoral violence in the past.

The international community imposed sanctions on the country in the early 2000s, following reports of election-rigging and suppression of the opposition.

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## [UN experts urge India to align new anti-trafficking bill with human rights law](#)

India must revise its planned new legislation to tackle trafficking in persons so that the measures proposed are in line with international human rights law, said two independent UN human rights experts on Monday.

Maria Grazia Giammarinaro, Special Rapporteur on [trafficking in persons](#), and Urmila Boola, Special Rapporteur on [contemporary forms of slavery](#), said in a [statement](#) that they were “gravely concerned” about the bill as presented by the Government to the Indian Parliament last week.

“Its focus on addressing trafficking from a criminal law perspective is not sufficiently complemented by a human rights-based and victim-centred approach” they added, flagging that this risks further harming already vulnerable individuals.

The experts explained that the bill over-emphasises the criminal response, including the promotion of “rescue raids” by the police and the institutionalisation of victims in the name of rehabilitation, not giving due consideration to their rights and needs, especially in terms of protection.

According to the experts, other problematic aspects include the “over-broad and vague nature” of some of the bill’s provisions, which could lead to blanket criminalisation of activities that do not necessarily relate to trafficking.

“The development of an appropriate legal framework that is consistent with

relevant human rights standards is key not only to ensure that victims are identified, assisted and referred to appropriate protection services, but also to guarantee more effective investigation and prosecution of perpetrators,” the statement read.

The experts advocate for the application of “appropriate screening methods and standard operating procedures for the identification and referral of victims or potential victims of trafficking and social integration programs which are respectful of their rights.”

They also expressed concerns as the proposed law seems to conflate trafficking with the smuggling of migrants.

“This may lead to the criminalisation of all irregular migrants, including victims or potential victims of trafficking, who, because of a lack of safe, orderly and regular migration channels, are forced into the hands of smugglers or traffickers,” the Special Rapporteurs stressed, pointing out that such treatment was in contrast with current international efforts, including the [Global Compact on Migration](#), which aims at addressing protection gaps for vulnerable migrants.

“We urge the Indian Parliament to revise the Bill in accordance with human rights law, including the [OHCHR Recommended Principles and Guidelines on Human Rights and Human Trafficking](#), in consultation with civil society organisations, UN agencies and other relevant partners,” the experts emphasised.

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## [UN Human Rights chief denounces grave ‘assaults’ on fundamental rights of Palestinian people](#)

From arbitrary detentions and deliberate deprivation, to attacks against civilians and forced displacements, the [UN High Commissioner for Human Rights](#), Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein, expressed “acute concerns” on Monday over the current human rights situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

[Briefing](#) the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, Zeid – who also heads the UN human rights office, [OHCHR](#) – expressed concern over the dramatic escalation of violence along the border between the Gaza Strip and Israel during the past few months, in which dozens of Palestinian civilians were killed.

“I remind all parties that any disproportionate or indiscriminate use of weapons which lead to the death and injury of civilians is prohibited by

international humanitarian law”, said High Commissioner Zeid, warning that this escalation could potentially threaten peace across a far broader region.

Though the United Nations and the Government of Egypt have made efforts to maintain a ceasefire between Israel and the militant group Hamas which controls Gaza, the situation remains extremely fragile, he said. “I urge the parties and all those with influence to do their utmost to avoid another round of violence and misery.”

In his briefing, the Human Rights chief highlighted the dire conditions that Palestinians living in Gaza continue to endure. He regretted that these regular waves of violence “compound the already extreme humanitarian crisis”, which he denounced as “entirely man-made and entirely preventable”, including “skyrocketing unemployment and poverty, crumbling infrastructure, record food-dependency and a bleak political horizon”.

The grave funding crisis currently faced by the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees ([UNRWA](#)) – which plays a crucial role in providing protection, education and health services as well as employment to the refugee populations – is likely to further aggravate the situation, he said.

Regarding the recent [“shocking killings” along the Gaza fence](#) during the ‘Great March of Return’ demonstrations, he noted that the Human Rights Council resolved in May, to dispatch an independent, international Commission of Inquiry on the matter.

Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein, High Commissioner for Human Rights, briefs the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, via videoconference from Geneva to New York, 23 July 2018., by UN Photo/Loey Felipe

“It is essential that the authorities cooperate with the future Commission to advance accountability for these killings, as well as all alleged violations and abuses of international humanitarian law and international human rights law”, Zeid said, adding that “although Israel has put in place a number of accountability mechanisms, there are serious concerns that these are not in compliance with the international standards of independence, impartiality, and effectiveness.”

He said that it would also be “vital to address the root causes of the recent demonstrations”, namely the “grossly inadequate living conditions” in Gaza.

The UN Human Rights High Commissioner went on to highlight that the planning and construction of Israeli settlements continues “unabated” across the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem. “Since the beginning of 2018, settler attacks on Palestinians have spiked to the highest monthly average of the past three years,” he added.

As for demolitions and forced displacement of Palestinian families in the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem, despite having slowed down after peaking in 2017, they continue to take place monthly, said Zeid, with 366

structures demolished in the West Bank alone – including 11 school structures – in the past year.

Other violations in breach of international law cited by the High Commissioner include increasing restrictions on movement; daily intimidation by soldiers at checkpoints; settler violence and harassment; forced transfer, and the continued existence of the separation wall.

The Human Rights chief highlighted also the plight of hundreds of Palestinian children detained by Israel, including some without charge, under the so-called “administrative detention” system. An estimated 440 Palestinians are being held currently.

“These assaults on fundamental rights dismantle trust in institutions; strip away the social structures which enable peaceful resolution of disputes; and create a tinderbox in which any flash of conflict may ignite severe and unpredictable consequences,” he concluded.

On Monday, the [UN Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories](#) also denounced the deteriorating human rights situation for Palestinians, following their annual mission to Jordan.

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## [\*\*Afghanistan: UN mission condemns deadly attack near Kabul airport\*\*](#)

The United Nations mission in Afghanistan has condemned Sunday’s terrorist attack outside Kabul’s airport that reportedly killed and injured scores of civilians.

The suicide attack took place among a crowd gathered to greet First Vice President Abdul Rashid Dostum, shortly after his convoy had departed the area.

According to news reports, the former civil war general returned to the capital, after living outside Afghanistan for more than a year.

“This was [a senseless attack](#) that served no purpose other than to spread terror and try to promote division,” said Tadamichi Yamamoto, the UN Secretary-General’s Special Representative for the country.

“The organizers of these attacks, those supporting these cynical crimes, must be held accountable and brought to justice,” added Mr. Yamamoto, who heads the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA).

According to UNAMA’s 2018 mid-year report on civilian casualties, suicide and

complex attacks by anti-government insurgents killed 427 civilians and injured 986, a 22 per cent increase in the total casualties from the same period in 2017.

“At a time when Afghans are exploring ways toward much-needed peace, we must not allow such attacks to deter our collective resolve to make progress on ending the conflict,” said Yamamoto, who is also head of UNAMA.

Last week, Afghanistan concluded the voter registration process for the upcoming parliamentary and district council elections on 20 October and for the 2019 presidential elections.

And on Monday, the Security Council adopted a presidential statement to support the electoral process in Afghanistan, noting that more than 8.9 million Afghans, including more than three million women, have registered to vote.

In the statement, the 15-member body also emphasized the need to address remaining challenges and to accelerate progress in electoral preparations.

The Council also stressed the importance of an enabling a secure environment for voting, and condemned “in the strongest terms those who resort to violence to obstruct the electoral process, including the Taliban and the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da’esh) affiliates.”

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## [Essential services on verge of shutdown in Gaza as emergency fuel set to run out](#)

Supplies of emergency fuel provided by the United Nations for critical facilities in Gaza are being fast depleted, a senior UN relief official there warned on Sunday.

“At least one hospital has been forced to shut down for a few hours, and services are being dramatically reduced at others,” said Jamie McGoldrick, the Humanitarian Coordinator for the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

“Given ongoing blackouts of about 20 hours a day, if fuel does not come in immediately, [people’s lives will be at stake](#), with the most vulnerable patients, like cardiac patients, those on dialysis, and newborns in intensive care, at highest risk”, he added.

The humanitarian situation in Gaza – controlled by Hamas, a militant Palestinian faction – has been negatively impacted by a blockade of the

enclave imposed by Israel.

Since last Monday, the Israeli authorities have prohibited the entry of fuel into Gaza as part of tightened import and export restrictions, reportedly in response to the launch of incendiary kites from Gaza into Israel, which has caused extensive property damage.

Mr. McGoldrick called on Israel to end restrictions preventing the import of fuel and for donors to provide immediate funding for emergency fuel, currently set to run out in early in August.

According to the [World Health Organization](#) (WHO), Al Quds Hospital, which provides life-saving medical interventions for 150,000 people per year, including major surgeries, deliveries and intensive care will be forced to shut down in coming days due to lack of fuel.

Four other hospitals are likely to run out of fuel within the next three days, thus significantly reducing the provision of essential medical services to the population in Gaza.

The Palestinian Ministry of Health already has implemented strict contingency measures: hospitals have reduced diagnostic, sterilization and cleaning services, increasing the risk of infections amongst patients.

Elective surgeries are being further reduced. Over 7,000 elective surgeries have been postponed in recent months due to the mass trauma casualties and low resources available to cope with the demand.

At highest risk, currently, are over 2,000 patients in Gaza's hospitals, who rely on electrical devices, including neonates in incubators.

Over 1.27 million people would be directly affected by hospital closures and a reduction in the provision of vital health interventions.

Additionally, the reduced functioning of water and sanitation facilities risks an increase in waterborne disease and outbreaks.

"Until more sustainable solutions for the electricity crisis in Gaza are found, two steps can avert further devastation in Gaza in the short term," said Mr. McGoldrick. "Israel must let fuel and other essential supplies in and donors must mobilize resources to ensure that critical facilities receive the fuel they need."

An average of 950,000 litres is distributed by the UN each month to around 220 critical hospitals and health clinics; water and sewage treatment sites; and solid waste collection services.