

[Hanging of 42 prisoners in Iraq raises concern over flawed due process – UN rights chief](#)

27 September 2017 – The mass hanging of 42 prisoners on Sunday in a prison in southern Iraq raises massive concerns over the country's use of the death penalty, the UN human rights chief said Wednesday.

I am [appalled](#) to learn of the execution of 42 prisoners in a single day," UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein said in a press release from his Office ([OHCHR](#)), referring to the hanging at Al Hoot prison in the city of Nasiriyah.

Under international law, the death penalty may only be imposed after a strict set of substantive and procedural requirements have been met," he added.

Mr. Zeid said it was "extremely doubtful" that these strict due process and fair trial guarantees including the men's rights to effective legal assistance and a full appeals process, and to seek pardon or commutation of their sentence had been met in every one of these 42 individual cases.

Iraqi government officials have stated that the executed prisoners were Iraqis affiliated to the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da'esh) or al-Qaeda, who had been charged under anti-terrorism laws with offences including kidnapping, killing members of the security forces, carrying out armed robberies, and detonating improvised explosive devices.

However, no information has been released about their names, places of residence, exact crimes, trials, date of sentencing, or the appeals processes which Iraqi officials say they have exhausted.

Iraqi officials have stated that around 1,200 of the estimated 6,000 prisoners held in Nasiriyah have been sentenced to death.

OHCHR has repeatedly warned that the Iraqi justice system as a whole is too flawed to allow for any executions, expressing concern over reports that Iraq may be planning to expedite the process of executing prisoners already sentenced to death while urging the Government to step back from its policy of accelerated or mass executions.

Mr. Zeid called on the Government to establish a special judicial oversight body to make recommendations on legal reforms that would ensure respect for due process and fair trial standards, as well as to monitor any future trials related to capital punishment.

He also urged the authorities to halt all imminent executions and to establish an immediate moratorium on the use of the death penalty.

[Amid cholera outbreak in north-east Nigeria, UN steps up aid, warns pregnant women most vulnerable](#)

26 September 2017 – Large-scale displacement and a health system in tatters as a result of persistent violence by the Boko Haram terrorist group have left many – most worryingly, pregnant women and their unborn babies – vulnerable to cholera in the wake of an outbreak in August, the United Nations Population Fund ([UNFPA](#)) has warned.

“Studies show that [cholera](#) infections during pregnancy can lead to sudden loss of the foetus, premature delivery, stillbirth and an increased mortality and morbidity, both for the baby and the mother,” said Homsuk Swomen, a UNFPA reproductive health specialist in Maiduguri, north-eastern Nigeria, one of the worst affected areas by the Boko Haram violence.

Due to the ongoing conflict, many pregnant women are malnourished, aggravating their vulnerability to cholera and the consequences if they fall ill.

Furthermore, the “traditional role” played by women and girls in the region is making them all the more susceptible to the disease.

According to Sylvia Opinia, a UNFPA expert in gender issues, it is usually women and girls who care for sick family members, clean latrines, fetch and handle untreated water, and prepare food for the family.

“We need to understand that [cholera is not gender neutral](#),” she underscored.

On its part, the UN agency is working with local health staff, community and social workers in the camps to impress upon them the need to include women and girls in education messages on the disease, and especially targeting pregnant women with those messages. It is also engaging health workers to identify vulnerable women and girls, including pregnant women, for referral to appropriate care.

But funds are needed.

Last Sunday, the UN and partners [launched a \\$9.9 million appeal](#) to respond to the current outbreak in Borno state (north-east Nigeria) and to prevent further outbreaks in high-risk areas. A [Cholera Response and Prevention Plan](#) has been developed to address the immediate needs of 3.7 million people that could be affected by the outbreak.

In related news, the World Health Organization ([WHO](#)), the UN health agency, [concluded](#) an oral cholera vaccination campaign around Maiduguri this weekend,

inoculating some 844,000 people in affected areas.

According to WHO, it takes those immunized about a week to develop the immune response that should protect against the disease, and most individuals vaccinated should be protected for up to six months.

As of 25 September, 3,934 suspected cases of cholera including 54 deaths have been reported in and around Maiduguri. About 14 million people are affected by the crisis in north-eastern Nigeria (Adamawa, Borno and Yobe states), of whom 6.9 million need health assistance.

[Global 'learning crisis' threatens future of millions young students – World Bank report](#)

Global 'learning crisis' threatens future of millions young students – World Bank report

26 September 2017 –

Schooling without learning is a terrible waste of precious resources and of human potential, the World Bank said today, warning in a new report that millions of young students in low and middle-income countries face the prospect of lost opportunity and lower wages in later life because their primary and secondary schools are failing to educate them to succeed.

Warning of 'a learning crisis' in global education, the [World Development Report 2018: 'Learning to Realize Education's Promise'](#) said that schooling without learning is not just a wasted development opportunity, but also a great injustice to children and young people worldwide.

"This [learning crisis is a moral and economic crisis](#)," World Bank Group President Jim Yong Kim said in a press release on the report's launch.

The report argues that without learning, education will fail to deliver on its promise to eliminate extreme poverty and create shared opportunity and prosperity for all. Even after several years in school, millions of children cannot read, write or do basic math.

"When delivered well, education promises young people employment, better earnings, good health, and a life without poverty. For communities, education spurs innovation, strengthens institutions, and fosters social cohesion. But these benefits depend on learning, and schooling without learning is a wasted opportunity. More than that, it's a great injustice: the children whom societies fail the most are the ones who are most in need of a good education

to succeed in life,” underscored Mr. Kim.

Learning crisis is widening social gaps, not narrowing them

According to the World Bank, this learning crisis is widening social gaps instead of narrowing them. Young students who are already disadvantaged by poverty, conflict, gender or disability reach young adulthood without even the most basic life skills.

The report recommends concrete policy steps to help developing countries resolve the crisis by using stronger learning assessments as to what works and what doesn't to guide education decision-making; and mobilizing a strong social movement to push for education changes that champion 'learning for all.'

While not all developing countries suffer from such extreme learning gaps, many fall far short of levels they aspire to.

Leading international assessments on literacy and numeracy show that the average student in poor countries performs lower than 95 per cent of those in high-income countries. Many high-performing students in middle-income countries – young men and women who achieve in the top quarter of their groups – would rank in the bottom quarter in a wealthier country, explained the World Bank.

The report notes that when countries and their leaders make 'learning for all' a national priority, education standards can improve dramatically

The report, which was written by a team directed by World Bank Lead Economists Deon Filmer and Halsey Rogers, identifies what drives these learning shortfalls – not only the ways in which teaching and learning breaks down in too many schools, but also the deeper political forces that cause these problems to persist.

The report notes that when countries and their leaders make 'learning for all' a national priority, education standards can improve dramatically. For example, from a war-torn country with very low literacy rates in the 1950s, South Korea achieved universal enrolment by 1995 in high-quality education through secondary school – its young people performed at the highest levels on international learning assessments.

“The only way to make progress is to 'find truth from facts.' If we let them, the facts about education reveal a painful truth. For too many children, schooling does not mean learning,” said World Bank Chief Economist Paul Romer.

After extensive consultations with governments, development and research organizations and the private sector in 20 countries, the report offers the three policy recommendations: assess learning, so it can become a measurable goal; make schools work for all children; and mobilize everyone who has a

stake in learning.

[UN rights experts urge Member States to 'go beyond statements,' take concrete actions to help Rohingya](#)

26 September 2017 – A month on from counter-terror operations following attacks on police outposts in Myanmar's Rakhine province, seven United Nations rights experts have called on the Government to stop all violence against the minority Muslim Rohingya community as well as on the global community to "go beyond" statements and take action to save them.

"There have been credible allegations of serious human rights violations and abuses committed against the Rohingya, including extrajudicial killings, excessive use of force, torture and ill-treatment, sexual and gender-based violence, and forced displacement, as well as the burning and destruction of over 200 Rohingya villages and tens of thousands of homes," [said](#) the experts (see end for list) in a news release issued today by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights ([OHCHR](#)).

In the news release, the experts, including the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights in Myanmar, recalled the briefing last week by State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi, in which she urged the international community to learn along with the country's Government, the possible reasons behind the current exodus from Myanmar to Bangladesh.

"No one chooses, especially not in the hundreds of thousands, to leave their homes and ancestral land, no matter how poor the conditions, to flee to a strange land to live under plastic sheets and in dire circumstances except in life-threatening situations," stressed the experts.

According to estimates, more than 430,000 people have crossed into Bangladesh since the violence erupted.

SEE ALSO: [UN rights chief points to 'textbook example of ethnic cleansing' in Myanmar](#)

Further in the release, the experts also called on Myanmar authorities to ensure unfettered access to humanitarians to the affected locations and displaced people as well as for rights monitors, including the Human Rights Council Fact-Finding Mission for an independent and impartial assessment of the situation on the ground.

We call on Aung San Suu Kyi to meet the Rohingya personally in

Rakhine state as well as in Cox's Bazar to talk to those who have fled, as well as those who have stayed, as she says the Myanmar Government is interested in doing UN rights experts

They further urged the state Counsellor to personally meet the Rohingya.

Concluding the news release, the rights experts also called on UN Member States to "go beyond statements and start taking concrete action" to stop the military and security forces from what they noted "accomplishing their so-called 'unfinished business' of getting rid of the Rohingya minority from Rakhine state."

Meanwhile, the humanitarian crisis across the border, in Bangladesh continues to worsen by the day.

The Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees ([UNHCR](#)), one of the UN humanitarian entities involved in the response, [reported](#) that despite every effort by those on the ground, the massive influx of people seeking safety has been outpacing capacities to respond, and the situation for these refugees has still not stabilized.

"Many of those who have arrived recently are deeply traumatized [and] despite having found refuge in Bangladesh, they are still exposed to enormous hardship," Adrian Edwards, a UNHCR spokesperson, [said](#) at a media briefing in Geneva today, urging for a redoubling of the international humanitarian response in Bangladesh.

UNHCR along with other UN agencies, including the World Food Programme ([WFP](#)), UN Children's Fund ([UNICEF](#)) and World Health Organization ([WHO](#)) are also on the ground and [assisting](#) in the response efforts.

WFP and UNICEF are [distributing](#) food and therapeutic nutrition interventions (such as high-energy biscuits) and have set up child-friendly spaces. WHO is [providing](#) critical medical supplies for over half of the 38 mobile medical teams covering refugee settlements and camps.

The UN human rights experts noted above include Yanghee Lee, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar; Agnes Callamard, Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions; Fernand de Varennes, Special Rapporteur on minority issues; Leilani Farha, Special Rapporteur on adequate housing; Cecilia Jimenez-Damary, Special Rapporteur on the rights of internally displaced persons; Mutuma Ruteere, Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance; and Ahmed Shaheed, Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief.

Special Rapporteurs and independent experts are appointed by the Geneva-based UN Human Rights Council – the highest intergovernmental forum in the UN system on rights issues – 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.

The only world safe from use of nuclear weapons is a world completely free of them – UN chief

26 September 2017 – The only world that is safe from the use of nuclear weapons is a world that is completely free of them, [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres said today as the United Nations marked the International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons.

“A world free of nuclear weapons is a [global vision](#) that requires a global response,” Mr. Guterres told a high-level General Assembly meeting held in commemoration of the [International Day](#), observed annually on 26 September.

Although the goal of such a world is universally held, he said, it has lately been subject to numerous challenges, including a series of provocative nuclear and missile tests conducted by the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea.

He added that the States possessing nuclear weapons have a special responsibility to lead by taking concrete steps, including those agreed at various review conferences of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons ([NPT](#)).

Expensive campaigns to modernize nuclear weapons – combined with the absence of planned arsenal reductions beyond the new Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) between Russia and the United States – make it difficult to see how disarmament can make progress, Mr. Guterres said, warning against misguided assertions that prevailing security conditions do not permit disarmament initiatives.

“It is true that we live in challenging circumstances, but this can be no excuse for walking away from our shared responsibility to seek a more peaceful international society,” he said. The General Assembly declared 26 September as the International Day devoted to furthering the objective of the total elimination of nuclear weapons through a resolution adopted in December 2013.

Also addressing the event was Assembly President Miroslav Lajčák, who noted that thousands of nuclear warheads still exist and they are being stored across three different continents. More than half of the world’s population lives in countries which have nuclear capabilities, or are member of nuclear alliances, he added.

Since the designating the International Day, the world has witnessed three nuclear tests.

“One nuclear test is one too many. Six nuclear tests in the 21st century is, frankly, alarming. So too is the reckless rhetoric we are witnessing. It can bring us all to the verge of a cliff, which we cannot afford to fall off,” he said.

Last week, the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons was opened for signature. Not everyone agrees that this was the right step to take, but it demonstrates a determination, which is beyond dispute, he said.

“We can live in a nuclear-free world, as long as we all believe that it is possible. And as long as we are all willing to work to make it possible,” he concluded.