

UN rights expert urge Iran to annul death sentence against prisoner

A group of United Nations human rights experts have called on Iran to annul the death sentence against a prisoner citing serious concerns that he was tortured in detention and did not receive a fair trial.

In a [news release](#) on Wednesday, the experts said that Iranian Kurdish prisoner Ramin Hossein Panahi, who was arrested last June for alleged membership of the Kurdish nationalist group Komala, was repeatedly beaten in detention, denied medical care and access to a lawyer, and held in solitary confinement until January.

They also expressed concern regarding his trial, which took place before the Revolutionary Court and lasted less than an hour.

“Executing Mr. Panahi, following his torture, and unfair trial and on the basis of charges that do not meet international standards for [the use of death penalty, would be unconscionable](#),” said the experts.

“We remind Iran that the only thing that distinguishes capital punishment from arbitrary execution is full respect for stringent due process guarantees.”

The experts also noted that despite marks of torture on Mr. Panahi body, the court did not order an investigation, and that he was allowed only one meeting with his lawyer between his arrest and the trial and no family visits. There are also ongoing concerns about Mr. Panahi, and he reportedly began a hunger strike early in 2018.

The experts also expressed concern that some members of Mr. Panahi’s family appeared to have been convicted in separate summary trials, and sentenced to long prison terms, in apparent reprisals for their efforts to obtain further information on his situation.

It is understood that the Supreme Court branch in Qom reaffirmed Mr. Panahi’s death sentence earlier in April, and his case was due to be passed to the Office of Implementation, said the experts, his lawyer has appealed for a judicial review.

The news release noted that the experts are in dialogue with Iranian authorities regarding Mr. Panahi’s situation.

The UN rights experts include Agnes Callamard, the [Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions](#); Dainius Puras, the [Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health](#); and Nils Melzer, the [Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment](#).

UN Special Rapporteurs and independent experts are appointed by the Geneva-based 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.

[Chemical watchdog confirms UK findings on Salisbury toxic chemicals](#)

Results of sample analysis collected by the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons ([OPCW](#)) from the individuals and the site of an alleged exposure to a nerve agent in Salisbury, United Kingdom, confirm the country's findings relating to the identity of the chemical, the Security Council [heard today](#).

"[The OPCW] Technical Assistance Visit team has noted that the toxic chemical in question was of high purity," said Izumi Nakamitsu, the UN High Representative for Disarmament Affairs.

The [statement](#) from the OPCW does not specifically name the substance, it says technical experts confirm the findings of the UK relating "relating to the identity of the toxic chemical that was used in Salisbury and severely injured three people."

The UK has alleged that the toxic chemical in question is the nerve agent, Novichok, and said that it was "highly likely" that Russia was behind its use in the 4 March incident that seriously injured Sergei Skripal and his daughter, Yulia, and one other person – a police official – in the British town of Salisbury.

Russia has firmly denied the charge.

An OPCW expert team was deployed to the UK at the country's request seeking technical assistance in identifying the nature of the toxic chemical reportedly used.

The team collected biomedical samples from the three individuals, as well as environmental samples from the site, under full chain of custody and transported them to its designated laboratories for testing.

OPCW's report on its finding was submitted to the UK, and at the country's request, to the States Party to the Convention on Chemical Weapons on 12 April. A [public summary](#) of the report can be found on the OPCW website.



UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe

Ambassador Karen Pierce of the United Kingdom addresses the Security Council meeting on the Salisbury incident in the United Kingdom.

Also at today's meeting, Karen Pierce, the Permanent Representative of the UK to the UN, updated the 15-member Security Council of the investigations conducted by UK authorities.

She went on to explain why, "there is no plausible alternative explanation than Russian State responsibility for what happened in Salisbury."



UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe

Ambassador Vassily Nebenzia of the Russian Federation addresses the Security Council meeting on the Salisbury incident in the United Kingdom.

Vassily Alekseevich Nebenzia, the Permanent Representative of Russia to the UN, dismissed the charges and alleged lack of transparency by UK, stating “the British barred [OPCW] experts from even mentioning the type of technical assistance requested and from naming the toxic chemical that Porton Down identified.”

He added that the UK instead had that information placed in the classified part of the OPCW report, which cannot be discussed in an open meeting of the Security Council.

The OPCW is the implementing body of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), which came into force in 1997 and outlaws the production, stockpiling, and use of chemical weapons and their precursors.

[Senior UN official calls on Israel to halt plans for relocating Palestinian Bedouin communities in West Bank](#)

A senior United Nations humanitarian official on Wednesday called on Israeli authorities to halt plans to demolish Palestinian-owned structures and cease plans for the relocation of Palestinian Bedouin communities in the West Bank.

“We are monitoring the situation in Khan al Ahmar closely and are [deeply concerned](#) by what we see here, and in the scores of other vulnerable Bedouin communities,” UN Humanitarian Coordinator Jamie McGoldrick said.

Mr. McGoldrick visited the Khan al Ahmar-Abu al Helu, located on the outskirts of East Jerusalem in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, with Scott Anderson, the UN [Relief and Works Agency](#)’s Director of Operations in the West Bank, and Palestinian officials.

“We call on the Israeli authorities to respect their legal obligations, as the occupying power, including through stopping the demolition of Palestinian-owned structures and ceasing plans for the relocation of Palestinian Bedouin communities,” Mr. McGoldrick stressed.

Khan al Ahmar-Abu al Helu is home to 181 people, 53 per cent of whom are children and 95 per cent of whom are Palestine refugees registered with the UN agency.

It is one of 46 Bedouin communities in the central West Bank that the UN considers being at risk of forcible transfer, due to a coercive environment generated by Israeli practices and policies, plans to move the communities from their current locations and other reasons.

Eighteen of these communities, including Khan al Ahmar, are located in or next to an area slated in part for a settlement plan – reportedly aimed at creating a continuous built-up area between Ma’ale Adumim and East Jerusalem.

Nearly all of the Khan al Ahmar community’s structures risk demolition by the Israeli authorities, including the school, initially built with donor support that serves some 170 students from the community and four surrounding ones, according to the [UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs](#).

“The entire community of Khan el Ahmar-Abu al Helu, the vast majority of whom are Palestine refugees and who are amongst the most vulnerable Bedouin communities in the West Bank, is facing the risk of demolitions of their structures and relocation,” said Mr. Anderson.

For years, the residents have insisted on the right to return to their original lands, in what is now southern Israel, and, until this occurs, asks for international support to remain in their current location.

“The humanitarian impact of home demolition is severe and long lasting. It is well documented in previous instances that the transfer of Bedouin communities into urban settings is socially and economically non-viable. The Khan al Ahmar-Abu al Helu community has repeatedly called for the provision of suitable planning solutions and services in its current location,” Mr. Anderson added.

The visit came in advance of next week’s Israeli High Court of Justice case, which may determine the fate of the structures and Israeli relocation plan.

[UN hails release of more than 200 child soldiers in South Sudan](#)

Two hundred and seven child soldiers have been released by armed groups in South Sudan, part of a series of planned discharges that should see nearly 1,000 children return home over the coming months.

The move, facilitated by [United Nations Children’s Fund \(UNICEF\)](#), follows the release of 300 children by armed groups in early February.

“No child should ever have to pick up a weapon and fight” [said](#) Mahimbo Mdoe, the head of UNICEF programmes in the country.

“For every child released, today marks the start of a new life,” he said. “We are proud to support these children as they return to their families and start to build a brighter future.”

But officials also noted that thousands more children remain in the hands of

armed groups in South Sudan, in violation of international law.

This week's discharge took place in Bakiwiri, a rural community in Western Equatoria state.

The children will now undergo medical screenings and receive counselling and psychosocial support as part of the reintegration programme, said UNICEF. Once home, they will also have access to vocational training as well as age-specific education services in schools and accelerated learning centres.

Their families will also be provided with three months' worth of food assistance to support reintegration.

Those discharged – 112 boys, 95 girls – were from the South Sudan National Liberation Movement and Sudan People's Liberation Army-In Opposition.

About 19,000 children still remain in armed groups

However, despite this release, and the one before it, there are still about 19,000 children in use by armed forces and groups in South Sudan. And with conflict lingering in the world's youngest nation, the risk that children will be used in fighting remains.

"So long as the recruitment and use of children by armed groups continues, these groups fail on their commitment to uphold the rights of children under international law," underscored UNICEF.

As peace talks resume, the UN agency has called on all parties to the conflict to end the use of children and to release all children in their ranks.

Since gaining independence in 2011, South Sudan has spent much of its short life mired in conflict, as what began as a political face-off between President Salva Kiir and former Vice-President Riek Machar erupted into full-blown war late in 2013.

Justice must be done for Syria crimes, says head of UN body building cases for prosecution

Those who committed the most serious crimes in Syria must be identified, and criminal case files must be built as the basis for prosecutions, the head of a United Nations body assisting these efforts said Wednesday.

"Perpetrators of core international crimes must be held accountable,"

Catherine Marchi-Uhel, head of the [International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism](#), told diplomats during an informal meeting in New York organized by the UN General Assembly, an intergovernmental body consisting of 193 Member States.

Established in December 2016 by the Assembly, the Mechanism is mandated to conduct two tasks: one, to collect, consolidate, preserve and analyze evidence of violations; and second, to prepare files to facilitate and expedite fair and independent criminal proceedings in national, regional or international courts, in accordance with international law.

“The horrors suffered by the Syrian people over the past seven years defy description,” she said. “The continuing widespread death and suffering, including recent allegations on the use of chemical weapons, are a stark reminder of the importance of justice for victims.”

Ms. Marchi-Uhel said the communities most affected by these events have been “understandably” disillusioned by the prospects of accessing that justice.

So, by establishing the Mechanism, the Assembly took a crucial step towards ensuring accountability for these crimes.

She called on all UN Member States to provide all the support needed for the Mechanism to fulfil its important tasks, by committing funding, preferably on a multi-year basis, and continuing to support regular budget funding for the Mechanism.;

She also urged countries to implement any changes to national legislative frameworks that may be required to facilitate cooperation between States and the Mechanism, and share relevant material about international crimes committed in Syria, including material previously provided to the Joint Investigative Mechanism and to the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons and its Fact-Finding Mission.

Further, she asked nations to consider entering into cooperative agreements with the Mechanism to provide witness protection and support services.