

UN rights office warns DR Congo authorities against use of excessive force when policing protests

5 January 2018 – Amid ongoing political tension in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), violent actions by the security forces during recent protests in Kinshasa and other cities suggest “deliberate intention to suppress civil and political rights,” the United Nations human rights office reported on Friday.

“From the latest information we have managed to gather, at least five people are known to have been killed and 92 injured,” Liz Throssell, spokesperson for the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights ([OHCHR](#)), told reporters at the regular news briefing in Geneva.

In addition, some 180 people were arrested – most have now been released.

“The security forces allegedly fired live ammunition, rubber bullets and tear gas grenades, in some cases at point blank range,” she added.

At the same time, Ms. Throssell said OHCHR believes the casualty figures from the 31 December demonstrations may be higher.

“Our colleagues on the ground were denied access to morgues, hospitals and detention centres. They were sent away from these sites by defence and security forces, and so were unable to fully conduct their human rights monitoring work,” she elaborated.

Security forces were also reported to have fired tear gas inside churches, stopped people attending religious services and stolen their personal property.

“This is an alarming development that impinges on freedom of religion or belief,” she underscored, adding: “We call on the authorities to ensure that the security forces do not resort to excessive force when policing demonstrations, and that protests are handled in line with international standards.”

Pointing out that “necessity, proportionality, non-discrimination and accountability are key principles that underpin the use of force for the management of peaceful assemblies,” Ms. Throssell maintained that the DRC Government must ensure that everyone is able to exercise their right to freedoms of association and peaceful assembly, opinion and expression.

There should also be credible and independent investigations into alleged use of excessive force, and those responsible for human rights violations should be brought to justice.

“We once again urge the authorities to engage in a constructive dialogue with

the opposition and to ensure that the right of all Congolese to participate in the public affairs of their country are respected,” she concluded.

[Shocked at executions in Egypt, UN rights office raises concerns over due process guarantees](#)

5 January 2018 – The United Nations human rights wing on Friday expressed deep shock that 20 people were reported to have been executed in Egypt since last week, amid concerns that due process and fair trial guarantees did not appear to have been followed.

According to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights ([OHCHR](#)), on 2 January, five men who had been sentenced to death by an Egyptian military court were hanged in Alexandria, four of whom had been convicted for an explosion near a stadium in Kafr al-Sheikh on 15 April 2015 that killed three military recruits and injured two others.

“We understand the defendants were tried by military judges on the basis of legislation that refers cases of destruction of public property to military courts and in view of the victims being from the Egyptian Military Academy,” OHCHR spokesperson Liz Throssell told reporters on Friday at the regular news briefing in Geneva.

On 26 December, 15 men convicted on terrorism charges were reportedly executed, found guilty by a military court of killing soldiers in Sinai in 2013.

“Civilians should only be tried in military or special courts in exceptional cases,” she continued.

Further, Ms. Throssell said it is important that all necessary measures are taken to ensure that such trials take place under conditions which genuinely afford the full guarantees stipulated in Article 14 of the [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#), to which Egypt is a State party.

Noting that these include a fair and public hearing by a competent, independent and impartial tribunal, she expressed concern that this did not appear to have been followed as military courts typically deny defendants’ rights accorded by civilian courts.

“In cases of capital punishment, trials must meet the highest standards of fairness and due process. Reports also indicated that the prisoners who were executed may have been subjected to initial enforced disappearance and torture before being tried,” she asserted.

Despite security challenges facing Egypt, particularly in Sinai, Ms. Throssell maintained, “executions should not be used as a means to combat terrorism.”

As such, she said the UN human rights office called on the Egyptian authorities to reconsider the use of death penalty cases in accordance with their international human rights obligations and to take all necessary measures to ensure that violations of due process and fair trial are not repeated.

Central African Republic: UN agency registers thousands of refugees arriving in Chad

5 January 2018 – In the wake of a recent violence flare-up in the Central African Republic (CAR), the United Nations refugee agency said Friday that it is registering and assisting thousands of mostly women and children refugees arriving in Chad.

“More than 5,000 refugees are estimated to have arrived in southern Chad since late December, escaping clashes between the armed groups Mouvement national pour la libération de la Centrafrique (MNL) and Révolution et Justice (RJ) in the town of Paoua,” Babar Baloch, spokesperson for the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), [told](#) the regular press briefing in Geneva.

Located in CAR’s prefecture of Ouham-Pendé, the town also has an additional 20,000 people displaced internally.

“With our government partners in Chad, UNHCR has so far registered some 2,350 new refugees in the village of Odoumian, located some 15 kilometres from the CAR border,” he added.

Many of the refugees trekked to Chad on foot. Local officials say some 5,600 have arrived since 27 December, when the recent fighting started. Over 1,000 new refugees are also reported to have arrived at existing camps near the town of Goré.

“The influx is the largest movement of refugees from CAR, exceeding the total number for 2017, when about 2,000 fled into Chad,” the spokesperson continued, adding that many are reporting widespread human rights abuses by armed groups in villages alongside the CAR-Chad border.

Although the border with CAR is officially closed, Mr. Baloch welcomed Chad’s humanitarian gesture in allowing the refugees to seek international

protection inside its territory.

Host to over 75,000 Central Africans, UNHCR is helping Chadian authorities to register and aid the refugees.

“With its partners, UNHCR is also providing medical check-ups for the many refugees arriving in poor health, some unable to walk,” he elaborated.

Armed violence and attacks inside CAR, have resulted in the country’s highest-ever recorded number of refugees and internally displaced – almost one-fourth of the population of around 4.6 million.

[UN readying training guidelines to help cabin crews identify, report human trafficking](#)

4 January 2018 – The United Nations is taking the global combat against human trafficking into the skies as the Organization’s human rights office and its Montreal-based civil aviation agency begin putting the final touches on training guidelines that could help airline cabin crew spot possible victims.

Human trafficking is considered the [third most lucrative](#) illegal activity on the planet – after the illegal sale of arms and drugs – and its clandestine nature makes it difficult to quantify with precision. In 2017, the UN International Labour Organization ([ILO](#)) [estimated](#) that some 40.3 million people worldwide were subjected to forced labour and modern slavery.

Men, women and children are recruited, transferred, harboured or received, through the use of force or deception, to be exploited into prostitution rings, forced labour, domestic servitude or the removal of their organs.

With all this in mind, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights ([OHCHR](#)) is working with the International Civil Aviation Organization ([ICAO](#)) to develop guidelines for airlines operators to train cabin crews in identifying and reporting trafficked individuals.

“Cabin crewmembers are in a unique situation where they can observe passengers over a certain period of time, allowing them to use their observation skills to identify a potential victim of trafficking,” the document reads.

In an interview with *UN News*, Youla Haddadin, Advisor on Trafficking in Persons with OHCHR, said cabin crew and flight attendants develop strong observation skills and the jointly-developed guidelines can draw on those skills and provide cabin crew with the reporting and response procedures if

they are faced with a potential trafficking situation.

[The indicators] can be used when [cabin crew] crew are trying to identify potential victims or persons accompanying them. They should observe for a period of time and collect information [while following the principle of] 'do no harm' ensuring that a potential victim is not further jeopardized and ensuring their own safety and that of other passengers, she explained.

Ms. Haddadin advised using the proposed guidelines to collect information and assess the situation, share it with other colleagues and then, if they feel a response should be initiated, report it to the pilot, the law enforcement official on any plane, who will then notify ground crew. The cabin crewmember's role ends there, she said, noting that cabin crew are not law enforcement officers.

The Guidelines document gives examples of indicators for cabin crews on how to identify potential victims, including situations where a passenger is not in control of their documentation or has false identity documents; is not aware of their final destination; or may not be allowed to speak for themselves directly.

Ms. Haddadin stressed that the proposed guidelines were developed by members of the [ICAO Cabin Safety Group](#), which is comprised of representatives of airlines and national civil aviation authorities. We sat around the table and I provided the elements related to international law, trafficking and human rights, and they contributed [their expertise].

She told *UN News* that the guidelines are in the final stages of approval by ICAO and OHCHR and will be rolled out very soon. Some airlines have already started developing their own modules; a few in the United States had already begun training their cabin crews and staff on victim identification. Canada had already developed its training module and had adapted its module to the proposed guidelines.

[UN officials welcome reopening of communications between two Koreas](#)

3 January 2018 – United Nations [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres has welcomed the reopening of the communication channel between the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) and the Republic of Korea, his deputy spokesman said on Wednesday.

It is always good to have a dialogue between the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the Republic of Korea, Farhan Haq told reporters in response to a question during the daily news briefing at UN Headquarters

in New York.

He went on to say that the UN remains committed to ensuring the implementation of Security Council resolutions on the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula. "We hope that enhanced diplomatic initiatives will help achieve this goal," he added.

According to media reports, DPRK announced Wednesday the reopening of a channel of communication, the day after the offer of dialogue made by the Government of the Republic of Korea.

This communication channel, established in August 1972, was cut in February 2016 by Pyongyang after Seoul decided to close the inter-Korean industrial zone of Kaesong, in the wake of a nuclear test by the DPRK.

Meanwhile, the President of the 72nd session of the UN General Assembly, Miroslav Lajčák, met today with Ja Song Nam, the Permanent Representative of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) to the United Nations, at the request of the Permanent Representative.

According to a note issued by the Assembly President's Office, Mr. Lajčák said he was pleased with the readiness of DPRK to constructively engage in a dialogue with the Republic of Korea, including a possible participation of a delegation from DPRK in the Winter Olympic Games in PyeongChang, Republic of Korea, as well as with the reopening of the communication channels.