

Ensure independent investigations into Nicaragua protest deaths – UN rights office

The United Nations human rights arm has called for investigations into all acts of violence in Nicaragua, where scores of people – the majority of them students – have been killed in protests that began in mid-April.

The [Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights](#) (OHCHR), has official requested Nicaraguan authorities to grant it access to the country so that it can gather first-hand information about what happened during the protests, spokesperson Ravina Shamdasani said on Friday.

“With demonstrations continuing, including a march that passed off in Managua on Wednesday, [we once again call for an investigation into all acts of violence](#) and credible and inclusive national dialogue,” she added.

The OHCHR spokesperson also said that the country’s truth commission – established by the Nicaraguan National Assembly to investigate the deaths and allegations of rights violations during the protests – must be independent and able to conduct its work in a transparent and impartial manner.

According to reports, at least 47 people, including two police officers and a journalist have been killed in protests, which began as a reaction to social security reforms but widened to include calls for investigations into, and accountability for, the killings; as well as for justice and democracy.

In addition to poverty and discrimination, the administration of justice, including juvenile justice, child labour and trafficking remain [major human rights concerns](#) in Nicaragua.

Indigenous communities and Afro-descendants are among those most affected by poverty, and public services where they live, are run down – including health and educational facilities – in comparison with other areas of the country.

UN expert warns of “stark increase” in hate crimes across UK, post-Brexit

Sounding an alarm over a “stark increase” in hate crimes across the United Kingdom as well as “widespread discrimination” faced by ethnic minorities, a United Nations independent rights expert has called on the country to

“comprehensively” combat racism and bias.

[“I am shocked by the criminalisation of young people from ethnic minorities, especially young black men. They are over-represented in police stop and searches, more likely to face prosecution,”](#) said E. Tendayi Achiume, the UN [Special Rapporteur on racism, xenophobia and intolerance](#), adding that they are also “over-represented in the prison system”.

Summarizing her [initial findings](#) at the end of a four day visit to the UK, the expert echoed calls for “a unified national policy that lays out a comprehensive strategy and benchmarks, for a systematic elimination of unlawful racial disparities.”

“The creation, implementation, and oversight of such policy must meaningfully include ethnic-minority communities in decision-making roles,” she insisted.

The UN rights expert’s visit to the UK came as it prepares to formally exit the European Union, commonly referred to as “Brexit.”

Ms. Achiume said that it was worrying that the anti-migrant, anti-foreigner rhetoric, developed around the campaign in favour of Brexit had become widespread in society, going as far as to add that a hateful and stigmatising discourse had become “normalised” – even involving some high-ranking officials.

She also said that some immigration policies have resulted in the exclusion, discrimination and characterization of groups and individuals on the basis of their race, ethnicity or related status.

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The Special Rapporteur highlighted that the UK’s Prevent programme – part of the government’s counter-terrorism strategy which requires faith leaders, teachers, doctors and others to refer suspects to a local body – enabled “life-altering judgments on the basis of vague criteria, in a climate of national anxieties in which entire religious, racial and ethnic groups are presumed to be enemies.”

Across the country, this has led to high levels of anxiety and mistrust affecting the Muslim community especially, she said.

There are, however, laws and policies in Britain that prohibit both direct and indirect forms of racial discrimination, and these are “commendable” said Ms. Achiume.

“This is a firm basis for tackling structural and institutional racism and discrimination on the basis of race, ethnicity, national origin, gender and

other protected categories, even in the absence of prejudice,” she stressed.

The Special Rapporteur, whose visit came at the invitation of the UK, met with Government officials, parliamentarians, civil society groups, and religious, ethnic and racial community representatives, and visited several prisons.

Ms. Achiume will present a report on the findings and conclusions of her visit to a forthcoming session of the Geneva-based UN [Human Rights Council](#) – the highest global intergovernmental body on matters related to human rights.

Special Rapporteurs and independent experts are appointed by the 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 UN staff, nor are they paid for their work.

New \$10 billion funding plan, targets 260 million missing out on school

Three youth activists from India, Kenya and Sierra Leone on Friday delivered a petition signed by 1.5 million of their peers to the United Nations Secretary-General that calls for more investment in education.

The Global Youth Ambassadors, from the charity organization TheirWorld, were at UN Headquarters in New York in support of a funding plan launched by Gordon Brown, the UN Special Envoy for Global Education.

The \$10 billion International Finance Facility for Education aims to get more than 260 million children into the classroom. It targets some of the world’s most marginalized youth and addresses issues which are denying them access to school, such as child labour, child marriage and discrimination against girls.

It also aims to help countries achieve [Sustainable Development Goal \(SDG\) 4](#), which calls on governments to deliver equitable, quality education for all.

UN chief António Guterres thanked Mr. Brown and the youth representatives for the initiative, stressing that “[a huge investment](#)” is needed in global education.

Mr. Guterres, who had previously spent 10 years at the helm of the UN refugee agency, [UNHCR](#), expressed concern that priority is not given to children’s education during humanitarian crises.

“I remember that in emergencies there is this mentality of ‘move the trucks, pitch the tents, find the water, distribute the food, find the vaccines’, but

the question of putting the schools to work, finding teachers comes later,” he said, adding that “the amount of humanitarian funding dedicated to education was, and – I believe – still is, extremely reduced.”

The Secretary-General also highlighted future education needs, pointing out that one billion young people will enter the labour market in the next decade and the kind of jobs they will perform may differ from those available today.

“Education has to be able to address the needs of today, but education needs to prepare us for the future,” he said.

[Afghanistan: End attacks on civilians, prosecute perpetrators, says senior UN rights official](#)

A top United Nations rights official has welcomed the Afghan Government’s “undeniable commitment” to improving an often “dire” human rights record, while also voicing concern over continued attacks on civilians ahead of key elections later in the year.

Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights, Andrew Gilmour, was speaking at the end of a four-day visit to Afghanistan in which he noted rising civilian casualties, due mainly to terrorist attacks, but also highlighted continuing discrimination against women at many levels of society.

“The Government has made significant progress in ending violence against women, but the use of ‘mediation’ for the gravest cases of violence, including murder; severe violence and harmful traditional practices, [is to be regretted](#),” said Mr. Gilmour.

“What would send a strong signal to those men who continue to violently abuse women with impunity, would be to start seriously prosecuting them,” he added.

While recognizing the Government’s work on human rights, particularly its ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture, which reinforces Afghanistan’s compliance with international human rights standards, he urged the authorities to investigate and prosecute military or civilian perpetrators of so-called “bacha bazi” – a form of sexual abuse against boys.

Turning to the vulnerability of civilians in recent days during the registration process for elections in October, he referred to a report released by the UN Assistance Mission ([UNAMA](#)) on Thursday, that detailed a disturbing pattern of [attacks at election-related facilities](#), which have

resulted so far in 271 civilians killed and injured.

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Meeting with President Ashraf Ghani on Wednesday, Mr. Gilmour welcomed the President's clear commitment to take additional measures to protect civilians, despite extremely difficult circumstances.

At a conference on peace and reconciliation, he called the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) an impressive and crucial pillar of society, saying: "the people of Afghanistan want security and a lasting peace built on accountability and justice. I hope the Government hear these compelling voices."

Reduce civilian casualties during military operations

In the Kunduz province, Mr. Gilmour stressed to the provincial authorities the need to reduce civilian casualties during military operations.

He spoke with community representatives from Laghmani village, Dasht-e-Archi district about the Afghan forces' firing on 2 April of rockets and machine guns on a religious gathering – leading to the reported death and injury of more than 100 people, mainly children.

The UN rights official said he was deeply troubled by the incident and urged the Government at the highest levels to better protect civilians, hold perpetrators accountable in line with their obligations under international humanitarian law and restore trust between the residents of Dasht-e-archi and the Government.

"Accepting full responsibility for what clearly was a terrible mistake, and a sincere apology for the suffering caused, is always a useful step in advancing reconciliation and failure to do so provides great ammunition for terrorists and extremists," he said.

Mothers, children, lacking basic nutrition in North Korea: UN food aid chief

The head of the United Nations food relief agency said on Friday that many mothers and young children in North Korea are still relying on humanitarian

assistance to meet their nutritional needs.

“I see a country that is working hard to achieve food security and good nutrition,” said the Executive Director of the [World Food Programme](#) (WFP), David Beasley, at the end of his four-day visit to the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK).

WFP aims to assist 650,000 women and children in DPRK every month, providing highly nutritious, fortified cereals and biscuits that can address crucial gaps in their diets.

Funding shortfalls, however, have meant that rations have had to be reduced and even suspended in some cases.

“I came to DPRK to listen, look and learn with an open mind. This visit has given me a first-hand opportunity to assess the needs and evaluate WFP’s operations on the ground,” he said.

“There is a real need for continued humanitarian assistance, especially when it comes to meeting the nutritional needs of mothers and young children,” he added.

Last month, UN Resident Coordinator in the north Asian country, Tapan Mishra, said that the UN and its partners are urgently requesting [\\$111 million in humanitarian funding](#) to assist millions of people in DPRK, including children whose growth has been stunted because they are not getting enough nutritious food to eat.

The appeal was based on the [Needs and Priorities Plan](#) 2018, which said that amidst political tensions, an estimated 10.3 million people across DPRK continue to suffer from food insecurity and poor nutrition, as well as a lack of access to basic services.

During his visit, Mr. Beasley spent two days in the capital, Pyongyang, meeting with senior government officials, and two days visiting WFP projects in different parts of the country.

He travelled to Sinwon County in South Hwanghae Province where he visited a “food-for-assets” project in Komchon Ri village as well as a WFP-supported children’s nursery.

He also travelled from Pyongyang to Sinuiju City in North Pyongan province, visiting a local factory where WFP produces fortified biscuits for its projects.

WFP has had a long relationship with the country, stretching back 23 years.

“Much progress has been made, but much work lies ahead,” the WFP chief said.