

## [DR Congo: UN officials hail landmark convictions, life sentences in Kavumu child rape cases](#)

19 December 2017 – The United Nations envoys dealing with sexual violence in conflict and the head of the Organization’s peacekeeping mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) have welcomed the conviction of 11 Congolese militia fighters for raping dozens of children – including an 18-month-old toddler – in the vast country’s restive east.

The Special Representatives of the UN Secretary-General, respectively on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Pramila Patten, and for Children and Armed Conflict, Virginia Gamba, jointly welcomed the decision by military justice authorities in the DRC on the conviction of a provincial parliamentarian and members of the ‘Army of Jesus’ militia for the crimes against humanity of rape for dozens of children between 2013 and 2016 in Kavumu, which is located in DRC’s South Kivu Province.

The South Kivu Military Court on Wednesday, 13 December, sentenced Frederic Batumike, a South Kivu provincial Member of Parliament, and 11 other persons to life in prison for the kidnapping and rapes of 38 children.

In addition to life sentences for crimes against humanity for rape and murder, the Court also awarded reparations to the victims.

“The child survivors of sexual violence in Kavumu, their families, and community have shown tremendous bravery throughout the trial process,” Special Representative Patten said this past Friday. “I commend their courage and I hope today’s judgment delivers a measure of justice for their suffering.”

She noted further that the “judgment and life sentences rendered by military justice authorities is a significant step forward in ending impunity for sexual violence in the DRC.”

The envoys also commended civil society actors for their role. “The case demonstrates that when there is political will, well-trained Government officials, civil society involvement, and an engaged press, there can be justice for sexual violence,” said Ms. Gamba.

Ms. Patten added that: “I am pleased that the UN Team of Experts on the Rule of Law and Sexual Violence in Conflict could be deployed to assist national authorities in the military justice system appropriately to ensure that the Kavumu case was prioritized in accordance with the Joint Communiqué signed by my Office with the Government of the DRC in 2013.”

“The potentially life-changing judgments of reparations that were awarded by the court to the child victims must be paid for justice to be fully delivered and the sentences of the perpetrators must be carried out,” they underscored.

For its part, the UN stabilization mission in the DRC, known by its French acronym, MONUSCO, on Saturday applauded the life sentences handed down by Congolese authorities and called the decision a “a major landmark in the fight against impunity for sexual violence in DRC.”

MONUSCO chief Maman Sidikou [said](#) the decision sends a clear signal that “no one is above the law, whatever the rank.”

The statement also noted that the UN provided logistics and security support which has enabled the Congolese judicial authorities to conduct the investigations and organize a fair trial in Kavumu.

Mr. Sidikou called the holding of the trial “the fruit of the collective and continued efforts made by the Personal Representative of the Congolese Head of State in charge of the fight against sexual violence and child recruitment, as well as by the various actors engaged in the fight against impunity.”

He urged Congolese authorities “to pursue their efforts to bring to justice all those who violate human rights, international humanitarian law and commit other serious crimes.”

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## [UNICEF says 2017 has been a ‘very difficult year’ for children in Central African Republic](#)

19 December 2017 – For children and women in the Central African Republic, 2017 has been a very difficult year and sadly, the situation is not expected to improve in the coming months, the United Nations Children’s Fund ([UNICEF](#)) said Tuesday.

“2017 has seen a dramatic increase in violence. The previously unstable regions, such as the center and the north west, have remained very tense. In addition, the entire south-west that had previously been spared by the crisis, is now the worst-hit region,” said Christine Muhigana, UNICEF Representative in the country, at the regular press briefing in Geneva.

Children and women are of course the first victims: half of the population in CAR is in need of humanitarian support, that is 2.5 million people, including 1.3 million children.

Currently, 20 per cent of the schools are closed because of insecurity, and those that are open have too many pupils and not enough teachers.

Reports of children’s rights violations are on the rise. In 2017, 50 per cent

more documented incidents than the previous year, twice the number of children recruited into armed groups.

Immunization campaigns have been disrupted in several regions due to persistent insecurity, and basic healthcare needs are not met especially in regions where the NGOs are no longer able to operate.

“As UNICEF Representative, I am very concerned about the lasting impact this crisis is having on children. We have a whole generation at risk of growing up traumatized, without proper education, without healthcare and constantly exposed to the most horrific violence,” she said.

UNICEF has helped provide temporary learning spaces for over 50,000 children in 2017, and plans to do so for 85,000 children in 2018.

The agency also provided support for children released from armed groups to reintegrate into society.

Through a rapid response mechanism, UNICEF has been able to provide non-food items, such as mats, mosquito nets, blankets, and cooking supplies, to nearly 25,000 households and emergency water and sanitation interventions to almost 72,000 people.

At the same time, the agency received only 46 per cent of the funding needed to meet the humanitarian needs this year.

“In 2018 the needs are growing: we are going to need every support we can get, if we do not want the children of CAR to be left to a terrible fate,” she said.

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## **Security Council renews Syrian cross-border relief convoys amid ongoing challenges for aid workers**

19 December 2017 – The Security Council today renewed the authorization for United Nations relief agencies and their partners to use routes across conflict lines and border crossings to deliver lifesaving assistance to millions in north-west and southern Syria through Turkey and Jordan.

In a resolution adopted by a recorded vote of 12 in favour and three abstentions (Bolivia, China and Russia), the 15-member Council called on Syrian authorities “to expeditiously respond to all requests for cross-line deliveries submitted by the UN and its implementing partners and to give such requests positive consideration.”

Also in the resolution, the Council underscored the need for a political solution to the conflict in Syria and urged all concerned stakeholders to facilitate a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political transition to end the conflict.

“The Syrian people will decide the future of Syria,” stressed the Council.

The use of cross-line routes was [first authorized](#) by the Council in July 2014 through a resolution that also tasked the UN with monitoring the loading of the aid consignments as well as their openings, such as by customs officials, to confirm the humanitarian nature of these relief consignments.

The renewal today authorizes the cross-border aid deliveries as well as the monitoring of consignments until 10 January 2019.

#### ***Aid workers face overwhelming access challenges***

Also today, Mark Lowcock, the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator told the Council that the situation for close to 400,000 Syrians trapped in in eastern Ghouta, an area designated as a “de-escalation zone,” remains unbearable with intensive air and ground-based strikes reported daily – except for a two-day pause – since mid-November.



Mark Lowcock, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, briefs the Security Council meeting on the situation in the Middle East



Staffan de Mistura, Special Envoy for Syria, briefs the Security Council meeting on the situation in the Middle East

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The situation is particularly dire for more than 500 individuals in need of urgent medical evacuation, of whom over 420 are women, children and the elderly.

“There have already been 16 civilian deaths among those waiting for permission to leave eastern Ghouta for medical reason [...] all that is needed is the green light from the Syrian authorities for these people to go to hospitals just a few miles outside of eastern Ghouta,” said Mr. Lowcock.

In his briefing, the top UN relief official also outlined the continuing challenges humanitarians face in delivering vital assistance to the millions in need across the war-torn country, including in places which have not seen any relief supplies in months.

### *No real progress from the Geneva talks, UN Special Envoy says*

Also during the same meeting, the UN Special Envoy for Syria told Council members the latest round of [intra-Syrian talks](#) between the Government and opposition, which wrapped up last week in Geneva, failed to achieve any real progress.

“The opportunity to begin a real discussion or negotiation was not seized,” said Staffan De Mistura.

“A golden opportunity was missed for many reasons: psychological, because we are at the end of the year; political, because we are at the end, we want to believe, of a major military operation; and from a human point of view because most Syrians have been asking and waiting for this in order to see the situation changing for them,” he said.

Speaking to the press last Thursday, Mr. De Mistura had expressed disappointment at the Syrian Government’s lack of engagement on any issue other than counter-terrorism, before adding that he intended to call a new round of talks in January.

SEE ALSO: [‘Golden opportunity’ missed for progress on intra-Syrian talks, says UN envoy](#)

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## [Ukraine: UN agencies stepping up aid to most vulnerable as temperatures plummet](#)

19 December 2017 – As temperatures plummet across Ukraine, the United Nations refugee and migration agencies said Tuesday that they are stepping up assistance to the most vulnerable people affected by the conflict in the country’s east.

The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees ([UNHCR](#)) is increasing distributions of aid to the displaced.

“[Winter brings additional hardship](#) to the population,” UNHCR spokesperson Andrej Mahecic said at a press briefing in Geneva, noting that temperatures can plummet to minus 10 degrees Celsius, or 14 Fahrenheit, in December and minus 20 C, or minus 4 F, in January.

“Most live in poorly insulated homes and a smaller number in collective centers, and are unable to cover the rising utility costs,” he said.

The aid comprises clothes, warm jackets and boots, coal for heating and cash

grants to cover winter expenses. Recipients include some 15,300 people, who are mainly single parents, elderly, families with many children, and people with disabilities or chronic illnesses.

Most have been displaced from their homes in eastern Ukraine by the conflict in the regions of Donetsk and Luhansk, which is now well into its fourth year. Near the line of contact between the Government and the non-Government controlled areas, houses are frequently damaged by shelling.

In some villages, gas pipes have been damaged by shelling and, as a result, coal and firewood represent the sole means of heating homes. UNHCR staff report that people are often forced to make a choice between buying food and medicines, or fuel to heat their dwellings.

In the non-Government controlled areas, where 40 per cent of the households need heating fuel and nearly 90 per cent need winter clothes and insulation, UNHCR is providing 9,000 tonnes of coal to 3,000 households and more than 7,500 pieces of winter clothing.

In Government-controlled areas, UNHCR provides unconditional cash grants to 1,000 households, and winter jackets to more than 4,700 children.

#### ***Dire humanitarian situation on Europe's doorstep***

For its part, the UN International Organization for Migration ([IOM](#)) has started distributing coal to people in need.

“Some 3.4 million men, women and children are locked in a dire humanitarian situation right on [Europe's doorstep](#),” said Thomas Weiss, IOM Ukraine Chief of Mission, during his recent visit to the field.

About 3,800 vulnerable low-income households in non-government-controlled areas of Donetsk will each receive three tons of high quality anthracite coal, which should be sufficient to cover their heating needs for the entire winter.

The planned assistance in these areas also includes the rehabilitation of the heating systems in up to 20 social and medical institutions, as well as the distribution of 200 cast-iron stoves to families located in least accessible areas, where wood is the only available heating fuel.

In parallel, IOM will in a few weeks transfer a first round of multipurpose cash to 4,000 vulnerable individuals in the government-controlled area, living close to the contact line in both Luhansk and Donetsk regions.

Families told IOM that they used 31 per cent of the funds they received to cover their medical expenses, and spent 23 per cent of the funds on fuel, winter clothing, as well as paying their bills for heating.

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## UN rights chief calls for independent probe into Israeli forces 'shocking' shooting of amputee

19 December 2017 – Shocked at the “incomprehensible” killing of a wheelchair-bound amputee protester by Israeli security forces, the top United Nations human rights official has called on the country to open an independent and impartial investigation into the incident.

“International human rights law strictly regulates the use of force in the context of protests and demonstrations. The lethal use of firearms should only be employed as the last resort, when strictly unavoidable, in order to protect life,” Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, [said](#) on Tuesday.

“However, as far as we can see, there is nothing whatsoever to suggest that Ibrahim Abu Thurayeh [the protester] was posing an imminent threat of death or serious injury when he was killed,” he added, stressing: “Given his severe disability, which must have been clearly visible to those who shot him, his killing is incomprehensible – a truly shocking and wanton act.”

According to the news release, Ibrahim Nayef Ibrahim Abu Thurayeh, a 29-year-old man from Gaza, who reportedly had both legs amputated after an Israeli attack on Gaza in 2008, was among hundreds of Palestinians marching across farmland towards a fence following Friday prayers on 15 December to protest against the United States’ decision to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel.

He appears to have been killed by a bullet to the head when he was approximately 20 meters from the fence, it added.

Given his severe disability, which must have been clearly visible to those who shot him, his killing is incomprehensible – a truly shocking and wanton act  
High Commissioner Zeid

Since President Donald Trump’s 6 December statement concerning the status of Jerusalem, protests have been held throughout the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and in occupied Gaza. The response by the Israeli security forces has resulted in five people being killed, hundreds injured and large-scale arrests of Palestinians, noted OHCHR.

The biggest flashpoint has been in Gaza, where three people have been killed as protesters burned tires, threw stones, sang songs and waved flags along the fence. Israeli security forces have responded with firearms, including live-ammunition, to disperse the protesters.

According to the UN rights office, the use of live ammunition has resulted in

over 220 people being injured in Gaza, including 95 on Friday alone, in addition to tens of others who sustained injuries from tear gas or rubber bullets, read the news release.

It also noted reports that suggest a preliminary internal Israeli army investigation has taken place.

“Nevertheless, the High Commissioner called on Israel to immediately open an independent and impartial investigation into this incident, and into all others that have resulted in injury or death, with a view to holding the perpetrators accountable for any crimes committed,” it read.

Mr. Zeid also “unequivocally condemned” all attacks against civilians, including the indiscriminate shelling of Israeli civilian areas by armed Palestinian groups operating out of Gaza.