

Senior UN official urges Libya to protect migrants from conflict-related sexual violence

7 February 2017 – The highest United Nations official tasked with advocating against the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war urged today Libyan authorities to protect migrants from rape and other human rights violations.

In a statement, Zainab Hawa Bangura, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, called on the Libyan Government and on the international community as a whole to protect migrants who are living or passing through Libya.

“In the course of their journey, women and girls but also men and boys face grave human rights violations, including conflict-related sexual violence, committed by parties to the Libyan conflict, as well as smugglers, traffickers and other criminal groups,” said Ms. Bangura, who is also an Under-Secretary-General.

She noted also that migrants face sexual violence in official and unofficial detention centres, some being held “for days, weeks or months.”

In addition, Ms. Bangura voiced increasing concern about the “systematic use of sexual violence” by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) in Libya, a phenomenon which the office of the Special Representative has been investigating in Iraq and Syria.

“Testimony from women and children recently released from ISIL as a result of the military operation in Sirte reveals a pattern of rape and sexual slavery, particularly against migrants,” Ms. Bangura said, noting that some of the survivors are pregnant.

She voiced alarm also that most of the women and children are being detained in Al Jawiya prison in Misrata “in precarious conditions including overcrowded cells, lack of adequate access to food, water and medicine, and absence of women guards as an important protection measure.”

Among her proposals, Ms. Bangura is urging authorities to urgently review the country’s migration policy, to protect escapees from ISIL and provide them with adequate support, to assist all victims of conflict-related sexual violence with adequate medical and other resources, and to investigate and prosecute those responsible for the crimes.

She also reiterated the recommendation of the Secretary-General that all countries give due consideration to recognizing conflict-related sexual violence as a form of persecution that warrants refugee status.