

Belarus: UN expert decries Government's return to mass violence against peaceful protestors

28 March 2017 – A United Nations-appointed independent expert on the human rights situation in Belarus has expressed dismay over the Government's return to the policy of violent mass repression against peaceful demonstrators, non-governmental organizations, journalists and political opponents, and is calling on the authorities there to stop harassment and violence.

"The events of the last weekend prove the pre-meditated character of the repressive measures, and show an open return by the Government to its old policy of mass repression against citizens who exercise or dispense defense for human rights provided by the constitution and international treaties," said the Special Rapporteur on human rights in Belarus, Miklós Haraszti, in a news release from the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).

He was referring to the crackdown on March 25 and 26 against dozens of human rights defenders, both local and international, that came after hundreds of peaceful demonstrators against the Government's social policies had been violently attacked, arbitrarily arrested and deprived of their liberty, and then summarily fined or sentenced to prison from one to two weeks.

Since early February, demonstrators have been protesting against a decree under which a fine can be levied against anyone who does not work more than 183 days and is not declared officially unemployed.

Mr. Haraszti said he was "particularly shocked" by the raid against non-governmental organizations, such as Viasna, in their own offices, accompanied by physical violence, and by the disappearance for three days of political opponent Mikalai Statkevich, who was eventually released from the facility of the intelligence service.

"Two weeks ago, I, together with other human rights experts, had warned that further violations could be committed by the Government of President Lukashenko, known for its history of violent oppression of any form of dissenting views," the expert said, expressing regret that his fears materialized.

"I will continue to be vigilant and call on the international community to press for opening to dialogue with human rights defenders and those who promote peaceful and democratic change in Belarus," Mr. Haraszti said.

Special Rapporteurs and 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.

Protecting human rights essential in promoting sustainable supply chains – UN experts

28 March 2017 – The only way to achieve socially sustainable supply chains is if human rights are protected and respected, a group of UN experts said today in an open letter addressed to G20 leaders currently meeting in Geneva.

Despite contributing positively to social and economic development worldwide, links between global supply chains and negative human rights impacts persist, the UN Working Group on Business and Human Rights said.

Michael Addo, the current head of the Working Group said: “All too often, global supply chains are associated with human rights violations and abuses such as unsafe working conditions, child and forced labour, livelihoods destroyed by toxic industrial wastes, land seizures without compensation, and persecution of those who speak up against such abuse.”

Millions of lives are affected by the actions of companies in global supply chains and as such, governments and companies have enormous potential to promote sustainable development and uphold human rights, as long as they work together to do so, the working group noted.

The letter calls on governments to “lead by example,” in their roles as economic actors in ensuring that state-owned or controlled business respect human rights.

G20 members are meeting to prepare a ministerial declaration for more inclusive global economic growth.

“The G20 represents 85 percent of global economic output, 75 percent of world trade, and two-thirds of the world’s population, and includes both major ‘developed’ and ‘emerging’ economies,” Mr. Addo noted.

“G20 leaders are therefore uniquely placed to address the human rights risks and impacts associated with global supply chains. They also have a unique responsibility to demonstrate leadership on this critical issue for our time,” he said.

The UN Working Group also said that any commitments to promoting sustainable supply chains must be founded on the globally-agreed UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.

The Working Group on human rights and transnational corporations and other business enterprises was established by the UN Human Rights Council in June 2011. Along with current Chair Mr. Addo, its members are: Surya Deva, Dante

Pesce, Anita Ramasastry and Pavel Sulyandziga.

The Working Group reports to the UN Human Rights Council and to the General Assembly. Its experts Special Procedures are independent and are not UN staff. They are also independent from any government or organization. They serve in their individual capacity and do not receive a salary for their work.

[Around 22 million children could soon starve without urgent aid, UNICEF warns](#)

28 March 2017 – Millions of children are on the brink of starvation in the worst humanitarian crisis in decades, the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) today warned, urgently calling for nearly \$255 million to respond to immediate needs in northeast Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan and Yemen.

“Time is running out,” UNICEF said, noting the threat from famine, drought and war.

Some 22 million children are hungry, sick, displaced and out of school in the four countries, according to the UN agency. Nearly 1.4 million are at imminent risk of death this year from severe malnutrition.

“We learned from Somalia in 2011 that by the time famine was announced, untold numbers of children had already died. That can’t happen again,” said Manuel Fontaine, UNICEF Director of Emergency Programmes.

Famine was declared a month ago in South Sudan, and will likely be declared soon in Nigeria, Somalia and Yemen where fighting has pushed people off their farmland and droughts have destroyed their animals and what is left of crops.

“Children can’t wait for yet another famine declaration before we take action,” Mr. Fontaine said.



A mother holds up an empty cooking pot as she crouches alongside her daughter inside their makeshift home at a settlement near the town of Ainabo, Somalia, Thursday 9 March 2017. Photo: UNICEF/Kate Holt

The UN agency is calling for close to \$255 million to provide 22 million children with food, water, health, education and protection services for just the next few months, according to a new funding update.

The majority of that funding will go towards nutrition programmes to screen children and provide them with therapeutic food, as well as health services and water and sanitation.

This request is part of a broader appeal for all of 2017 totalling \$712 million, up 50 per cent from what was requested for these four countries at the same time last year.

Supporting Syrian refugees not only an act 'of generosity' but also of 'enlightened self-interest' – UN chief Guterres

28 March 2017 – Visiting the Zaatari refugee camp in Jordan that is hosting about 80,000 Syrian refugees, the United Nations chief urged the parties to the conflict in Syria and the countries that have influence over them to realize that the crisis is not only a tragedy for Syrian people but also a threat to regional stability and global security.

“This is the moment for all countries that are involved, directly or indirectly in the conflict, to put aside their differences and understand [...] the common interest from the fact that they are all threatened by the new risk of global terrorism,” UN Secretary-General António Guterres told reporters at a press conference at the camp.

“Solidarity with Syrian refugees is also a way to be able to express our capacity to guarantee global security. It’s not only an act of generosity. It’s also an act of enlightened self-interest,” he added, noting that by failing to support refugees, groups such as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da’esh) and al Qaida could use such inactions as arguments to further their own vested interests and put global security at risk.

In his remarks, Mr. Guterres also hailed the generosity of the Government and the people of Jordan for supporting refugees despite having a vulnerable economy, and appealed for international solidarity with countries such as Jordan that have been hosting Syrian refugees.

“I hope that that if all countries that have an influence on the Syrian situation are able to come together, these refugees, [who have been living here for more than four years,] will be able to restart their lives again, to find jobs, to work, to have a normal life,” he said.

He also underscored the importance of Arab unity and said that when Arab countries are divided, it has allowed others to intervene and to manipulate

situations, creating instability, breeding conflict and facilitating activities of terrorist organizations.

The UN Secretary-General further called on to the wider international community to increase their humanitarian support as well as to make sure that more opportunities are given to the refugees and to make sure that the countries that have an influence on the parties to the conflict come together to put an end to this tragedy.

[Children suffer grave atrocities in Sudan's conflict – UN reports](#)

27 March 2017 – Fewer children have been recruited to fight in parts of Sudan, but they are still killed and injured, and victims of sexual violence in the country, according to a new report by the United Nations Secretary-General.

“Boys and girls continued to be victims of grave violations committed by all parties to the conflict, including killing and maiming, sexual violence and attacks on schools and hospitals,” said Leila Zerrougui, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict.

The report, released on Friday, details the impact of the armed conflict on children in Darfur, South Kordofan, Blue Nile and Abyei between March 2011 and December 2016.

During that time period, nearly 1,300 children were either killed or maimed in conflict as a result of hostilities between the Government and the armed groups. The majority of the casualties took place in Darfur, according to the report.

Rape and sexual violence were also a major concern in Darfur, where the UN confirmed at least 372 children were victimized.

“In most cases, children were raped during attacks on their villages or while getting wood or water in the vicinity of camps for displaced people,” the report authors wrote.

Despite these ongoing atrocities, the report notes a positive trend in recruitment and use of children – with fewer being conscripted.

However, there are concerns about cross-border recruitment and use of children by Sudanese and South Sudanese groups, notably the SPLM/N, Sudan People's Liberation Army-in Opposition and Justice (SPLA-iO) and Equality Movement (JEM).

Since 2011, the Government of Sudan has strengthened its national framework to protect children and raised the minimum recruitment age for national forces to 18.

In addition, the UN has signed three Action Plans with national authorities to protect children, as well as separately with SPLM/N and JEM.

The Special Representative has called on the Government and all other parties to conflict to take concrete measures to protect children.