

Germany is symbol of tolerance and hospitality for those in need of protection – UN chief Guterres

17 February 2017 – Speaking to the media in Munich, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres hailed the important role Germany has placed at a number of multilateral institutions, including the European Union and the United Nations.

“Germany has been extremely active in all aspects in which the international community needs to come together to face the dramatic challenges that are threatening our daily lives,” said Mr. Guterres at a press encounter alongside German Chancellor Angela Merkel.

He further noted that in a world where diversity is perceived as a threat and not a richness and where so many populist, xenophobic demonstrations exist, Germany and Chancellor Merkel had been a symbol of “tolerance” and “hospitality” for people displaced from their homes and who are in need of protection.

“A symbol I would like to see followed in many, many other parts of the world in order for us to be able to respond to the dramatic suffering that we are witnessing because of the terrible conflicts that have spread around the world,” the UN chief added.

“So, in this moment, I would like to say that I am sure that the cooperation that, as Secretary-General, I will have with Germany and its Government will be as solid, as positive, as deep and as successful as the cooperation we had when, as High Commissioner for Refugees, I could be fully in support of the German policy for the protection of refugees.”

In his remarks, Mr. Guterres also underlined the need for global responses to global challenges such as complex and interlinked conflicts, rising terrorism, impact of climate change and enormous movements of people and migration.

He further emphasized the importance of multilateralism and for countries to come together and to use multilateral institutions, in a spirit of solidarity, to overcome the obstacles of today’s world.

Iraq: UN condemns car bomb attack in

Baghdad

17 February 2017 – The United Nations today condemned the deadly terrorist attack in the Iraqi capital, Baghdad, for which the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da'esh) has claimed responsibility.

“We condemn the terrorist attack in the south of Baghdad [...] This week has seen a series of such atrocious crimes in the Iraqi capital,” said the statement issued by the spokesperson for UN Secretary-General António Guterres.

“The United Nations will continue to stand by the Government and people of Iraq in their efforts to fight terrorism and violent extremism, notably by building trust and mutual understanding through peaceful and inclusive,” the statement added.

Meanwhile, the UN envoy in Iraq also strongly condemned yesterday's car bomb attack in the Bayaa district of Baghdad, which, according to news reports, left more than 50 people dead.

“Yet again, the terrorists are continuing with their carnage against innocent civilians. This is totally unacceptable,” said the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Iraq, Ján Kubiš.

“The Iraqi people have shown their courage and determination in the fight against terrorism, and these desperate tactics by the terrorists will only increase the resolve of Iraqis, who want to live in peace and tranquility to terminate the so-called ISIL throughout the country,” Mr. Kubiš added.

A decade on, UN urges all Governments to endorse convention on enforced disappearance

17 February 2017 – Marking the tenth anniversary of an historic treaty to keep people from suffering enforced disappearance or secret detentions, the United Nations today urged all Governments that have not done so to ratify it, as the world body honoured victims separated from their loved ones.

The UN General Assembly adopted the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearances on 20 December 2006, and it opened for signature the following February.

Speaking at a High-Level Assembly meeting, the current President of the 193-

member UN body said that since its adoption, the Convention has filled “an important judicial void in the international system” by preventing future victimization and seeking to redress past wrongs.

“While the catalyst to establishing the Convention was the horrendous events that took place in Latin America during the 1970’s and 1980’s, in many parts of our world today the scourge of enforced disappearance continues,” said Peter Thomson.

As the international community’s attention focuses on implementing the 2030 Agenda, it is important that the Convention be seen as a vital element in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

“This applies particularly to SDG 16 in promoting the rule of law, ensuring equal access to justice, ending impunity, protecting human rights, sustaining peace, and in achieving the central tenet of the 2030 Agenda of leaving no one behind”, he continued, adding that faithful implementation of SDG 16 will create the conditions that will ensure no one will ever be subjected to enforced disappearance.

The idea that forced disappearances – in one form or another – continue today were echoed in the video message from the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein, who noted that most of the family members attending the high-level meeting have had members of their families disappear.

“The practice of enforced disappearance is not decreasing – it is morphing,” he said. “In the context of migration, internal conflict, transnational organized crime, humanitarian crises and the struggle against violent extremism, we are seeing new and alarming patterns of enforced disappearance.”

Mr. Thomson and Mr. Zeid commended the at least 55 Member States that have ratified or acceded to the Convention, and urged those remaining to join.

In their separate addresses, both senior officials also commended the work of the Committee on Enforced Disappearances, which alongside the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances, is the main UN expert mechanism in this field.

Speaking on behalf of the Committee, its Chair, Santiago Corcuera Cabezut said there were 347 urgent actions currently under consideration by the Committee – up from just five in 2012.

“The values protected by this Convention are universal, and therefore, the universality of the instrument should be achieved in the near future, just like the Convention on the Rights of the Child,” he said.

To support the principles of the Convention, the UN General Assembly has designated 30 August as the International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearance to draw attention to the global problem of enforced disappearance.

Atrocities will end in South Sudan only when perpetrators 'face consequences' – UN rights official

17 February 2017 – A senior United Nations human rights official today called for holding accountable those committing atrocity crimes in conflict-torn South Sudan.

“This is a war that has been waged against the men, women and children of South Sudan,” said the UN Assistant Secretary-General for human rights, Andrew Gilmour, as he wrapped up a four-day visit to country. “And the only way of ending this onslaught, will be when the perpetrators face consequences for what they are doing.”

According to a news release from the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), Mr. Gilmour travelled to Malakal, where he received further information concerning the suffering of the civilian population in the area.

“Although this is the fourth time I’ve been in South Sudan since 2011, I wasn’t prepared for the shocking devastation I witnessed in Malakal and even more by the clear pattern of systematic human rights violations and abuses suffered by the population,” he said.

The release said that women have been frequently subjected to rape, both by non-government militias and Government forces known as the Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLA), on their route to the market in Malakal town. Rape and gang rape is present in the testimonies of numerous women in the area, though this was categorically denied by the SPLA Division Commander with whom Gilmour spoke.

“It is utterly abhorrent that women in this area have to choose between getting raped or getting a livelihood,” Mr. Gilmour said, “But this seems the brutal reality of what South Sudan has become.”

RELATED: Killings and rapes in South Sudan continued ‘unabated’ after July 2016 violence UN

In his meetings with the authorities in Juba, Gilmour urged them to combat the worrying rise of hate speech and to do more to protect human rights defenders.



Inside the UN Protection of Civilians site, Malakal, South Sudan. Photo: UNMISS/Isaac Billy

To the Chief of General Staff of the SPLA, General Paul Malong, Mr. Gilmour emphasized the severe restrictions on access that the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) faces when trying to protect civilians, provide humanitarian assistance and monitor the human rights situation in the country.

He stressed his concern that elements of the SPLA had engaged in what could well amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity. On the other hand, he welcomed the recent start of UN human rights training for the SPLA and the appointment of SPLA focal points on conflict related sexual violence.

Mr. Gilmour urged the Director General of the National Security Service to put an end to the practice of arbitrary and prolonged detention without charge, bring detainees before the courts, and allow them access to their lawyers and family.

Meanwhile, the three-member UN Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan has called for the immediate launch of an independent mechanism to assist in investigating violations in the country, ahead of the establishment of the hybrid court.

As part of the 2015 Peace Agreement, the African Union is mandated to establish a hybrid court for South Sudan, with the accord also providing for a truth commission and reparations authority.

“Critical evidence is being lost every day as witnesses are killed or disappear, as memories fade, and physical evidence degrades, which means investigations need to start now so the hybrid court has cases to hear,” said Commissioner Ken Scott at the end of a transitional justice workshop held in Ethiopia.

Central African Republic: UN mission reinforces presence in restive Bambari

17 February 2017 – Amid ongoing rebel activity in and around Bambari in strife-torn Central African Republic, the United Nations mission – known as MINUSCA – said today that it has reinforced its presence in the city with the arrival of additional troops, including a quick reaction unit and Special Forces.

This reinforcement makes it possible to better protect Bambari and its inhabitants, as, for the time being, the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission is the only legitimate authority mandated by the Government to control the city. As Mission chief Parfait Onanga-Anyanga recalled: “Bambari should not belong to armed groups.”

In a news release, the Mission stressed that the FPRC (*Front Populaire pour*

la Renaissance de Centrafrique)'s coalition and UPC (*Mouvement pour l'Unité et la Paix en Centrafrique*) represent a threat for civilian populations and that UN peacekeepers will respond in case of violence.

However, discussions are ongoing and a UN civilian-military delegation will soon meet with the leader of one of the armed groups. The MINUSCA stressed that Bambari "must be free of armed groups in the coming days."

And the UN Mission today also welcomed the nomination of Toussaint Muntazini Mukimapa as Special Prosecutor to the CAR's Special Criminal Court.

Clashes between the mainly Muslim Séléka rebel coalition and anti-Balaka militia, which are mostly Christian, plunged the country of 4.5 million people into civil conflict in 2013. According to the UN, more than half the population is in dire need of assistance. Despite significant progress and successful elections, CAR has remained in the grip of instability and sporadic unrest.

In December 2016, the Mission supported a new dialogue between 11 of the 14 armed groups, as part of an ongoing effort to disarm the factions.