

[New UN report reveals obstacles to combat impunity for conflict-related sexual violence in Ukraine](#)

16 February 2017 – Lack of laws, capacity and professional experience to effectively investigate and prosecute conflict-related sexual violence in Ukraine is not only resulting in widespread impunity, it is causing survivors of sexual violence to be “victimized twice”, according to a new United Nations human rights report.

“What’s the point of saying what happened to me? No one will be able to help and no one will be able to find those who did it. No one will punish them,” one survivor of sexual violence quoted in the report said.

The report, issued today by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), also revealed that beatings and electrocution on the genitals, rape, threats of rape and forced nudity were used to punish, humiliate or extract confessions. In the territory controlled by armed groups, sexual violence was also used to compel people in detention to hand over property or to do as the perpetrators demanded, as an explicit condition for their release.

The majority of the documented cases happened when people, both men and women, were detained by either Government forces or armed groups.

“[...] he told me that if I refused to write, perpetrators would bring my [...] daughter in and will make me watch how they take turns one after another to rape her. After that I filled in eight pages with the text they dictated to me,” read the report, citing a woman who was detained on conflict-related charges.

“The investigation and conviction of perpetrators of sexual violence is vital for the victims who are entitled to justice and redress,” said Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, underscoring that doing so can also have a decisive impact in preventing such crimes.

“Impunity encourages the criminals, for that is what they are, to continue.”

Furthermore, the report also noted that deteriorating economic situation, particularly in conflict-affected regions, combined with a breakdown of community ties due to conflict and displacement, has led some people to use harmful survival strategies and coping mechanisms that may increase the risk of sexual violence and trafficking.

The report was prepared by the UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine (HRMMU) – deployed to the country in March 2014 upon the invitation of the

Government of Ukraine – and looks at the period from 14 March 2014 to 31 January this year and covers all territory of the country, including the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, with a special focus on the eastern regions, parts of which are under the control of armed groups.

Lack of support for victims further complicated by restrictions placed by armed groups

The report also draws specific attention to the lack of support for victims, especially in areas of Donetsk and Luhansk controlled by armed groups.

Furthermore, medical professionals and state institutions throughout the country lack the specific knowledge and skills needed to deal with survivors of torture and conflict-related sexual violence.

In this situation, civil society organizations are stepping in through donor-funded programmes, as well as by various UN agencies and international organizations to offer support to the victims. However, these are mostly confined to urban areas and there is little or no assistance available in smaller towns and rural areas.

On top of this, restrictions imposed by the armed groups have hindered these organizations to carry out their programmes, particularly those linked to protection and psycho-social support and there are no real redress mechanisms available for victims in the territory controlled by armed groups, noted the report.

Iraq: UN health agency delivers medical aid to newly retaken areas of Mosul

16 February 2017 – The United Nations health agency has delivered medical supplies to parts of eastern Mosul, the Iraqi city liberated from the Islamic State (ISIL), where clinics are receiving an influx of people in urgent need of medical care.

The World Health Organization (WHO) said the supplies will support treatment of patients with infectious diseases, chronic conditions, diarrheal diseases and trauma cases who have been deprived of medical care.

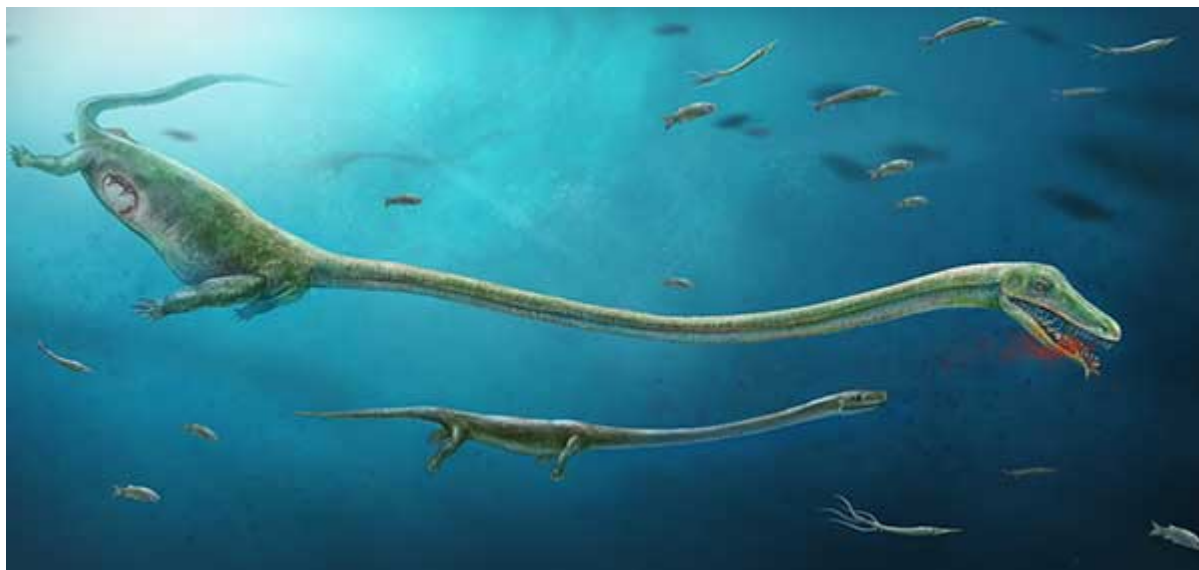
According to the press release, the supplies are a donation from the Government of Norway and include medicines, emergency health kits, surgical kits and an interagency diarrheal disease kits.

They were delivered to newly retaken areas of Mosul, including 16 primary health centres, one hospital and the Directorate of Health (DOH) of Ninewa

– the governorate which includes Mosul.

WHO has appealed for \$65 million to support health interventions in this part of Iraq through the end of the year. So far, \$14 million has been received.

Fossil offers clues to live births



An image released by Nature magazine in February shows a pregnant Dinocephalosaurus catching a fish. [Photo: China Daily]

A fossil of a long-necked marine reptile unearthed in Yunnan province shows the creature that lived millions of years before dinosaurs was developing an embryo, an indicator that it gave birth to live offspring, scientists said on Tuesday.

The discovery at the Luoping Biota National Geopark of the pregnant long-necked marine reptile that lived about 245 million years ago proved the live birth of the unusual fish-eating reptile, known as the Dinocephalosaurus, or terrible-headed lizard, according to research published in the journal Nature Communications.

“Our discovery pushes back evidence of reproductive biology in the group by roughly 50 million years, and shows that there is no fundamental reason to suggest that archosauromorphs, or ruling reptiles, did not give live birth,” said Liu Jun, the lead author of the research and a paleontologist at Hefei University of Technology in Anhui province.

“Evidence of live birth among this category has never been discovered. The findings have changed our understanding of the evolution of vertebrate reproductive systems,” he said.

Liu added that some reptiles – including about 20 percent of the world’s

9,400 species of snakes and lizards – give birth to live young.

The fossil was uncovered along with another 20,000 fossils at the geopark in 2008.

With the help of other researchers, Liu was able to restore the fossil to its original shape and identify the creature in 2011. It is now preserved at the Chengdu Institute of Geology and Mineral Resources.

“I think you’d be amazed to see it, with its tiny head and long snaky neck,” said Mike Benton, a paleontologist at the University of Bristol, who took part in the research.

The species had one of the longest necks relative to body size of any living creature to have existed. It was an estimated 4 meters long, with a slender neck roughly 1.7 meters long, Liu said. It had paddle-like flippers, a small head and a mouth with teeth, including large canines, perfect for snaring fish.

“The identification of the embryo as the reptile’s baby, rather than one of its hearty meals, proved key to the whole research.

“In aquatic amniotes, prey is usually swallowed head first and this orientation is maintained during digestion and disarticulation. Therefore, the neck-forward position of the embryonic skeleton suggests that the included skeleton was not ingested prey, but was an embryo,” the researchers wrote.

“We note that the embryo demonstrates the curled posture typical associated with vertebrate embryos.”

Liu said the fact that the Dinocephalosaur did not lay eggs has its advantages, as having live births would have been highly adaptive to reproduction in the sea.

“It is also an indicator that marine reptiles practically dominated the oceans at that time,” he added.

[Seaplane undergoing final tests](#)



AG-600, the world's largest amphibious aircraft, will have a maximum takeoff weight of 53.5 metric tons and a size roughly comparable to that of a Boeing 737. [Liang Xun / Xinhua]

The world's largest amphibious aircraft, the AG-600, will carry out its debut flight in the first half of the year and is due to begin delivery in 2021, its chief designer said.

Huang Lingcai of China Aviation Industry General Aircraft Co, the seaplane's developer based in Zhuhai, Guangdong province, said on Wednesday that engineers are carrying out final tests on the AG-600 that will conduct the first flight.

Another AG-600 is also undergoing in-house tests in Xi'an, Shaanxi province, he said, adding that 46 out of 53 tests have been completed.

After the tests are completed, pilots will train aboard both aircraft and then practice taxiing before the flight, he said.

"After the maiden flight, we will continue to conduct tests and experiments and finish the certification procedures around 2020. The first deliveries are due in 2021," Huang said.

China Aviation Industry General Aircraft, a subsidiary of State-owned aircraft giant Aviation Industry Corp of China, launched the AG-600 project in September 2009, aiming to fill China's lack of amphibious planes.

The Chinese Navy once had a handful of SH-5 maritime patrol amphibious aircraft, but they reportedly have been decommissioned.

Seventeen orders for the new aircraft have been received from Chinese

government departments and domestic enterprises, the company said. An aviation source who did not want to be named said the first user will be the State Forestry Administration.

The company said that the first trial run was made on Monday of the four WJ-6 turboprop engines installed on the AG-600 that will make the first flight.

The seaplane will have a maximum takeoff weight of 53.5 metric tons and a size roughly comparable to that of a Boeing 737. It will be the world's largest amphibious aircraft, surpassing Japan's ShinMaywa US-2 and Russia's Beriev Be-200, Huang said, adding that it will have an operational range of about 4,500 kilometers.

Qu Jingwen, general manager of China Aviation Industry General Aircraft, said the AG-600 will play an important role in forest fire control, maritime search and rescue, transportation of personnel and supplies to islands, and law enforcement tasks at sea.

Huang also said the seaplane can fly a round trip between Sanya, Hainan province, and the shoal of Zengmu Ansha, the southernmost point of China's territory, without refueling.

It is capable of carrying 50 people during a maritime search and rescue mission. To extinguish a forest fire, it can collect 12 metric tons of water from a nearby lake or sea within 20 seconds, information from the company shows.

Wu Peixin, an aviation industry observer in Beijing, said seaplanes such as the AG-600 are suited to maritime search and rescue because they can land on islands and on the surface of the sea, which makes them flexible and gives them a longer operation time compared with ordinary aircraft.

[Bike-sharing apps vow to prevent underage users](#)



A girl poses for a photo while sitting in the basket of a bike owned by Mobike, a bike-sharing service provider, at the Bund in Shanghai on New Year's Eve. [Gao Erqiang / China Daily]

The operators of three major bike-sharing apps have pledged to make their services less accessible to children in response to Shanghai traffic and education authorities' calls for improved safety.

China's traffic law bars children under the age of 12 from riding bikes and tricycles on roads, yet a rapid rise in the popularity of shared bikes in cities nationwide has resulted in more young people breaking that law.

After meeting with Shanghai officials on Saturday, operators of Mobike, Ofo and Bluegogo promised to revamp equipment and security procedures to block underage users from accessing their bikes.

"We will replace the mechanical locks on our bikes with smart ones, which will help put an end to illegal use by children," said Ren Baoluan, Ofo's public relations manager.

Netizens have said that Ofo's bikes are easy for children to access because their locks require only a four-digit combination, which some users forget to scramble when they finish their journey, meaning the bikes can then be ridden for free.

Ren said that with smart locks, which Mobike and Bluegogo bikes already have, users are only able to unlock a bike after receiving a dynamic password on their smartphone, and can only end the service once a bike is properly locked.

The companies said they will also jointly assign specialists to patrol key areas such as schools and parks, and cooperate with neighborhood committees to crack down on underage cyclists.

“We will place a warning sign on each of our bikes,” Ren added.

Authorities responded to the issue after receiving complaints that children had been seen racing bikes owned by the apps, which, in some cases, had resulted in injuries.

Statistics from the Shanghai Education Commission show that 245 non-motor-vehicle-related traffic accidents involving children under the age of 12 were reported in the city last year, causing one fatality and 85 injuries.

The total number of shared bikes – which are easy to rent through smartphone apps and can be parked at users’ convenience – in Shanghai, Beijing and Guangzhou has surpassed 100,000.

Cao Guoxing, head of public relations at Mobike, said that while backing efforts to prevent children from riding bikes on the road alone, they encourage children to learn how to cycle when accompanied by adults in a safe space.