

[UN warns of 'deteriorating climate' for human rights defenders in Guatemala](#)

It's becoming increasingly dangerous to defend the rights of indigenous people in Guatemala, the United Nations human rights office warned on Friday, following the murder of three activists over the past 10 days.

"We are concerned about what appears to be [a deteriorating climate](#) for the defence of human rights in Guatemala," Ravina Shamdasani, Spokesperson for the [Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights](#) (OHCHR), told reporters in Geneva, urging the State to ensure a safe working environment free from threats and attacks.

On 9 May, a rights officer working on behalf peasants and indigenous peoples, was killed in the town of San Luis Jilotepeque Jalapa.

A community leader from the grassroots social justice group known as Comité Campesino de Desarrollo del Altiplano (CCDA), was murdered on 10 May, and another member of the organization was found dead on 13 May.

The two most recent killings took place in an area of Guatemala where CCDA, and other civil society organizations, have been working with the Government, on an agreement to address more than 50 land conflicts in the country.

Other rights defenders have also suffered threats and attacks in recent months, OHCHR said.

"We call on the authorities to promptly investigate these murders and other attacks and threats against human rights defenders, and to ensure that those found responsible are held accountable," Ms. Shamdasani said.

"We share the deep concerns about the protection of indigenous peoples who claim rights to land, as expressed by UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, during her visit to Guatemala earlier this month," she added.

[Syria: Civilians bear brunt of unilateral sanctions, exacerbating](#)

'unparalleled suffering, destruction,' says UN expert

Syrian civilians are frequently being denied live-saving humanitarian support – an unintended consequence of unilateral sanctions, that are exacerbating an already dire situation, according to a United Nations rights expert.

"I [am deeply concerned](#) in the way that sanctions are being implemented," Idriss Jazairy, the Special Rapporteur on the negative impact of the unilateral coercive measures on the enjoyment of human rights, said on Thursday.

At the invitation of the Government, Mr. Jazairy [visited Syria](#) from 13 to 17 May, witnessing first-hand how the crisis, among other things, has severely affected the economy.

The gross domestic product has fallen by two thirds, half of working-age Syrians are unemployed and the currency value is one-tenth of what it was in 2010.

To make matters worse, the cost of food has increased eight-fold since the crisis began in 2011, leaving about one-third of the population food-insecure.

Sanctions on the Government and its members include a European Union arms embargo; a ban on dealing with the Syrian central bank; travel bans and asset freezes affecting military personnel, business people and scientists accused of developing chemical weapons, according to media reports.

"I do not wish to diminish the role of the conflict in creating this terrible situation," Mr. Jazairy said, "but I emphasize that restrictive measures are only making the situation worse."

"The Syrian people should not have to suffer for what has become an international conflict of unbelievable complexity. All those seeking to meet basic human rights require our help, not our red tape," he concluded.

Special Rapporteurs and independent experts are appointed by the Geneva-based UN Human Rights Council to examine and report back on a specific human rights theme or a country situation. The positions are honorary and the experts are not paid for their work.

Judges urge Security Council to serve interests of all UN Member States

The Security Council should act on behalf of the entire United Nations membership rather than prioritizing their own national interests, or those of close allies, international court judges said on Thursday, as the 15-member body debated how to effectively counter numerous threats to world peace.

“Against a backdrop of grave threats and growing turmoil in many regions, the unity of this body and the serious commitment of the entire international community will be crucial in preventing human suffering and defending our common humanity,” declared Maria Luiza Viotti, Chef de Cabinet, delivering a statement on behalf of UN Secretary-General António Guterres.

She noted that the [UN Charter](#) does not rule out using any specific means of settling international disputes, leaving Member States free to choose from a range of different tools; including negotiation, enquiry, mediation, conciliation, arbitration and judicial settlement.

Therefore, the Council could adopt a more open-minded approach, such as recommending that States settle disputes through special settlement mechanisms; a power it has rarely employed.

Where States agree to use the International Court of Justice, the Council should ensure that its judgment is properly observed, she said, calling on Member States to consider accepting the compulsory jurisdiction of the Court.

“International law is foundational to this Organization and the Security Council has a special role to play in ensuring that it is respected”, she said.

Also briefing the Council was Hisashi Owada, Senior Judge and President Emeritus of the International Court of Justice, who said that the crucial question is how the Council and the Court should work together to resolve disputes.

The Court’s legal opinion has helped to inform the Council on choosing a means of resolving disputes, as was the case in 1970, with legal resolution of South Africa’s continued presence in Namibia.

He said that the Council could seek the legal opinion of the Court on issues that often are at the root of the conflict; as it did following the Balkan wars of the 1990s, which led to the creation of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia.

To strengthen cooperation between the two bodies, he said, the Council could use its discretionary power more often to refer legal disputes to the Court, and consider making more use of the Court’s legal advisory function.

He noted that 15 of the 26 requests for advisory opinions came from the General Assembly, and the Council has sought out the Court only on a limited number of cases, such as Israel's construction of a border fence in 2000 and Kosovo's declaration of independence, in 2008.

Theodor Meron, President of the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals, said that international criminal justice "is still very much in its infancy, and it is in a highly vulnerable stage of development at present."

"International courts were never designed to try any more than a small number of alleged perpetrators," he said, and officials in national jurisdictions must take on "the lion's share of this work."

Mr. Meron suggested the Council develop and adopt objective criteria to assess all credible allegations of international crimes, and serve the interests of the UN membership as a whole, rather than prioritizing their own interests or those of their strategic allies.

He also encouraged the Council to simply refer possible violations of international law to appropriate judicial actors for further action, rather than being a gate-keeper and "risking becoming stymied in debates about whether or not egregious atrocities occurred in any particular situation or who might be responsible."

Today's debate was chaired by Andrzej Duda, the President of Poland, who urged States and the international community to reject the temptation to place force above law, and fear above trust.

"If we call an act of aggression a 'conflict', without properly defining the victim and the aggressor; if we call a threat a 'challenge' without defining the source of that threat... then we are helpless in terms of selecting legal steps to react," he said.

Economic growth 'exceeds expectations' but trade tensions are rising: UN report

Global economic growth is exceeding expectations this year but heightened geopolitical tension and tensions over international trade could thwart progress, according to a new United Nations report.

The global Gross Domestic Product (GDP), is due to expand by more than 3 per cent this year and next, according to the UN World Economic Situation and

Prospects ([WESP](#)) – an improved outlook compared with the 3 per cent and 3.1 per cent growth for 2018 and 2019, forecast six months ago.

The revision reflects strong growth in developed countries due to accelerating wage increases, broadly favourable investment conditions and the short-term impact of a fiscal stimulus package in the United States.

At the same time, widespread increase in global demand has accelerated the overall growth in trade, while many commodity-exporting countries will also benefit from the higher energy and metal prices.

Speaking at the launch, Elliott Harris, UN Assistant Secretary-General for Economic Development and Chief Economist, said the accelerated growth forecast was positive news for the international effort to reach the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals ([SDGs](#)), which include eradicating extreme poverty and hunger.

However, Mr. Harris cautioned that “there is a strong need not to become complacent in response to upward trending headline figures”. He added that the report “underscores that the risks have increased as well”, adding that rising risk “highlights the need to urgently address a number of policy challenges, including threats to the multilateral trading system, high inequality and the renewed rise in carbon emissions”.

Trade barriers and retaliatory measures mark a shift away from unambiguous support for the norms of the international trading system, the report notes, which threatens the pace of global growth with potentially large repercussions, especially for developing economies.

The report also finds that income inequality remains alarmingly high in numerous countries but there is evidence of noticeable improvements in some developing countries over the last decade.

It cites some countries in Latin America and the Caribbean region where specific policy measures related to minimum wage levels, education and government transfer payments have significantly reduced inequality over the last 20 years.

The report also finds that global energy-related carbon dioxide emissions increased by 1.4 per cent in 2017 due to faster global economic growth; the relatively low cost of fossil fuels and weaker energy efficiency measures, among other factors.

Reforming fossil fuel subsidies and providing tax breaks to boost greener economic growth could accelerate the international effort to meet the greenhouse gas emission targets outlined in the 2015 [Paris Agreement](#).

UN chief condemns attack against 'blue helmets' in Central African Republic

United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres, on Thursday condemned an attack against UN peacekeeping troops in southeastern Central African Republic (CAR) that claimed the life of one peacekeeper, and wounded eight others – all from Mauritania.

In a statement released by spokesperson, The UN chief reiterated that attacks against UN peacekeepers [could amount to a war crime](#).

He called on the government of CAR to investigate the incident and swiftly bring those responsible to justice.

Mr. Guterres also expressed his condolences to the family of the bereaved, as well as to the Government of Mauritania, where the deceased and wounded peacekeepers hail from.

The attack, targeting a convoy escorted by troops from the UN peacekeeping mission in the country (MINUSCA), took place on Thursday morning near the town of Alindao, which is located along the restive Bambari-Bangassou road corridor.

The attack is believed to have been carried out by so-called anti-Balaka elements, who are operating in the area.

Fighting between the mostly Christian anti-Balaka militia and the mainly Muslim Séléka rebel coalition has plunged the CAR into civil conflict since 2012.

A peace agreement was reached in January 2013, but rebels seized the capital, Bangui, in March of that year, forcing President François Bozizé to flee.

Concerned with the security, humanitarian, human rights and political crisis in the CAR and its regional implications, the Security Council authorized the deployment of MINUSCA in 2014 with the protection of civilians as its utmost priority.