

State of emergency must be lifted for 'credible elections' in Turkey, says UN rights chief

Long-term restrictions on “freedoms of expression, assembly and association” are incompatible with the holding of “credible elections” in Turkey, said the United Nations human rights chief on Wednesday, calling on the Government to lift its extended state of emergency.

“Over the past two years, through successive states of emergency, the [space for dissent in Turkey has shrunk](#) considerably, with at least 29 more journalists jailed on terrorism offences in just the last week of April alone,” said Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein, the UN [High Commissioner for Human Rights](#), in a statement.

During the 18-month period of emergency rule, which was declared following an attempted coup in 2016, nearly 160,000 people have been arrested; 152,000 civil servants dismissed, many arbitrarily; and teachers, judges and lawyers dismissed or prosecuted.

“The heavy police presence and arrests during the May Day protests also demonstrated yet again the severely limited space for freedom of peaceful assembly in the country,” added Zeid.

“It is difficult to imagine how credible elections can be held in an environment where dissenting views and challenges to the ruling party are penalized so severely.” – *Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights*

On 19 April, a day after the Turkish Government called for early parliamentary and presidential elections, it announced its seventh extension of emergency laws, which suspend the country’s obligations under several articles of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights relating to the free expression, assembly, and association.

“It is difficult to imagine how credible elections can be held in an environment where dissenting views and challenges to the ruling party are penalized so severely,” underscored Mr. Zeid.

In a recent [report](#), the [UN Human Rights Office](#) said the state of emergency’s routine renewals were eroding civil society, the judiciary and the ability of media to hold politicians accountable in the country.

“Elections held in an environment where democratic freedoms and the rule of law are compromised would raise questions about their legitimacy, and result in more uncertainty and instability,” Mr. Zeid explained.

“It is in the interests of the people of Turkey that the country’s constitutional order is fully restored, and that human rights and fundamental freedoms are fully respected, in law and practice,” concluded the High Commissioner.

[Lebanon elections ‘vital step’ in consolidating democratic tradition – UN chief](#)

Welcoming the parliamentary elections in Lebanon, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres has called on the country’s political leaders to work in a spirit of unity.

In a statement attributable to his spokesperson, Mr. Guterres urged the country’s political leaders to “work in a spirit of unity and with a view to furthering the ambitious agenda set out by Lebanon and its international partners.”

[“The elections represent a vital step](#) in strengthening Lebanon’s state institutions and consolidating its democratic tradition,” added the Secretary-General.

The UN chief also said that he looks forward to the formation of the new government.

UN continues to support Lebanon and its sovereignty, stability, and political independence in accordance with the [Taif Accord](#) – the agreement which ended the decades-long civil war in the country – as well as relevant Security Council resolutions, noted the statement.

The elections, held on 6 May, are the first since 2009.

It is also the first time Lebanon went to polls since the start of the Syrian crisis, which has driven over 1.5 million desperate Syrian refugees into Lebanon.

[Rival South Sudan leaders still ‘bent](#)

on armed confrontation' – UN peacekeeping chief

The peace process in South Sudan is at a critical juncture while opposing sides allow themselves to get bogged down in arguments over ministerial quotas, the United Nations peacekeeping chief said on Tuesday, as the country prepares for a third round of regionally-backed peace talks.

“Parties remain far apart on the issues of governance and security,” Jean-Pierre Lacroix, the UN Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, told the Security Council, noting that agreement on permanent ceasefire terms and transitional security arrangements, remain elusive.

In addition, while the Intergovernmental Authority on Development, IGAD – an eight-country trading-bloc in Africa – has worked to narrow the gap ahead of talks, the parties remain far from agreement.

The world’s youngest country, South Sudan, has spent much of the past seven years mired in conflict, riven by a political face-off between President Salva Kiir and his then former Vice-President Riek Machar that erupted into full-blown war late in 2013.

The conflict shows no signs of abating and there has been a recent surge in violence across large parts of the country, impacting thousands of civilians. Nearly 4.3 million South Sudanese have been driven from their homes – 1.7 million internally, and around 2.5 million across its borders.

Of particular concern is the scale of sexual violence perpetrated, said Mr. Lacroix, underscoring that reports of rape and gang rape are compounding what is already a “desperate situation” for women and girls.

Humanitarian agencies are also facing increasing challenges responding to those in need. In April, two relief workers were killed, bringing to 100 the total number of aid workers killed since December 2013.

“We must respond and respond quickly to ensure accountability for these violations and abuses and bring an end to these heinous acts once and for all,” stressed the senior UN official.

No sign of ‘meaningful implementation’ of ceasefire agreement

Both the Government and opposition remain bent on armed confrontation and the Agreement on Cessation of Hostilities – signed in December last year – is yielding little, underscored Mr. Lacroix, calling on the Council to use its influence.

“It is in this context that I reiterate that there must be a tangible cost for the continuation of violence in South Sudan,” he said, “there must be consequences for blatant

violations of the Cessation of Hostilities agreement and broken promises to protect civilians.”

“Without consequences, we have no one to blame but ourselves for allowing the crisis to escalate unchecked and perpetuating a lack of confidence in a political solution to the crisis.”

[‘Fabric of society’ at risk in Bosnia and Herzegovina, UN Security Council told](#)

With elections looming, tensions across Bosnia and Herzegovina are rising alongside inflammatory rhetoric against the country’s long-standing peace agreement, a senior figure monitoring its implementation has warned.

Valentin Inzko, the High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina, told the Security Council on Tuesday that the situation was being heightened by a “general trend” towards stockpiling weapons across the Balkan state.

“I am deeply concerned by the recent readiness among some politicians to refer to the possibility of a renewed conflict, including controversial statements by senior Bosniak politicians suggesting that a rearming effort was underway to ‘respond’ in case of a hypothetical war,” said Mr. Inzko.

At the same time, senior Republika Srpska officials were also resorting to violent rhetoric, denying the statehood of Bosnia and Herzegovina and advocating for eventual secession, he added.

“Public comments were also made, glorifying convicted war criminals and calling for the return of an Republika Srpska army.”

There needs to be a change in the way politics is conducted within the country – *High Representative Valentin Inzko*

Mr. Inzko warned that some Croat officials have “mused” about the territorial reorganization of the country and threatened the dissolution of the state if the current electoral issues are not resolved to their satisfaction.

“Bosnia and Herzegovina is a single, multi-ethnic, sovereign state, consisting of two entities, in which all citizens – the three constituent peoples and others – live and work together, and elected officials above all have a responsibility to contribute to peace and reconciliation,” stressed the High Representative, urging all public figures to choose their words more

carefully and responsibly.

Progress cannot be taken for granted

In his briefing, High Representative Inzko said while the country has made significant strides since the end of the war in 1995, the progress cannot be taken for granted.

“The risk is that this divisiveness and sense of unease about the future of the country slowly seeps into the fabric of society,” he said, urging the international community to increase efforts to promote reconciliation in Bosnia and Herzegovina and across the region.

“Beyond this, there needs to be a change in the way politics is conducted within the country. It needs to come from the politicians themselves, but we as an international community, individually and collectively, have an interest in encouraging this change.”

The Office of the High Representative (OHR) is an ad hoc international institution responsible for overseeing implementation of civilian aspects of the Peace Agreement that ended the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina that saw thousands killed in fighting.

In addition, the conflict witnessed widespread violations of human rights and international humanitarian law, including war crimes and crimes against humanity and necessitated the setting up of a special international court, the International Criminal Tribunal for former Yugoslavia (ICTY) to prosecute those accused.

ICTY concluded its work in December last year, having heard the testimony from nearly 5,000 people and sentencing 90 individuals for their crimes.

UN chief ‘deeply concerned’ by US decision to exit Iran nuclear deal

Following a decision on Tuesday by the United States to withdraw from the 2015 nuclear agreement with Iran, the United Nations chief said he was “deeply concerned” by the move, and called on all parties to preserve the deal.

President Donald Trump made the announcement at the White House, and immediately afterwards signed a memorandum to begin reinstating economic sanctions on Iran at “the highest level”.

In a statement released shortly afterwards, UN [Secretary-General António](#)

[Guterres](#) said: "I am [deeply concerned](#) by today's announcement that the United States will be withdrawing from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) and will begin reinstating US sanctions."

"I have consistently reiterated that the JCPOA represents a major achievement in nuclear non-proliferation and diplomacy and has contributed to regional and international peace and security," he added.

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The JCPOA – reached by Iran, China, France, Germany, Russia, the United Kingdom, the US and the European Union – sets out rigorous mechanisms for monitoring restrictions placed on Iran's nuclear programme, while paving the way for the lifting UN sanctions against the country.

"It is essential that all concerns regarding the implementation of the Plan be addressed through the mechanisms established in the JCPOA," Mr. Guterres stressed, adding that "issues not directly related to the JCPOA" should be addressed separately.

The UN chief called on other JCPOA participants to abide fully by their respective commitments and on all other Member States to support the agreement.

Earlier this month, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) released a [statement](#) via its Spokesperson, reiterating the fact that according to its December 2015 [Board of Governors report](#), "the Agency had no credible indications of activities in Iran relevant to the development of a nuclear explosive device after 2009."

At the Board of Governors meeting in March this year, IAEA chief Yukiya Amano said Iran was still abiding by the deal and IAEA inspectors had been given access to all sites and locations, upon request. "If the JCPOA were to fail, it would be a great loss for nuclear verification and for multilateralism," he said.