

Houthi crimes highlighted at European Parliament

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BRUSSELS: The international community has been urged to do more to tackle human rights violations committed by the Iran-backed Houthis in Yemen.

And speakers at a special conference on the issue also called for the militia group's leaders to be prosecuted in international courts for their war crimes.

Atrocities carried out by the Houthis against women and children were among a catalogue of incidents highlighted at the recent meeting in Brussels organized by the Group of the European People's Party in the European Parliament.

Guest speaker, Dr. Wesam Basindawa, head of the Yemeni Coalition of Independent Women, told members of the European Parliament and representatives of EU institutions about cases of physical and sexual violence toward women and children, the recruiting of children as soldiers, and brutal attacks against minorities.

She said the Houthis had obstructed the delivery and distribution of humanitarian aid and carried out cross-border terrorist attacks on civilian targets in neighboring Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

The group had also turned schools and educational facilities into camps and weapons stores, breaching international humanitarian and human rights laws.

And she pointed out that religious and ethnic minorities in Yemen, such as the Jewish and Baha'i communities, had seen many of their rights and basic freedoms restricted by the Houthis.

Basindawa said: "We and the international community must do more work and put pressure on this terrorist militia, tighten sanctions against it, prosecute its leaders, and try them in international courts as war criminals."

MEP Isabella Tovaglieri, a member of the European Parliament Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality, said women were the worst-affected and most vulnerable category in conflict zones and needed to be protected against rape, kidnapping, forced marriage, and poverty.

"Europe should help women in peacebuilding and in conflict resolution," she added.

Addressing the conference, MEP Luisa Regimenti spoke about physical and psychological violence toward women and the importance of providing victim support services.

Another MEP, Ryszard Czarnecki, said the Houthis had targeted civilians

during attacks in Marib and at Al-Thwara hospital, adding that the group had set fire to an overcrowded detention center housing African refugees.

Also speaking at the conference was MEP and Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality member, Isabella Adinolfi. She noted the need to support female teachers, intellectuals, and journalists who were working to raise awareness about the humanitarian crisis in Yemen.

MEP Gianna Gancia said the war in Yemen had created a critical situation for women and girls and that "from the beginning of the conflict seven years ago, the EU had made diplomatic efforts and provided financial support to Yemen through humanitarian assistance and development."

Alessandra Illuticini, president of Progetto Donna 2021, told delegates of the atrocities meted out toward women in Houthi-controlled areas such as the forced wearing of niqabs, child marriage, honor killings, and domestic violence.

She pointed out the need to work closely with the UN and human rights organizations to empower women and protect them as well as support their fight for rights.

MEP Lucia Vuolo said: "Yemen remains one of the world's worst humanitarian crises. Conflict across Yemen continues to endanger civilians, trigger displacement, and damage civilian infrastructure such as hospitals and schools."

Simona Russo, coordinator of the Fight Impunity association, said the serious situation in Yemen was one "that we should not forget."

Program host, MEP Fulvio Martusciello, said he had been working for more than three years on raising awareness about the humanitarian crisis in Yemen.

He and his European Parliament colleagues had written to Joseph Borrell, high representative of the EU for foreign affairs and security policy, calling for the Houthis to be designated as a terrorist group.

MEP Anna Cinzia Bonfrisco said: "We need to encourage women peacebuilders and help them establish a dialogue between the different parties in Yemen. Women should be active members of the peace negotiations in Yemen."

Closing the session, conference moderator, Manel Msalmi, said the EU as a peace actor should work closely with civil society organizations in Yemen to empower female leaders.



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Houthis under fire for ruining peace efforts to end war

CHP investigates 1 124 confirmed and 1 091 asymptomatic additional SARS-CoV-2 virus cases with 2 308 cases pending status by nucleic acid tests as well

as 9 545 cases tested positive by rapid antigen tests (with photo)

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health (DH) today (March 21) announced the latest epidemic situation of COVID-19. As of 0.00am, March 21, the CHP was investigating 4 523 additional cases that tested positive for the SARS-CoV-2 virus by nucleic acid tests (1 124 confirmed cases, 1 091 asymptomatic cases and 2 308 cases with pending case status) in the past 24 hours. Separately, 9 545 additional positive cases through rapid antigen tests (RAT) (6 188 symptomatic cases and 3 357 asymptomatic cases) were reported. Hong Kong has recorded a total of 696 606 and 365 152 cases that tested positive by nucleic acid tests and RAT respectively for the SARS-CoV-2 virus so far.

The aforementioned newly reported cases consist of five imported cases and 4 518 locally acquired cases tested positive by nucleic acid tests, as well as 9 545 locally acquired cases tested positive by RAT. The CHP is continuing with epidemiological investigations on the cases. A list of buildings related to the cases is available at the "COVID-19 Thematic Website" (www.coronavirus.gov.hk).

In addition, as of 0.00am, March 21, a total of 5 906 deaths that have been tested positive for the SARS-CoV-2 virus during the fifth wave (since December 31, 2021) was recorded, with 5 879 and 27 deaths reported from the Hospital Authority and public mortuaries respectively. Hong Kong has so far recorded a total of 6 119 deaths that have been tested positive for the SARS-CoV-2 virus.

Furthermore, among the earlier cases by nucleic acid tests reported, there were cases (including pending cases) changed to confirmed, asymptomatic or re-positive cases. As at yesterday (March 20), the total number of confirmed cases was 277 061, while the figures for asymptomatic cases, re-positive cases, pending/unknown cases recorded since January 1 were 139 313, 10 and 275 699 respectively.

As a passenger flight (TK083) operated by Turkish Airlines arriving in Hong Kong from Istanbul, Turkey, on March 20 had three passengers who tested positive upon arrival, the DH thus invoked the Prevention and Control of Disease (Regulation of Cross-boundary Conveyances and Travellers) Regulation (Cap. 599H) to prohibit the landing of passenger flights in Hong Kong from Istanbul operated by Turkish Airlines from March 22 to April 4.

The spokesman for the CHP stressed that the local situation of COVID-19 infection became severe recently and there is a continuous increase in the number of cases involving mutant strains that carry higher transmissibility. With the higher transmissibility and risk of infection of the Omicron mutant strain, the CHP strongly appeals to the community to continue to comply with the social distancing measures, avoid going out and refrain from participating in unnecessary or crowded activities or gatherings

(particularly religious or cross-family activities and gatherings). This would lower the risk of infection and prevent the virus from spreading in the community.

The spokesman reminded that COVID-19 vaccines are highly effective in preventing severe cases and deaths from the SARS-CoV-2 virus. They can provide effective protection to those vaccinated in preventing serious complications and even death after infection. People who are yet to receive vaccination, especially senior citizens, chronic patients and other immunocompromised persons who face a higher chance of death after COVID-19 infection, should get vaccinated as early as possible for self-protection and to reduce the risk of falling seriously ill and death should they get infected. Meanwhile, a person who gets COVID-19 and influenza at the same time may be more seriously ill and would have a higher risk of death. Influenza vaccination may reduce the likelihood of hospitalisation and the length of stay. In addition, seasonal influenza vaccination is recommended for all persons aged 6 months or above except those with known contraindications. Persons at higher risk of getting influenza and its complications, including the elderly and children, should receive seasonal influenza vaccination early. Please see details of the vaccination schemes on the CHP's website (www.chp.gov.hk/en/features/17980.html).



[Government makes “restriction-testing declaration” and issues compulsory testing notice in respect of specified “restricted area” in Block 4, Po Tin Estate, Tuen Mun](#)

The Government today (March 18) exercised the power under the Prevention and Control of Disease (Compulsory Testing for Certain Persons) Regulation (Cap. 599J) to make a "restriction-testing declaration" effective from 4pm,

under which people (hereafter referred to as "persons subject to compulsory testing") within the specified "restricted area" in Tuen Mun (i.e. Block 4, Po Tin Estate, Tuen Mun, excluding unit 8 on G/F. See Annex.) are required to stay in their premises and undergo compulsory testing. Persons subject to compulsory testing are required to stay in their premises until all such persons identified in the "restricted area" have undergone testing and the test results are mostly ascertained. The Government aims at finishing this exercise at about noon tomorrow (March 19). The operation may be extended depending on test results.

A Government spokesman said, "Under Cap. 599J, the Government can, according to the needs of infection control, make a 'restriction-testing declaration'. As the sewage discharged from the above building was tested positive for COVID-19, it is suspected that there are asymptomatic patients in the building. Given the risk of infection in the relevant area is assessed to be likely higher, the Government decided to make a 'restriction-testing declaration' for the relevant area."

The Government will set up temporary specimen collection stations at the "restricted area" and request persons subject to compulsory testing to undergo testing before 9pm today. Arrangements will be made for persons subject to compulsory testing to undergo a nucleic acid test at specimen collection stations where dedicated staff will collect samples through combined nasal and throat swabs. Persons subject to compulsory testing must stay at their place of residence until all test results are ascertained to avoid cross-infection risk. The Government will make arrangement to facilitate specimen collection for people with impaired mobility. All persons in the "restricted area" who were tested positive for the SARS-CoV-2 virus on or after December 31, 2021, will not be required to undergo testing in this compulsory testing exercise.

The Government spokesman said, "We understand that this exercise will cause inconvenience to the public. The Government has made arrangements to carry out testing for all persons present in the 'restricted area' as soon as possible. The aim is to strive to complete testing of all identified persons subject to compulsory testing and confirm the results, and finish the exercise at around noon tomorrow. The Government will make a public announcement when the declaration expires officially. In the cases in which employees are unable to go to work because of the declaration, the Government hopes their employers can exercise discretion and not deduct the salaries or benefits of the employees."

If staying in the "restricted area" will cause unreasonable hardship to individuals who are not residents in the area when the declaration takes effect, government officers may exercise discretion and allow that person to leave the area after considering the individual circumstances. That person must have followed the instructions to undergo testing and leave his/her personal information for contact purposes.

According to the compulsory testing notice to be issued today, any persons other than those specified above who had been present at the above

building for more than two hours from March 5 to March 18, 2022, even if they were not present in the "restricted area" at the time when the declaration took effect, must undergo compulsory testing on or before March 20, 2022. As a mutant strain is involved, for prudence's sake, vaccinated persons and persons who have recently been tested are also required to undergo testing.

The Government appeals to persons subject to compulsory testing for their full co-operation by registering and undergoing testing, and waiting for the results patiently at home. The Government will strictly follow up on whether the persons concerned have complied with the compulsory testing notices and "restriction-testing declaration". Any person who fails to comply with the compulsory testing notices commits an offence and may be fined a fixed penalty of \$10,000. The person would also be issued with a compulsory testing order requiring him or her to undergo testing within a specified time frame. Failure to comply with the compulsory testing order or the "restriction-testing declaration" is an offence and the offender would be liable to a fine at level 4 (\$25,000) and imprisonment for six months.

Post-1990 electronic gazette copies available on Hong Kong e-Legislation

The Department of Justice (DoJ) has implemented a project to back capture printed gazettes published before 2000 to facilitate the access to as-made legislation. Over 7 500 electronic copies of Legal Supplements and selected Supplements to the Hong Kong Government Gazette published between 1990 to 1999 are now included in the Hong Kong e-Legislation (HKeL) for public access.

The e-gazette database under the HKeL covers Legal Supplements No. 1 (Ordinances), No. 2 (Subsidiary Legislation, etc), No. 3 (Bills) and No. 7 (Authentic Chinese Texts) as well as Supplement No. 6 (Private Bills only). Users can obtain and download their electronic copies through www.elegislation.gov.hk/gazette. In addition, the electronic copies are also accessible through hyperlinks under the enactment history of a chapter and under the source notes of individual provisions when viewing legislation under the HKeL.

The initiative is to make research into pre-2000 gazettes more convenient, as previously they are only available in printed version and are only accessible in the Hong Kong Central Library.

"It is hoped that the expanded e-gazette database would facilitate academic, legal and policy researches," a DoJ spokesperson said today (March 18).

The DoJ will continue to implement the project by phases to cover

further past gazettes published before 1990 in the forthcoming years.

Government announces latest situation of fresh food supply from Mainland

A Government spokesman announced today (March 18) that the supply of fresh food from the Mainland yesterday (March 17) was stable.

According to the latest information, the quantity of vegetables supplied from the Mainland to Hong Kong yesterday (as of midnight) by land and water transportation was over 2 300 tonnes, comparable to the average daily supply from the Mainland on a normal day. The volume of vegetables supplied from the Mainland to Hong Kong sold through the wholesale markets of the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) and the Vegetable Marketing Organization yesterday was about 744 tonnes. The average wholesale prices per catty for choi sum and pak choi stood at \$11.50 and \$7.20 respectively. The supply of eggs to the wholesale market remained steady, with the average daily supply standing at about 3.2 million for the past week, largely comparable to the average daily supply on a normal day.

The total supply of chilled meat from the Mainland yesterday was about 51 tonnes which was comparable to the supply on a normal day. The supply of live pigs was abundant.

The supply of chilled poultry from the Mainland was over 130 000 head yesterday and over 9 500 live chickens were slaughtered locally. The supply was fairly stable.

Regarding the rice supply, in compliance with the requirement of the Government, stockholders of rice have to maintain the reserve stock of rice at a level sufficient for consumption by the local population for 15 days. The trade generally stocks double the required amount, which is sufficient for one month's consumption by Hong Kong citizens. In recent years, the import and consumption of rice in Hong Kong has stood at a steady level of around 320 000 to 330 000 tonnes per year. The import quantity (including reserve stock) as of end-January 2022 was 30 400 tonnes. Suppliers also maintain a reserve for food that can be stored, such as frozen meat, for around three months' stock generally.

The Government will continue to maintain close liaison with the Mainland authorities and major food suppliers to ensure a stable food supply.

The AFCD updates and publishes the fresh food supply information daily. Members of the public may visit the AFCD website for updates on daily supplies and wholesale prices of fresh food (www.afcd.gov.hk/english/agriculture/agr_fresh/agr_fresh.html).