

UN peacekeeping chief warns Security Council about insecurity in Central African Republic

28 July 2017 – The head of the United Nations peacekeeping operations has warned that the increased intensity of attacks on civilians and peacekeepers is bringing Central African Republic (CAR) to the tipping point.

Addressing the Security Council in a closed-door session, the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, Jean-Pierre Lacroix, yesterday cited the [worsening security and humanitarian](#) situation in Bangassou, in the south-eastern part of the country, where three UN peacekeepers have been killed in recent days.

The attacks took place against the backdrop of sustained fighting in the south-east of the country, heightened inter-ethnic tensions and efforts by spoilers to manipulate communities along religious lines and undermine the stabilization process in the country, Mr. Lacroix told the 15-member Council, according to a note from the UN Spokesperson's Office.

Mr. Lacroix is scheduled to travel to the CAR over the weekend to convey a message of support to the UN stabilization mission known by its French acronym, MINUSCA, and to meet with national authorities.

In his address yesterday, Mr. Lacroix also raised concerns about the deteriorating security in the border town of Zemio, 290 km east of Bangassou, with the risk of further clashes between the Muslim community and elements affiliated with anti-Balaka, which had already led to the displacement of more than 22,000 civilians.

He also mentioned that the security situation in the town of Bria, in the north of the country, remains fragile and that the departure of the Ugandan and American forces from the eastern part of the country this spring has created a vacuum leading to the emergence of hostile 'self-defence' groups.

The violence has led to a worsening humanitarian situation in the country, with the numbers of internally displaced persons up about 40 per cent since last year.

Clashes between the mainly Muslim Séléka rebel coalition and anti-Balaka militia, which are mostly Christian, have plunged the country of about 4.5 million people into civil conflict since 2012. According to the UN some 2.3 million people, over half the population, [in dire need of assistance](#). In addition to those displaced within the CAR, more than 484,000 people from the country have been forced to seek refuge in neighbouring nations.

The senior UN official also reiterated that a military solution to the

problem of the armed groups will not suffice to address the root causes of the conflict: “The absence of tangible progress in the peace process risks further worsening the situation.”

He noted the importance of operationalizing the July 17 roadmap by the members of the African Initiative for Peace and Reconciliation and underlined the importance of prioritizing the implementation of the ceasefire agreed upon in the Rome agreement of 20 June.

Venezuela: UN rights wing urges calm ahead of controversial weekend polls

28 July 2017 – The United Nations human rights office expressed deep concern today at the risk of further violence in Venezuela, where elections for a Constituent Assembly convened by President Nicolas Maduro are due to be held on Sunday.

“The [wishes of the Venezuelan people](#) to participate or not in this election need to be respected,” Elisabeth Throssell, spokesperson for the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights ([OHCHR](#)) told reporters at the regular press briefing in Geneva.

“No one should be obliged to vote, while those willing to take part should be able to do so freely,” she added.

The OHCHR spokesperson pointed out that demonstrations considered by the authorities to be “disturbing the elections” have been banned until 1 August.

“We urge the authorities to manage any protests against the Constituent Assembly in line with international human rights norms and standards,” she continued, calling on those opposing the election and the Assembly to do so peacefully.

“We hope that the poll scheduled for Sunday, if it goes ahead, will proceed peacefully and in full respect of human rights,” she said.

Responding to questions, Ms. Throssell said the situation in the country is “very tense and difficult.” As such, OHCHR reiterated the call for calm and for peaceful protests and for all sides to use only peaceful means to make their views heard.

With regard to the legitimacy of the vote itself, the spokesperson noted that it is “a hugely controversial issue” amplified by the fact that there had been an unofficial consultation by the opposition on the constituent assembly.

Our Office is concerned about the environment in which the elections are to take place and believes that a constitutional process can only be successful if based on a broad consensus and the participation of all sectors of society, Ms. Throssell said.

Despite decline in attacks on persons with albinism, root causes rife in rural Tanzania, UN expert finds

28 July 2017 – Welcoming a drop in the number of reported attacks against people with albinism, a United Nations human rights expert has concluded that this group of people in rural Tanzania continue to live in fear amid widespread attitudes that lead to violence against them.

People with albinism continue to live in a very fragile situation, as the root causes of the attacks against them remain rampant, and the effects of over a decade of violations have taken their toll, [said](#) Ikponwosa Ero, the UN independent expert on the enjoyment of human rights by persons with albinism, at the end of her 11-day visit to Tanzania.

Ms. Ero, however, praised the Government for its work to tackle the issue which is rooted in the mistaken belief that the body parts of people with albinism have value in witchcraft practices.

I welcome the measures already taken by the Government and civil society, and the decrease in the number of reported attacks, she said. There have been positive measures to address witchcraft practices, including the registration of traditional healers.

However, full oversight over their work has still not been achieved, and confusion still exists in the minds of the general public between witchcraft practice and the work of traditional healers, the expert noted.

She said more work was needed to address witchcraft and educate the public.

Ms. Ero also highlighted concerns over the use of schools as protection centres for children with albinism, which in some cases have evolved from temporary shelters into long-term accommodation. Although there has been a significant reduction in the overall number of children in these shelters, more work remained to be done, she added.

During her mission to Tanzania, Ms. Ero met with various high-level officials, civil society representatives, people with albinism, and their family members.

Independent experts are appointed by the Geneva-based UN 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.

She will present a full report and recommendations to the Human Rights Council in March 2018.

Wrapping up African trip, UN deputy chief vows to ensure displaced women return home in dignity

27 July 2017 – The United Nations deputy chief wrapped up her visit to two African countries – Nigeria and the Democratic Republic of the Congo – where today she stressed the importance of women’s participation in peace, security and development processes.

The final day’s itinerary for Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed included a visit to the Mugunga camp for internally displaced persons, on the outskirts of Goma, which is the capital of North Kivu Province in restive eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).

Ms. Mohammed [said](#) that she is firmly resolved to ensure that women in the camp return home in “dignity and humanity, which is not a favour but a right,” promising to embark on an advocacy initiative to finance the better settlement of the women as they return to their places of origin.

She also commended the women at the camp for their involvement in small trade through micro-financing, which enabled them to meet the needs of their families.

Regarding the victims of sexual violence, she said: “These are our African women [and] we will take their voice out to the international community and see what can be done to put an end to the scourge.

In the DRC, the Deputy Secretary-General also visited the women’s economic and empowerment centre and stressed that the mission was intended to “revitalize women’s participation and leadership in peace, security and development.”

VIDEO: Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed calls for more resources to alleviate the suffering of people, displaced by conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The mission was also intended to seek the support of the governor in the work of women in the provinces and to advocate for the implementation of legal texts in favour of gender equality, she said.

Ms. Mohammed began the trip on 18 July, which first took her to Nigeria. She was joined by the UN Women Executive Director Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, as well as the UN Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Pramila Patten, and the African Union Special Envoy on Women, Peace and Security, Bineta Diop.

This first-ever high-level [joint AU-UN high-level trip](#) is the first part of a two-part mission focused on women's meaningful participation in peace, security and development. A similar mission will cover two further countries later in the year.

[Ahead of World Day, UN agency says fight against hepatitis 'gaining momentum'](#)

27 July 2017 – On the eve of World Hepatitis Day, the United Nations health agency released a study that reveals efforts to eliminate disease are gaining momentum globally.

It is encouraging to see [countries turning commitment into action](#) to tackle hepatitis, said Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General of the World Health Organization ([WHO](#)).

Identifying interventions that have a high impact is a key step towards eliminating this devastating disease, he added, noting that many countries have succeeded in scaling-up the hepatitis B vaccination and now the task is to increase access to diagnosis and treatment.

New WHO data from 28 countries representing some 70 per cent of the global [hepatitis](#) burden reveals that nearly all have established high-level national hepatitis elimination committees and more than half have allocated dedicated funding for hepatitis responses.

Findings also show that more than 86 per cent of the countries reviewed have set national hepatitis elimination targets and more than 70 per cent have begun to develop national hepatitis plans to enable access to effective prevention, diagnosis, treatment and care services. Furthermore, nearly half of the countries surveyed are aiming for elimination through providing universal access to hepatitis treatment.

But WHO is still concerned that progress needs to speed up. The

national response towards hepatitis elimination is gaining momentum. However, at best one in 10 people who are living with hepatitis know they are infected and can access treatment. This is unacceptable," said Gottfried Hirnschall, WHO's Director of the HIV Department and Global Hepatitis Programme.

This week, WHO also added a new generic treatment to its list of WHO-prequalified hepatitis C medicines to increase access to therapy, and is promoting prevention through injection safety: a key factor in reducing hepatitis B and C transmission.

This year's [World Hepatitis Day](#) is being marked under the theme 'Eliminate Hepatitis' to mobilize intensified action towards the health targets in the [2030 Agenda](#) and UN Sustainable Development Goals ([SDGs](#)).

"For hepatitis elimination to become a reality, countries need to accelerate their efforts and increase investments in life-saving care. There is simply no reason why many millions of people still have not been tested for hepatitis and cannot access the treatment for which they are in dire need," said Mr. Hirnschall.

Viral hepatitis affected 325 million people worldwide in 2015, with 257 million people living with hepatitis B and 71 million people living with hepatitis C – the two main killers of the five types of hepatitis. Viral hepatitis caused 1.34 million deaths in 2015, a figure close to the number of tuberculosis deaths and exceeding deaths linked to HIV.

In early November, WHO and its partners will convene World Hepatitis Summit 2017 in São Paulo, Brazil, which promises to be the largest global event to advance the viral hepatitis agenda, bringing together key players.