

Attack on humanitarian convoy north-east Nigeria leaves four civilians dead – UN aid official

18 December 2017 – At least four civilians are reported to have been killed when an aid convoy transporting food supplies was ambushed by armed individuals in Nigeria's strife-torn north-east region, the top United Nations humanitarian official in the country said.

The attack took place along the Dikwa-Gamboru road in Borno state, and also resulted in the destruction of basic aid items initially destined to alleviate the suffering of thousands of conflict-affected women, children and men.

"Violence against convoys carrying humanitarian aid is unacceptable and can result in concerning limitations in our ability to provide life-saving relief to those who need it the most," said Edward Kallon, the Humanitarian Coordination in Nigeria, in a [news release](#) today.

"We must ensure the safety of aid workers and aid convoys across the north-east of Nigeria, so people in need of assistance can access it in a timely manner and in sufficient quantity. Many lives are at risk," he underscored.

The conflict in Nigeria's north-east provoked by the Boko Haram terrorist group has triggered a deep humanitarian crisis. Since the start of the conflict in 2009, more than 20,000 people have been killed and thousands of women and girls abducted.

Borno along with Adamawa and Yobe are the worst affected with nearly seven million people in need of humanitarian assistance, more than 50 per cent of whom are children.

Since January 2017, despite major challenges, relief efforts by the UN as well as partners have managed to assist over five million conflict-affected people, reaching about five million with health care assistance, three million with food security interventions, 936,000 with nutritional support, and over 1.3 million with safe drinking water.

Owing to such humanitarian efforts, for the first time since the onset of the crisis, hunger has considerably declined in the region.

[According](#) to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization ([FAO](#)), the number of people facing acute hunger has [halved](#) since June-August – from 5.2 million to 2.6 million people.

However, there are fears that without sustained and timely assistance, the good work could quickly be undone, leaving more than 3.5 million people with acute hunger, as well as at the risk of famine, by August 2018, warned the UN food security agency.

UN urges international cooperation to make migration safer in a world on the move

18 December 2017 – On International Migrants Day, the United Nations is appealing for cooperation in managing migration to ensure that its benefits are most widely distributed, and that human rights of all concerned are protected – as recognized by the [2030 Agenda](#) for Sustainable Development.

“Evidence [overwhelmingly shows](#) that migrants generate economic, social and cultural benefits for societies everywhere,” said [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres in his message commemorating the [International Day](#), marked annually on 18 December.

“Yet,” he continued, “hostility towards migrants is unfortunately growing around the world. Solidarity with migrants has never been more urgent.”

Climate change, instability and growing inequalities mean “[migration] is here to stay,” Mr. Guterres stated.

As such he called for effective international cooperation in managing migration to ensure that its benefits are most widely distributed and that human rights of all concerned are properly protected – as recognized by the UN 2030 Agenda.

For his part, the Director-General of the International Organization of Migration ([IOM](#)), William Lacy Swing, made an urgent call for safe migration in a world on the move, which is the theme of the 2017 edition of the International Day.

“While we live at a time when [a privileged elite considers global mobility virtually its birth-right](#), it is denied to countless others trapped in hopelessly bad economic or conflict circumstances,” he emphasized in an opinion piece.

Mr. Swing called migration a human reality to be managed, not a problem to be solved as he underscored the benefits of the [Global Compact for Migration](#) that is expected to be adopted by the end of 2018, once negotiations by UN Member States are concluded.

“If we stop to think about the strict and mandatory rules which enable over 34.5 million flights per year that enable the equivalent of 44 per cent of the world's population to take off and land safely, it should be possible to find some common rules in order to allow many more to travel, migrate and

return home freely and safely,” he stressed.

He emphasized the need to assist migrants, saying “if we don't come up with solutions, the smugglers will do it for us, at great cost to human life and to the fabric of our societies.”

Calling migration “a global phenomenon driven by many forces,” Audrey Azoulay, Director-General of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization ([UNESCO](#)), meanwhile said in her message that “UNESCO is [acting to advance the migration-related commitments](#) of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,” adding that the agency's work with UN partners in shaping a global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration.

In parallel, UN human rights experts said: “States can play a significant role in [promoting positive perceptions about migrants](#) in the general public, by using and promoting a positive discourse, and by presenting facts and studies, including about the contribution of migrants to societies.”

“Migration itself is a natural part of human existence. It is not a crime and it is not a problem. This approach to migration governance shifts emphasis away from closing borders and keeping people out, and towards creating accessible, regular, safe and affordable migration channels, and promoting and celebrating diversity,” she stated.

[UN rights wing 'appalled' at mass execution in Iraq](#)

15 December 2017 – Expressing deep shock at a mass execution of 38 men at a prison in the Iraqi city of Nassiriya, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights ([OHCHR](#)) has called on the country to establish an immediate moratorium and carry out an urgent and comprehensive review of its criminal justice system.

"The mass execution [...] once again raises [huge concerns about the use of the death penalty in the country](#)," Liz Throssell, an OHCHR spokesperson, told the media at a regular news briefing in Geneva Friday.

"Given the flaws of the Iraqi justice system, it appears extremely doubtful that strict due process and fair trial guarantees were followed in these 38 cases," she added.

All prisoners had been convicted for terrorism-related crimes. They were executed Thursday.

Also in her briefing, Ms. Throssell said that the executions and the fears over due process and fair trial guarantees raised the dangers of “irreversible miscarriages” of justice and violations of the right to life.

The UN rights office has time and again raised concerns over the continued use of death penalty in the country.

So far this year, it has been informed of 106 executions in the country, including the mass hanging of 42 prisoners in a single day in September, the spokesperson added.

“We once again urge the Iraqi authorities to halt all executions, establish an immediate moratorium on the use of the death penalty and carry out an urgent and comprehensive review of the criminal justice system,” she added.

‘American Dream’ quickly becoming an ‘illusion,’ says UN human rights expert

15 December 2017 – The number of Americans living in poverty and the already high income inequality could worsen further in the days to come, making the United States the most unequal society in the world, the United Nations expert on extreme poverty and human rights warned Friday.

“The [American Dream is rapidly becoming the American Illusion](#), as the US now has the lowest rate of social mobility of any of the rich countries,” said the UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, Philip Alston, Friday, at the end of a fact finding mission to the country.

“Instead of realizing its founders’ admirable commitments, today’s United States has proved itself to be exceptional in far more problematic ways that are shockingly at odds with its immense wealth and its founding commitment to human rights,” he added.

Assumption that poor come from minorities is wrong – UN expert

In his statement, the Mr. Alston also stated that the assumption that poor came from ethnic minority groups is not correct and in fact there are eight million more white people than African-Americans living in poverty.

“The face of poverty in America is not only black or Hispanic, but also white, Asian and many other colours,” he said.

He went on to add that he was “struck” by the extent to which construed narratives about supposed distinctive differences between the rich and poor

have been “sold” to the electorate by some politicians and the media.

The face of poverty in America is not only black or Hispanic, but also white, Asian and many other coloursSpecial Rapporteur Philip Alston

Such misconceptions included notions that “the rich are industrious, entrepreneurial, patriotic and the drivers of economic success [while] the poor are wasters, losers and scammers,” he explained.

“Despite the fact that this is contradicted by the facts, some of the politicians and political appointees with whom I spoke were completely sold on the narrative of such scammers sitting on comfortable sofas, watching colour TVs, while surfing on their smartphones, all paid for by welfare.”

“I wonder how many of these politicians have ever visited poor areas, let alone spoken to those who dwell there,” he noted.

Proposed policy and welfare cuts could ‘essentially shred’ safety nets – UN expert

Further in the statement, the Special Rapporteur also expressed the fear that proposed changes in US tax and welfare policies could have “devastating consequences” for the poorest in the country and make it the “most unequal society in the world.”

“The dramatic cuts in welfare, foreshadowed by President [Donald] Trump and [House of Representatives] Speaker [Paul] Ryan, and already beginning to be implemented by the administration, will essentially shred crucial dimensions of a safety net that is already full of holes.”

“Several administration officials told me that as far as welfare reform is concerned, states are, in Justice Louis D. Brandeis’ famous phrase, ‘laboratories of innovation.’ Recent proposals to drug-test welfare recipients in Wisconsin and West Virginia, along with Mississippi’s recent purge of its welfare rolls, raise concerns that the administration would happily look the other way while states conducted what were in essence unethical experiments on the poor.”

Mr. Alston’s final report on his US visit will be available in Spring 2018 and will be presented to the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva in June 2018. The statement he delivered in Washington DC today can be [found here](#).

During his [two-week mission](#), at the invitation of the federal government, the UN expert visited California, Alabama, Georgia, West Virginia and Washington, D.C., as well as Puerto Rico.

UN 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.

UN rights office urges El Salvador to reform 'draconian' abortion laws

15 December 2017 – The United Nations human rights wing has called on the Latin American nation, El Salvador, to immediately halt the application of a law that unduly penalizes women for abortion-related offenses and to review all cases to ensure their compliance with international human rights standards.

According to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights ([OHCHR](#)), [at least 42 women have been convicted of attempted or aggravated homicide](#) after suffering miscarriages or other complications under the Penal Code since 1988.

The law, which a spokesperson for OHCHR described as “one of the most draconian abortion laws in the world” completely prohibits access to abortion regardless of the circumstances, including if a woman’s life is at risk or if she has suffered sexual violence.

The specific section of the Penal Code is Article 133.

In one of the most recent instances, on Wednesday, the Second Appeal Court of San Salvador upheld a 30-year prison sentence against Teodora Vasquez for aggravated homicide.

Ms. Vasquez was in the ninth month of her pregnancy when she suffered intense pain, and called the emergency services before passing out. She awoke to find her baby had been stillborn. She was accused of deliberately ending her pregnancy and was sentenced to 30 years in prison in January 2008.

During his [visit](http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=58118) to El Salvador last month, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein, met with Ms. Vasquez and three other women at the Ilopango women’s rehabilitation centre.

They all had suffered miscarriages or other obstetric emergencies.

Women living in poverty affected disproportionately

According to the UN rights office, women in poverty are worst impacted.

“It is important to highlight here, as the High Commissioner has done, that El Salvador’s Penal Code disproportionately affects women living in poverty, such as Teodora,” said Liz Throssell, the OHCHR spokesperson.

“We have not seen women from wealthier backgrounds jailed under similar circumstances in El Salvador,” she added, calling on the country to comply

with its international human rights obligations and lift the absolute prohibition on abortion.