

UN rights expert 'deeply concerned' about reprisals against those she met on official visit to Myanmar

24 January 2017 – A United Nations expert warned today about possible reprisals against the people she met during her recent visit to the country, noting that she was particularly struck by the fear of some she spoke to “who were afraid of what would happen to them after talking to me.”

“There is one word that has hung heavily on my mind during this visit – reprisals,” the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, Yanghee Lee, said in a press statement wrapping up her 9 to 21 January mission to the country.

She said she is deeply concerned about those with whom she met and spoke, “those critical of the Government, those defending and advocating for the rights of others, and those who expressed their thoughts and opinions which did not conform to the narrative of those in the position of power.” Moreover, she noted the increasing use of section 66 (d) of the Telecommunications Law against many, “merely for speaking their minds.”

“It is particularly alarming to learn that the security forces’ counter operations in the villages of Maungdaw north in Rakhine state have reportedly been resumed following a brief lull, with raids conducted in several villages including nearby the villages I visited,” Ms. Lee stressed.

There are further allegations of arbitrary arrests and detention in relation to these latest reported raids.

The expert was especially dismayed to note that during the visit, feelings of optimism and hope had appeared to be fading among the country’s ordinary people – just one year after nationwide elation over the last general elections.

The Special Rapporteur regretted that due to security reasons, she was only allowed to go to Myitkyina, and not Laiza and Hpakant in Kachin, stating that the situation “at the northern borders is deteriorating.”

“Those in Kachin state tell me that the situation is now worse than at any point in the past few years. Whilst I was not able to travel to the areas most severely affected, the situation is now such that even in Myitkyina, the capital of the state and home to over 300,000 people, residents are afraid – and now stay home after dark,” the UN expert explained.

In visiting a hard labour camp in Mon state, Ms. Lee was concerned over prisoners’ living conditions, pointing to the use of shackles as a form of additional punishment and the lack of transparency regarding their transfer to the hard labour camp. Without an individual complaint system in prisons

she was “struck by the fear of those prisoners who were afraid of what would happen to them after speaking to me.”

A report from the visit will be presented in March to the UN Human Rights Council, the largest body of independent experts in the UN Human Rights system. Ms. Lee’s position is honorary and she does not receive a salary for her work.

[This is not a Charter for Budget Responsibility, it’s a ‘Charter for Alternative Facts’ – John McDonnell](#)

John

McDonnell MP, Labour’s Shadow Chancellor, speaking after the vote tonight on the revised Charter for Budget Responsibility, said:

“This is not a Charter for Budget Responsibility, it’s a ‘Charter for Alternative Facts’, as the Chancellor has tonight abolished the OBR’s ability to determine when a negative shock occurs. This represents a lack of confidence by the Chancellor in his ability to reach his own targets, as well as a rowing back of the welcome principles the OBR was created for – impartiality and credibility of fiscal policy.

“Instead of less scrutiny by the OBR, Labour would like to see more, such as our call for the Chancellor to give power to the OBR to assess short-medium term policy decisions on health spending. Given the last six years of Tory underfunding in our NHS alongside the Government’s denials of the resulting crisis, we need to restore not diminish the public’s faith in the Government’s spending plans.

“Under this new charter the OBR will assume the role of bystander rather than arbiter of whether or not the economy is facing a negative shock. This is a huge power grab by the Chancellor, as it means he can decide when and what such a “shock” will be, and therefore he can suspend his rules when he likes, and make up his

targets as he goes along.

“This

Charter also continues with the practice of lumping infrastructure spending in with day-to-day spending, meaning that there will be insufficient scope for investment in our economy, which could hinder growth and therefore our ability to reduce the national debt.

“Despite all the rhetoric of “pressing the reset button”, the Autumn Statement has shown that there would be a continuation of austerity cuts to public services. There is still no more money for the NHS and social care crisis, or for ESA and Universal Credit recipients facing cuts.

“Labour’s

Fiscal Credibility Rule would provide the adequate level of investment our economy needs, underpinned by independent oversight coming from both the MPC and a beefed up OBR, which would report to parliament and not the Treasury.”

[UN rights chief urges probe into Askarov case despite Kyrgyz decision to uphold life sentence](#)

24 January 2017 – The United Nations human rights chief today voiced deep concern about a decision by a Kyrgyz court to uphold a life sentence against human rights defender Azimjan Askarov, saying it highlights “serious shortcomings” in the country’s judicial system.

“The decision by the national court clearly had not taken into account the views of the UN Human Rights Committee which had found in March 2016 that Askarov had been arbitrarily detained, held in inhumane conditions, tortured and prevented from adequately preparing his defence,” UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein said in a statement.

“Despite the repeated commitment of the Kyrgyz authorities to uphold international fair trial standards and to resolutely investigate torture allegations, this trial vividly displayed the deficiencies in the country’s judicial and law enforcement system,” the High Commissioner added.

Reading the statement to reporters in Geneva, spokesperson for the High Commissioner’s Office (OHCHR) Ravina Shamdasani noted that the hearing allegedly relied on the same witness testimonies as in the first trial, and that the court-appointed interpreter for Mr. Askarov was repeatedly absent.

Ms. Shamdasani reiterated OHCHR's call for Askarov's conviction and sentence to be quashed and urged Kyrgyzstan to conduct "impartial, objective and thorough investigations and judicial proceedings in order to ensure justice for all."

Mr. Askarov was sentenced to life imprisonment and confiscation of his private property in November 2010 for the murder of a police officer, participation and organization of mass riots and incitement to inter-ethnic hatred.

His arrest is believed to be related to his peaceful activities as a human rights defender, particularly his documentation of inter-ethnic violence in the Jalal-Abad region in June 2010, OHCHR had said at the time of his original sentencing.

Mali: UN mission condemns attack on Kidal base that kills one 'blue helmet'

24 January 2017 – The United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) today condemned the attack on its camp in the country's restive northern region of Kidal, which left one 'blue helmet' dead and two others seriously wounded.

According to the UN, several mortar shots hit the MINUSMA camp in Aguelhok on Monday afternoon, killing a UN peacekeeper from Chad.

MINUSMA interim chief Koen Davidse strongly condemned the attack and expressed sincere condolences to the family of the deceased and wished a speedy and full recovery to the wounded.

Mr. Davidse reiterated that the attacks on MINUSMA will not weaken the mission's determination to fully implement its mandate to support the efforts of the Malian Government, the signatories of the Peace Agreement and the Malian people to achieve lasting peace and stability.

"This attack marks a dark and violent period in Mali. The criminal and bloody attacks of the last few days show that terrorism targets, without discrimination, the peace camp. I wish to express our gratitude and solidarity to the families of the many victims," he stated.

Responses to global ills must integrate peace and sustainable development, UN Member States told

24 January 2017 – United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres today highlighted the importance of recognizing the links between sustainable development and sustaining peace amid such intertwined global challenges as rising inequality, protracted conflicts and climate change.

“We need a global response that addresses the root causes of conflict, and integrates peace, sustainable development and human rights in a holistic way – from conception to execution,” Mr. Guterres told the UN General Assembly high-level dialogue, on ‘Building sustainable peace for all: synergies between the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and sustaining peace.’

The universal nature of the 2030 Agenda – adopted by the Assembly in September 2015 as a plan to tackle poverty, inequality and other global challenges – and its pledge to leave no one behind ties it to sustaining peace, he explained.

“Our priority is prevention – prevention of conflict, of the worst effects of natural disasters, and of other manmade threats to the cohesion and wellbeing of societies,” Mr. Guterres stressed, noting that the best means of prevention, and of sustaining peace, is inclusive and sustainable development.

Investing in sustaining peace means investing in basic services, bringing humanitarian and development agencies together, building more effective and accountable institutions, protecting human rights, promoting social cohesion and diversity, ensuring the meaningful participation of women and girls in all areas of society and moving to sustainable energy, he said.



A wide view of the Trusteeship Council Chamber during the General Assembly high-level dialogue on building sustainable peace for all. UN Photo/Manuel Elias

The Secretary-General cited two overriding challenges.

“First, education; education is a prerequisite for both peace and economic development. Good quality education systems can help transform societies, especially those affected by conflict [...] Second, youth unemployment deprives millions of young people of the opportunity to fulfil their potential, and plays a part in violent conflict and the rise of global terrorism.”

To tackle these global challenges, the United Nations must also be ready to reform, in particular in three major areas, including its strategy and

approach to peace. Indeed, he said, while peacekeeping missions consume about 70 per cent of the Organization's regular budget, many of them are deployed where there is no peace to maintain.

"We must prioritize the prevention of violent conflicts and the perpetuation of peace," he continued, also underscoring the need to reform the UN development system, as well as its administration.

Together with these reforms, it is crucial to build a new generation of partnerships, with governments, civil society, regional organizations, international financial institutions, academia and the business community and to implement the Addis Ababa Action Agenda on financing for development, he said.

In his remarks, General Assembly President Peter Thomson said that the history of the United Nations has been punctuated by both notable successes and some truly regrettable failures.

AUDIO: UN Secretary-General António Guterres says investing in education, finding decent jobs for young people and promoting social cohesion are just some of things that can be done to make the world safer, more resilient and sustainable. *Credit: UN News*

In April of last year, the General Assembly and the Security Council decided to advance a new approach to peace by adopting the so-called 'sustaining peace' resolutions in their respective chambers, thereby signalling a new cross-sectoral, comprehensive, and integrated approach to the maintenance of international peace and security.

He explained that those texts emphasize the importance of sustainable development to sustaining peace, and give special place to conflict prevention, gender equality, addressing root causes of conflict and protecting human rights.

"Taken in tandem, the 2030 Agenda and the [resolutions] make it clear that Member States regard sustainable development and sustaining peace are two agendas that stand or fall together," Mr. Thomson said, noting that today's dialogue is a tangible step to mutually reinforce commitment to that end.