

Mauritania: UN rights office voices concern about unrest ahead of constitutional referendum

3 August 2017 – The United Nations human rights office today expressed concern about the ongoing unrest in Mauritania, ahead of the constitutional referendum scheduled for Saturday, particularly the apparent suppression of dissenting voices and the reported use of excessive force by the authorities against protest leaders.

“Protests have been taking place daily since 21 July, led by opposition politicians calling for a boycott of the vote,” [said](#) Ravina Shamdasani, spokesperson for the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), in a statement.

“The authorities reportedly did not respond to the majority of requests for authorization for the protests and actively dispersed gatherings. In several cases, protest leaders were reportedly beaten up and a number of them were arrested,” she added.

An amendment to Mauritania’s constitution, which would abolish the Senate and change the national flag, is put to a vote in the referendum.

Mass protests are planned this afternoon in Nouakchott and reports suggest that the Senate building has been cordoned off by the police and the gendarmerie.

OHCHR urged the Government to ensure that its response to the protests is line with its obligations under international human rights law and to ensure that the rights to peaceful assembly, to freedom of opinion and expression are fully respected.

“These rights are particularly precious in a pre-electoral context,” she said, calling on all sides to refrain from the use of violence and to take measures to prevent the situation from escalating.

The Government has a responsibility to ensure that the elections are held in conformity with the international human rights obligations of Mauritania, and should take all necessary measures to ensure free, transparent and credible elections, she stressed.

Amid 'political impasse' in Burundi, Security Council urges all parties to cease violence

2 August 2017 – The United Nations Security Council today expressed deep concern over the political situation in Burundi including increasing numbers of refugees and reports of torture, forced disappearances and extrajudicial killings and strongly urged the Government and all parties to immediately cease and reject such violence.

In a statement read out by Ambassador Amr Abdellatif Aboulatta of Egypt, which holds the Council presidency for August, the 15-nation body underscored deep concern regarding the continued [worsening humanitarian situation](#), marked by nearly 202,000 internally displaced persons, three million people in need and more than 416,000 Burundians seeking refuge in neighbouring countries [...] resulting from the country's persisting political impasse.

The Council commended the host countries for their efforts, and regional governments to respect their international obligations relating to the status of refugees, and to ensure that their return is voluntary, based on informed decisions and in safety and dignity.

It also strongly condemned all public statements inciting violence or hatred towards different groups, including calls for forced impregnation of women and girls and urged the Government and all parties to cease all violence and to condemn any hate speech.

The Security Council stressed that the prevailing situation has seriously undermined the gains achieved through the 2000 Arusha Agreement, with devastating consequences for Burundi and the region as a whole.

The Council reiterated its intention to pursue targeted measures against all actors, both inside and outside of the country, who threaten the peace and security of Burundi and underlined the utmost importance of respecting the letter and the spirit of the Arusha Agreement that has helped to sustain a decade of peace in the nation.

The Security Council urges the Government of Burundi to reengage with international partners, especially the United Nations, in a constructive manner based on mutual trust, the statement said.

In that regard, the Council reiterated its concern over significant delays in the deployment of African Union human rights observers and military experts, noting that only 40 of the former and eight of the latter had been deployed to Burundi so far.

Reaffirming the Government's primary responsibility for ensuring security in its territory and protecting its population, with respect for the rule of law, human rights and international humanitarian law, it also called on States in the region to contribute to a solution to the crisis in Burundi and to refrain from supporting the activities of armed movements in any way.

Adopting new resolution, UN Security Council moves to thwart terrorists' access to weapons

2 August 2017 – The United Nations Security Council today unanimously adopted a resolution aimed at preventing terrorists from acquiring weapons, particularly small arms and light weapons, the “destabilizing accumulation and misuse” of which the 15-member body said “continue to pose threats to international peace and security and cause significant loss of life.”

The Council “strongly condemned” the continued flow of weapons, military equipment, unmanned aircraft systems (UASs) and their components, and improvised explosive device (IED) components to and between the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da'esh), Al-Qaida, their affiliates, and associated groups, illegal armed groups and criminals.

UN Member States were encouraged to prevent and disrupt procurement networks for weapons, systems and components between and among such groups and entities. Member States were specifically urged to ensure the ability to take appropriate legal actions against those who are knowingly engaged in providing terrorists with weapons and to ensure proper physical security and management for stockpiles of small arms and light weapons.

It also encouraged the implementation of marking and tracing procedures of small arms and light weapons to improve traceability of such weapons which could be provided to terrorists through illicit trafficking.

UN Member States were also urged to strengthen their judicial, law enforcement and border-control capacities, and develop their capabilities to investigate arms-trafficking networks in order to address the link between transnational organized crime and terrorism.

The Council also called on all States to consider becoming party to the related international and regional instruments, with a view to help eliminate the supply of weapons to terrorists, and to fully implement their respective obligations under those to which they are a party.

Before the adoption of the text, three leading UN officials involved in

counter-terrorism, briefed the Council on the complex efforts being undertaken by multiple agencies and committees to fulfil the Organization's promise to take an "all-of-UN" approach to tackle terrorism and the prevent terrorists from acquiring weapons.

Jehangir Khan, the Officer-in-Charge of the newly created [UN Counter-Terrorism Office](#), told Council members that "the spectre of terrorists acquiring lethal technologies and new weapons, including weapons of mass destruction, poses a serious threat to international peace and security."

This initiative goes to the heart of the Secretary-General's efforts to make prevention the core mission of the United Nations. Jehangir Khan

Welcoming the consideration of the resolution before the Council today, he said "this initiative goes to the heart of the Secretary-General's efforts to make prevention the core mission of the United Nations."

For his part, the Deputy Director of the UN Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate ([CTED](#)), Weixiong Chen, explained how the resolution would add further tasks to CTED's mandate.

Citing a wide range of vulnerabilities in the mechanism to prevent terrorists' access to weapons, he stressed the need for further efforts, such as reviewing and strengthening national legislation on countering the supply and trafficking of weapons to terrorists and preventing the flow of weapons to conflict-affected regions and conflict zones.

"Preventing and eliminating the supply of weapons to terrorists is a complex task," he said. "But please rest assured that CTED will continue to strengthen its engagement with its UN and international and regional partners, in accordance with the relevant Council resolutions, to assist Member States to deny terrorists access to weapons."

Preventing and eliminating the supply of weapons to terrorists is a complex task Weixiong Chen

Speaking via video-teleconference from Vienna, Austria, Yury Fedotov, the Executive Director of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime ([UNODC](#)), stressed the importance of cross-border partnerships.

He cited many challenges with preventing, detecting, investigating and successfully prosecuting illicit trafficking in weapons, including inadequate regulatory environments and data collection; lack of specialized skills and equipment; and lack of coordination within and between countries and regions.

"Looking ahead, we need to ([further strengthen cross-border partnerships](#) and operational responses, promote the involvement of diverse stakeholders,

including the private sector, and step up tailored assistance to address gaps in capacity,” he said.

UNODC remains fully engaged in providing comprehensive support through its integrated country, regional and global programmes and network of field offices, in coordination with UN partners as well as partners such as the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL).

Emmanuel Roux, Special Representative of INTERPOL to the United Nations, also delivered a statement on behalf of the body's Secretary-General, Jürgen Stock.

Mr. Roux highlighted the importance of tracing weapons back to their sources. “Traditionally, investigations would end at this point, with the seizure of a firearm. INTERPOL suggests that the recovery of a weapon is just the beginning,” he explained, stressing the need to strengthen and integrate border management to prevent the mobility of the individuals using weapons, such as foreign terrorist fighters.

“The capabilities I have described hold enormous potential in assisting law enforcement officers to prevent terrorist access to weapons,” he said, asking delegations to reach back to their respective capitals and national security services, to “inquire whether this potential is being maximized, at a time of unprecedented threat.”

[Afghanistan: UN condemns killing of civilians in Herat mosque attack](#)

2 August 2017 – United Nations [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres and the UN political mission in Afghanistan have denounced last night's attack against worshippers gathered in a mosque in the city of Herat which killed at least 31 civilians and injured many more.

“The Secretary-General strongly condemns the attack,” [said](#) his spokesman, Stéphane Dujarric, in a statement issued overnight.

“Attacks that deliberately target civilians are clear violations of fundamental human rights and international humanitarian law,” he added.

The UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan ([UNAMA](#)) joined in the [condemnation](#) of the attack at the Jawadia mosque.

According to the Mission, two attackers entered the Shia mosque during the evening prayer time when several hundred worshipers were present, opening fire and detonating two suicide improvised explosive devices against the congregation.

This attack deliberately targeting civilians at prayer can have no justification whatsoever," said Tadamichi Yamamoto, the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Afghanistan. "Fanning terror and sectarian violence against a specific community is abhorrent and those responsible must be brought to account."

The Secretary-General and UNAMA expressed condolences to the victims' families and wished a speedy recovery to the injured.

According to UNAMA, the attack is the fifth this year targeting Shia mosques, killing a total of at least 44 civilians and injuring at least 88. Four of the attacks occurred in Herat and the other in Kabul. Islamic State-Khorasan province claimed responsibility for two of these attacks.

In 2016, UNAMA recorded four separate attacks against Shia mosques and religious gatherings. Islamic State-Khorasan province claimed responsibility for two of those attacks.

Yesterday's attack took place one day after the assault against the Embassy of Iraq in Kabul, where two Afghan civilians lost their lives and one was injured.

The United Nations recalls international humanitarian law that prohibits deliberate attacks against civilians and civilian objects, including places of worship, as well as the cardinal principle of the inviolability of diplomatic premises.

INTERVIEW: Head of UN drug body urges greater access to treatment for women

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1 August 2017 –

Women continue to be disproportionately affected by drug use, and face obstacles in accessing treatment, compared to men, according to the President of the United Nations International Narcotics Control Board (INCB).

Viroj Sumyai, who earlier recently presented the Board's [annual report](#) to the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), urged Member States to integrate gender perspectives in the elaboration of their drug policies to address this discrepancy.

According to the report, drug-related harms to women and the resulting consequences for communities are often "sorely under-studied," and gender-disaggregated data on drug use are rarely collected.

"There are also inadequate budget allocations by Member States for the specific prevention and treatment of drug dependence and substance use disorders among women, who often do not have access to any assistance and suffer in silence," the report pointed out.

In this context and to learn more about the work of the INCB, as well as the challenges before the international drug control regime, *UN News* spoke to Mr. Sumyai, a national of Thailand, during his recent visit to UN Headquarters.

Parts of the interview have been edited for brevity and clarity.

UN News: Can you tell us about the work of the INCB?

Viroj Sumyai: The board is composed of 13 members, elected in their personal capacity, by the Economic and Social Council. We are based in Vienna, Austria. Our primary responsibility is to monitor the compliance by the States parties to the three international drug control conventions: the 1961 Convention; the 1971 Convention on Psychotropic Substances; and the 1988 Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances.

UN News: Women and drugs was a key subject in the Board's latest annual report. What were the major concerns that you identified and how can they be addressed?

Viroj Sumyai: The biggest problem we see is the disproportionate impact on women in being able to access treatment facilities for substance use disorder. According to the data, only one in five women addicted to drugs are going to treatment facilities.

There are no specialized facilities for women to seek treatment. This creates a major obstacle both for them as well as their families, especially children that depend on women for care.

Looking at it from a sustainable development perspective, when governments are looking at issues such as livelihoods for their populations, they need to look at this issue too. It is also the right of women to seek treatment for substance use disorder.

And this is my main goal as the President of the INCB: I want to tackle the problem of lack of access to treatment for women who are addicted to drugs.



A man enters a drug dependency treatment centre in Jalalabad, Afghanistan. However, women drug users across the globe face significant obstacles accessing such treatments. UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe

UN News: What are your thoughts on the abuse of opioid medications?

Viroj Sumyai: Over prescription of opioid medication, happening primarily in high-income countries like the US, Canada, countries in Western Europe,

Australia and New Zealand, is creating a lot of problems. However, at the same time, there is the lack of access to these medications in low- and middle-income countries which in itself is causing a lot of issues. This is a major concern.

UN News: What are the biggest challenges for the international drug control system and how can they be overcome?

Viroj Sumyai: The biggest challenge, in my view, is for the people in the middle- and low-income countries who suffer from the lack of access to controlled medications due to misconceptions on the part of the State party, who feels that very strict controls over [narcotic drugs](#) or [psychotropic substances](#) is good and that it stops diversion of these drugs into illicit markets.

This is resulting in medical practitioners and health officials becoming reluctant to prescribe such medications – like morphine – to people who are in need and are suffering from deadly diseases and require the medicines to alleviate their pain. Similarly, persons with psychological illness are also suffering because they cannot avail psychotropic medicines they need.

UN News: Can you share some good practices on tackling drug-related offences while also upholding human rights?

Viroj Sumyai: Many officials in law enforcement have raised the issue of overcrowding in prisons of those incarcerated on drug-related offences. According to the 1961 Convention, drug-abuse offence is a minor offence, and rather than incarcerating the drug user, getting them to treatment, rehabilitation and reintegration could be a better option. This would be a very good practice to follow.



The 'Crack Is Wack' wall. The mural was painted by New York City artist Keith Haring on the side of a New York City public school building located on Houston Street in Manhattan. (file) UN Photo/Pernaca Sudhakaran

UN News: Can you tell us about the collaboration between the INCB and other UN entities?

Viroj Sumyai: We are working closely with the UN World Health Organization ([WHO](#)) as well as with UNAIDS (the Joint UN Programme on HIV/AIDS), particularly to address the problems of those suffering with HIV and AIDS and are at the end stages of their lives, especially as they need morphine to lessen their pain.

With WHO, given their work with health professionals, we collaborate on building capacity regarding proper prescription of opioid medication and to ensure that these medicines are not over-prescribed. We also work with WHO in programmes on building capacities of national authorities on procurement of various types of medications.

UN News: What message would you like to convey to UN Member States?

Viroj Sumyai: I urge UN Member States, especially those that have the financial resources at their disposal, to support the INCB project building the capacity of national officials in low- and middle-income countries to tackle the problem of low access to opioid medication.



An anti-drug squad member of the Liberian National Police observes the destruction of nearly 400 kilogrammes of marijuana and other confiscated drugs in Monrovia. UN Photo/Staton Winter

UN News: Is there anything you would like to add?

Viroj Sumyai: One of the problems we are encountering is some Member States not going live with the 1961 Convention on issues regarding the legalization of non-medical use of cannabis. The 1961 Convention allows Member States to use schedule one substances for medical and scientific purposes. The time has already passed for the traditional use of cannabis or cocoa leaf because when this Convention was ratified there was a grace period of 25 years for each Member State to abolish the traditional use of cannabis or cocoa leaf, such as chewing the leaf.

This time period has already passed. We need to look towards the future and not go back to old practices or we will have to solve problems such as [those associated with] the problem of tobacco. Right now, a lot of money is wasted on trying to solve health problems associated with smoking. So if we go back to old habits of smoking marijuana, at the end we will find ourselves facing the problem not different from the problem of smoking.

INCB is an independent, quasi-judicial expert body established by the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs of 1961. It comprises 13 members, each elected by the UN Economic and Social Council, in their personal capacity to serve as independent experts.