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War Crimes Prosecution Watch is a bi-weekly e-newsletter that compiles official documents and articles from major news sources detailing and analyzing salient issues pertaining to the investigation and prosecution of war crimes throughout the world. To subscribe, please email warcrimesswatch@pilpg.org and type "subscribe" in the subject line.

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AFRICA

NORTH AFRICA

Libya

International court drops case against slain Libyan general (AP News)

June 15, 2022

The International Criminal Court on Wednesday dropped its war crimes case against a Libyan general after prosecutors confirmed he was dead.

The decision came more than a year after Libyan officials reported that assailants killed Mahmoud al-Werfalli, a commander in the self-styled Libyan Arab Armed Forces, by opening fire on his car in the eastern city of Benghazi.

The court said judges terminated proceedings against Al-Werfalli after studying evidence that included witness statements, photographs and social media posts.

The judges "considered the death of Mr. Al-Werfalli to be established and, decided that the proceedings against him must accordingly be terminated, and that the warrants of arrest are no longer in effect," a court statement said.

Al-Werfalli was wanted by the ICC for his alleged role in executing or ordering the executions of 33 captives in Benghazi in 2016 and 2017. The ICC says the killings were filmed and posted on social media. In 2018, he allegedly shot 10 people dead in front of a mosque in Benghazi.

Libya descended into chaos in 2011 and has become a haven for Islamic militants and armed groups. The same year, the U.N. Security Council asked the court in The Hague to investigate violence sparked by the 2011 uprising that led to the ouster and death of Libya's longtime dictator, Moammar Gadhafi.

Human rights activists last year sent evidence to the ICC and called for an investigation into abuses of migrants in Libya that they said "may amount to crimes against humanity."

MSF urges more routes to evacuate refugees from Libya (The Irish Times)

By Sally Haden

June 23, 2022

International medical charity Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) is calling for more schemes to be developed by safe countries in Europe and North America to evacuate desperate refugees and migrants from Libya.

New routes to safety could include new humanitarian corridors, and the chance for people to be sponsored privately or given a new home through community sponsorship, MSF says, allowing safe countries to "assume their responsibilities" and "prevent further abuse, trafficking, violence and torture directed at people who already survived what the United Nations qualifies as crimes against humanity".

MSF has been working with migrants and refugees in Libya since 2016, one year before the EU began spending tens of millions of euro on supporting the Libyan coastguard, enabling it to intercept boats of people trying to reach Europe. Since then, close to 100,000 men, women and children have been caught on the Central Mediterranean and forcibly returned to Libya. There, they are generally locked up in detention centres that Pope Francis, among others, has compared with concentration camps.

In its new report, MSF said that for many migrants trapped in Libya, including those with "serious physical and mental conditions", along with victims of torture, there are "no safe options" in the North African country.

Refugees and migrants have two main ways to leave Libya, MSF says. There are so-called "voluntary humanitarian returns", organised by the International Organisation for Migration with EU funding. "Given the lack of alternatives, particularly for migrants in indefinite detention, the 'voluntary' nature of the return is highly debatable," MSF writes. More than 50,000 people were returned to countries including Somalia, Nigeria, the Gambia and Bangladesh between 2017 and 2021.

Far more restrictive is the chance of evacuation for refugees and asylum seekers who face danger if they return to their countries of origin. Only nine nationalities are allowed to register with the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) to be considered for evacuation, which usually involves being brought to transit centres in Rwanda or Niger before they may be resettled to countries in North America or Europe. Since 2017, about 7,500 people have been evacuated or resettled. The "primary responsibility" for the lack of evacuation spaces rests with safe countries that are not offering enough, says MSF.

In late 2021, more than 41,000 people were registered with UNHCR, though many others had been delisted after losing contact for a year or more. "UNHCR is cruelly short of slots in third countries, which leads to a strict prioritisation selection among those registered," MSF writes. In some cases, couples have been separated or minors have turned 18 and lost the chance to be prioritised.

Last October, an independent UN-appointed fact-finding mission found evidence that there are crimes against humanity and war crimes being carried out against refugees and migrants in Libya.

Despairing teen refugee found hanged in Libya detention centre (AlJazeera)

By Frederica Marsi

June 23, 2022

The picture of a 19-year-old's body hanging lifeless from the ceiling in one of the halls-cum-dorms of the Ain Zara detention centre, south of Libya's capital, Tripoli, is the latest evidence of the human cost of the country's detention centres.

Mohamed Mahmoud Abdel Aziz, a refugee from Sudan's war-torn region of Darfur, is believed to have killed himself on June 5 after being released and apprehended again in the span of two weeks.

Thousands of refugees and asylum seekers in Libya are languishing in the centres, trapped in endless cycles of detention and abuse with dire repercussions for their mental health and safety.

Asylum seekers who spoke to Al Jazeera from inside Ain Zara said Abdel Aziz's body was left hanging for hours in the room where he lived with hundreds of others.

Mustafa, another Sudanese asylum seeker who asked that his name be changed to protect his identity, told Al Jazeera the image of Abdel Aziz's body was taken covertly by detainees at the centre. Libyan authorities later confiscated phones to prevent the image from spreading, and dozens were not returned.

Mustafa said people trapped in the detention centre are growing increasingly desperate as they see little or no hope for the future.

"We have been here for five months," he said. "Mohamed got tired of this until he reached this level and he [killed himself]."
Set free, then detained again

Abdel Aziz and Mustafa had been arrested in an overnight raid while peacefully demonstrating for relocation, protection, and evacuation from Libya outside the United Nations' refugee agency (UNHCR) on January 10.

More than 600 people were violently arrested and detained that day. The protests followed a major crackdown in the western town of Gargaresh, a hub for asylum seekers from African countries, that displaced thousands of people and resulted in the detention of at least 5,000.

Abdel Aziz was set free on May 23 as part of a group of 99 asylum seekers, including 46 children, evacuated from Ain Zara with the support of UNHCR.

He likely spent days on the streets before being apprehended again by Libyan authorities and taken back to the centre, where he is believed to have taken his own life shortly after.

"He was given 500 dinar (\$104) but it was not enough to rent any room to stay in," Mustafa said. "The UNHCR makes you sign a paper saying they cannot help with accommodation."

The UNHCR told Al Jazeera in a written statement that it was "saddened by the tragic death of the young asylum seeker". It did not confirm the sum of assistance allocated but said the teenager had "received cash assistance in different instalments through our urban programmes".

The agency provided a copy of the consent form for transfer, which states: "UNHCR is NOT providing accommodation NOR can it arrange for accommodation."

As of May 22, the UNHCR estimates that there are 2,772 people held in detention centres across Libya.

The agency said it does not keep track of how many people are re-apprehended after being released with its support.

The Libyan authorities did not respond to requests for comment.

Hussein Baumi, Libya and Egypt campaigner at Amnesty International, told Al Jazeera detention centres in Libya operate with increasingly scarce oversight on the part of international organisations, including the UNHCR and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM).

Libyan authorities have closed centres run by the Directorate for Combatting Illegal Migration (DCIM) that were rife with abuse, but similar patterns of violations have been reproduced in newly opened or re-opened centres that are run by militias away from scrutiny.

Amnesty has documented torture, cruel and inhuman detention conditions, extortion and forced labour, as well as invasive, humiliating and violent strip searches inside detention facilities.

Even when someone is released, freedom is not guaranteed for long.

"A lot of people who are released are captured again, sometimes by the same militias," Baumi said, adding that detention is often lucrative for armed groups who ask for ransom. "It is not a safe space for migrants and asylum seekers."

For those who were hoping to pass through Libya on their way to Europe, that is often not an option.

The European Union has spent more than 57.2 million euros (\$64.8m) in Libya, with the declared objective of "sav[ing] the lives of those making dangerous journeys by sea or land", according to a fact sheet published by the European Commission in June 2021.

It has trained and equipped the Libyan coastguard to intercept boats of refugees and migrants hoping to make it to Europe and return them to Libyan shores. Human rights watchdogs have long decried the alleged conduct of the coastguard, including the use of firearms and the deliberate damaging of boats.

So far in 2022, at least 8,860 asylum seekers, refugees and migrants have been reported as intercepted by the Libyan coastguard and other naval authorities.

“People take boats knowing that they might die,” Baumi said.

“This is the only way for them to escape mistreatment in Libya.”

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CENTRAL AFRICA

Central African Republic

**Official Website of the International Criminal Court
ICC Public Documents - Cases: Central African Republic**

'De facto lethargy' in Central African Republic, despite escalating attacks (UN News)

June 22, 2022

Efforts are underway to reinvigorate the Central African Republic's political process, which has lapsed into a state of "de facto lethargy" even as horrific attacks against civilians have risen, the senior UN official in the country told the Security Council on Wednesday.

“The fears legitimately nurtured by the civilian populations who are still suffering the harmful effects of persistent ceasefire violations [...] continue to be reported,” said Valentine Rugwabiza, the Secretary-General's Special Representative for the Central African Republic and Head of the UN's peacekeeping mission in the country, known by its French acronym, MINUSCA.

Noting that the mission maintains a frank and constructive dialogue with the CAR Government on human rights, she said it is working with authorities on the ground to adopt preventive measures, combat impunity and rehabilitate victims.

Decade of violence

While CAR had been registering positive steps towards restoring peace and stability, following the adoption of its Joint Road Map for Peace in October 2021, many report that progress is now languishing.

The Road Map was itself an attempt to more fully implement a 2019 peace agreement, known as the Khartoum Accord, which was signed between the Government and 14 non-State armed groups.

CAR has been grappling with conflict since 2012, as fighting between the mostly Christian anti-Balaka militia and the mainly Muslim Séléka rebel coalition killed thousands and left two out of three civilians dependent on humanitarian aid.

Despite the holding of a “republican dialogue” involving several constituent groups in March, recent weeks have seen fresh attacks against civilians by non-State groups, as well as militias affiliated with the Government.

Targeted attacks against humanitarian workers and certain ethnic groups, including the Fulani and the Gbaya, have also been reported. Remobilizing partners

Briefing the Council on UN efforts to address those violations and accelerate the CAR's political process, the Special Representative said MINUSCA is working to strengthen trust with authorities and re-engage partners.

On 4 June, a Strategic Review Meeting was held with the participation of key partners Angola and Rwanda — as well as the Economic Community of Central African States and others — in an effort to remobilize both the wider region and the global community against violence.

The meeting also resulted in the sovereign decision by the CAR authorities to establish a permanent platform for the strategic review of the political process, Ms. Rugwabiza said.

Staying ‘as long as it takes’

Requesting the 15-member Council’s unanimous support, she urged the Government to expedite the implementation of recommendations stemming from the recent republican dialogue.

The cessation of hostilities throughout CAR remains both an immediate objective and a gauge of the Joint Roadmap’s credibility, she added, underlining the need for “consensual dissuasive measures” against those parties who do not uphold their commitments.

Meanwhile, she pledged MINUSCA’s support to the CAR Government “for as long as it takes” to rebuild the capacities needed for more professional defence and security forces.

Remarks at a UN Security Council Briefing on the Central African Republic (United States Mission to the United Nations)

June 22, 2022

Thank you, SRSR Rugwabiza, for an informative briefing. My delegation wants to start by congratulating you on a productive beginning to your tenure at the helm of MINUSCA and commend you for the leadership you’re demonstrating. Thank you. I particularly want to thank, as well, Ms. Lina Ekomo for her very compelling, very brave briefing to us today. It’s important that we get ground truth from activists like you, and thank you for appearing today.

In light of the briefings we’ve just heard, my remarks today will address three themes: first, the contributions of MINUSCA toward peace and security in the Central African Republic; second, the need for continuing steps towards a political solution to the country’s conflict; and lastly, the continued human rights abuses and threat to regional stability from Kremlin-backed Wagner Group forces.

First, thanks to the daily work of peacekeepers and the commitment of their contributing countries, MINUSCA has continued to make critical contributions to protecting civilians and supporting implementation of the 2019 peace agreement. As the Secretary-General’s report notes, MINUSCA’s increasingly robust posture, coupled with joint operations with Central African security forces, has successfully ousted several armed groups and safeguarded towns.

My delegation also wants to likewise applaud SRSR Rugwabiza’s initiative in addressing the scourge of sexual exploitation and abuse through enhanced training and accountability mechanisms. We remain concerned, however, that Central African armed forces, in many cases in our assessment likely directed by the Wagner Group, perpetrated 23 violations of MINUSCA’s status-of-forces agreement over the last four months. We further condemn, as others have, disinformation campaigns targeting MINUSCA, which impedes mandate implementation and puts peacekeepers’ lives in danger.

The second point I’d like to make is that there is no military-only solution to CAR’s crisis. The only way forward is through full implementation of the 2019 peace agreement and sustained state authority across the country that is responsive to the needs of Central Africans, as well as justice for victims. To that end, I echo Ms. Lina’s call for the CAR government’s initiative to advance the peace process and commend the leadership of Rwanda and Angola in supporting it through the regional roadmap. Recent progress on disarmament, demobilization, reintegration, and repatriation, such as the demobilization of more than 700 former LRA members, are encouraging steps. All actors in country must respect formal disarmament, demobilization, reintegration, and repatriation processes, which are as fundamental to the success of the 2019 peace agreement as its other core tenets, to include honoring President Touadera’s ceasefire and strengthening relations between CAR and its neighbors.

Madam President, my third and final point is on upholding accountability for perpetrators of human rights violations and abuses. Like others, we celebrate the progress of the Special Criminal Court, which recently opened its first trial. This is an important milestone in ensuring truth and accountability for those afflicted by conflict. Unfortunately, one of the worst offenders of human rights abuses is the Wagner Group, whose forces, which are referred to as “other security personnel” in the Secretary-General’s report, perpetrated 42 incidents of human rights abuses during the reporting period, affecting 165 victims, often in the presence of national defense forces. Independent investigations corroborate this account, including a recent Human Rights Watch report that confirmed the Wagner Group has “summarily executed, tortured, and beaten civilians” across the country since 2019.

We call on the Russian government and the Central African Republic government, through its Special Commission of Inquiry, to investigate all allegations transparently and hold accountable those responsible for these heinous acts. We are deeply concerned by reports that Wagner forces have detained and killed peacebuilders and former combatants who willingly participated in DDR processes. Wagner's assassination of Zakaria Demane in February shocked many Central Africans. As the Secretary-General's report highlights, Wagner forces have rearmed ex-combatants, creating their own unaccountable proxy militias, and have interfered with MINUSCA's operations, hindering the peacekeepers' ability to implement mandated tasks. The illicit extraction of CAR's mineral wealth remains a key driver of Wagner's activities, in addition to those of non-state armed groups and other actors. Promoting responsible natural resource management and combating the related corruption are critical for peace and prosperity in the country.

In conclusion, we once again call on all actors in CAR to lay down their weapons. The people of CAR deserve a political solution that will end their suffering. Thank you, Madam President.

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Sudan & South Sudan

**Official Website of the International Criminal Court
ICC Public Documents - Situation in Darfur, Sudan**

A Chance for Peace in Darfur? (Al-Ahram)

By Asmaa Al-Husseini

June 21, 2022

The Rezeigat and Misseriya tribes signed a reconciliation agreement on Saturday following clashes that led to the death of hundreds, injury of thousands, and displacement of tens of thousands of Sudanese.

Present at the signing, which took place in a festive atmosphere in Al-Geneina, west Darfur, were – among other, high-level Sudanese officials – Vice President of the Sovereignty Council and Commander of the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), Lieutenant General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, aka Hemeti.

The signatories and attendees expressed their hope that the agreement would end war and destruction in Darfur, which has endured heavy fighting since 2003. According to UN estimates, some 300,000 Sudanese died and three million people were displaced in clashes during the reign of toppled president Omar Al-Bashir. However, the Sudanese government put the death toll at 10,000.

The war in Darfur led the UN Security Council to charge Al-Bashir and a number of his aides at the International Criminal Court with genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity.

During his speech at the signing ceremony, Hemeti said the Sudanese government will not allow chaos, the lack of security, and crimes to persist. He added that the regular forces will stop attempts to sabotage the state, pledging to put in place tight security plans. Peace should be ensured through “deterrence and the extension of respect for the state” and rule of law, Hemeti stated.

He also expressed the hope that the reconciliation agreement will end clashes between the Rezeigat and Misseriya tribes once and for all.

Masar Abdelrahman Aseel, one of Rezeigat's tribal leaders, said the clan will work on closing all the loopholes in the reconciliation, making it a model to emulate, and calling for a permanent, comprehensive solution.

Despite the ray of hope the agreement gave to stop bloodshed and find Darfur's lost peace, many observers from Darfur and other parts of Sudan opined that bloodshed and destruction in the region will only stop through real, tangible measures on the ground.

Amir Hafez Al-Sheikh, one of the leaders of the Misseriya tribe, said the war that erupted between the two tribes led to killing, displacement and burning of villages, stressing the need to impose the “respect for the state” by increasing security vehicles to deter outlaws. He noted that there are reasons that fuel conflicts between tribes, such as the emergence of tribal fanaticism,

partisan and regional polarisation on social media, as well as extremist ideologies.

Sudanese author and political analyst Fayez Al-Salik told Al-Ahram Weekly controlling the situation in Darfur is extremely complicated amid the lack of security. Stability in Darfur is not granted, even after the reconciliation agreement, due to the spread of weapons among Arab and non-Arab tribes, and the common notion that every group has to protect itself and earn its rights by the power of arms, he added. Al-Salik pointed out that all the parties want to control Darfur's resources, especially gold.

Failure to address the roots of the problem indicates that conflicts may erupt at any time, and without seizing weapons, achieving development, enforcing stability and the presence of forces that can impose respect for the state, conflicts will not stop nor will peace prevail in Darfur, he noted.

Sudanese author and political analyst Abdul-Azim Shawki told the Weekly that the government's plan is based on the heavy deployment of security forces to enforce the law, chasing down criminals and punishing them. He believes that "the state is accused in some cases of being a partner in those crimes, or turning a blind eye to some crimes, often failing to catch the culprits, possibly lacking the necessary capabilities."

Shawki said that tribal interests sometimes outweigh the higher interests of Sudan, with some tribal members enrolled in the RSF or the army turning a blind eye to conflicts in their tribes to tip the scale in their tribe's favour.

Al-Bashir's regime used to orchestrate battles and arm tribes, Shawki added, pointing out that the recent events in Darfur are the outcome of the practices of Al-Bashir, whose forces launched attacks on some areas with Antonov planes.

For the state to enforce respect, Shawki stated, resources for development are needed. Respect cannot be imposed by force of arms because the borders are expansive. He explained that the withdrawal of UNAMID in 2020 had a negative impact on Sudan's security, stressing that despite criticisms directed at UNAMID and attempts to weaken it by the previous regime, it was still recording violations.

Making matters worse is the plummeting economic conditions in Sudan and tribal aspirations to control other tribes. Gold mining and the rise of the price of land is another reason why peace is difficult to attain, Shawki said.

Partial and security solutions and empty promises are not enough to solve the problem in Darfur, he noted, stressing that development, the permanent presence of security forces, improving living conditions, and disarming people and tribes are the means for peace to prevail.

Adam Rigal, the spokesman of the General Coordination of Displaced Persons and Refugees in Darfur, concurred, saying that the present calm in Darfur is not indication enough of security as long as the real causes of the conflict are still present. All the committees concerned with investigating the massacres and violent incidents that took place in Darfur since the fall of the previous regime have not revealed their results, he added.

Sudanese journalist Al-Sir Al-Sayed believes that the crisis in Sudan needs to be resolved at a grassroots level to avoid tribal strife, racism and hate speech, stressing the importance of the strict application of the law.

The problem, however, is that tribal strife is rearing its ugly head extensively over all of Sudan once more. Many Sudanese observers and politicians believe that before solving tribal problems the crises of the centre of Sudan should be addressed first.

At present, Sudan is suffering from political tensions, security fragility, economic and social deterioration, which exacerbates the crises in the far stretches of the country, threatened with more flare-ups and armed confrontations if the political conflicts in Khartoum are not resolved.

The UN warned that 40 per cent of the Sudanese population is threatened with starvation. Moreover, regional and international conditions are casting heavy shadows over Sudan, making matters worse on all fronts.

Growing Violence in Sudan's Darfur Revion Raises Fears of Another War (The National)

By Hamza Hendawi

June 25, 2022

Tucked away in the vast arid lands of western Sudan, Darfur may be on the brink of an abyss, with thousands killed or injured and tens of thousands displaced in the latest wave of tribal clashes to afflict the region.

Ominously, the underlying causes of the unrest — land disputes between Arab herdsmen and ethnic African farmers — are in large part those that ignited Darfur's civil war of the 2000s in which 300,000 people died and 2.5 million were displaced.

The widespread use of rape and kidnappings during that war left a much deeper scar on the ethnically and religiously diverse nation than those caused by other conflicts that have beset Sudan since independence from Britain in 1956.

Feeding the potential for a fully-fledged conflict in Darfur is the preoccupation in Khartoum with the political crisis that began in October when army chief Gen Abdel Fattah Al Burhan derailed the country's fragile transition to democracy.

The wave of deadly protests against the coup across much of Sudan has also fed a climate of instability that, coupled with economic problems and the presence of armed groups operating outside the army's control, has inspired lawlessness in far-flung areas like Darfur, campaigners say.

Another factor is the withdrawal last year from Darfur of UN peacekeepers who protected the hundreds of thousands of displaced Darfurians living in camps.

War in Darfur would have disastrous consequences for Sudan, taking away any chance of a political resolution of its political crisis and speeding it closer to economic meltdown.

Gen Al Burhan, who insists his coup spared the country a civil war, blames all of Sudan's woes, including the resurgence of violence in Darfur, on what he says is the failure of civilian political groups to agree on a political future.

"The political infighting is effectively the very thing that's responsible for these events [in Darfur] and everything else that will happen in Sudan," Gen Al Burhan told a television interviewer last week. Up to 400 people were killed in Darfur in the past month, he said.

The UN said violence in western Sudan this month displaced more than 84,000 people, doubling the number of those driven from their homes this year. Last year, at least 440,500 were displaced, five times more than in 2020, the UN said.

A peacekeeping force mandated by a 2020 peace deal between Darfur rebel groups and Khartoum has yet to be put to work.

Gen Al Burhan has complained that the West has yet to honour pledges to bankroll the implementation of the accords, which call for the integration of rebels into the armed forces and the return home of the displaced.

The West has suspended billions of dollars' worth of aid and debt forgiveness in response to the October coup.

On Wednesday, the NGO Human Rights Watch said the civilian-led government toppled by the military in October and the military rulers who seized power have failed to provide adequate protection for Darfur after peacekeepers left there in 2021, or to address causes of the conflict.

Gen Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, whose paramilitary Rapid Support Forces has its roots in the Arab militias that fought on the government side against rebels in Darfur in the 2000s, has been touring the region in an effort to end the violence.

He has vowed he will not return to Khartoum until Darfur's problems are resolved.

It is a tall order given the complexity of Darfur's problems, the government's lack of sufficient resources to enforce law and order, compensate victims of years of violence or restore lands illegally seized by rival groups to their lawful owners.

A native of Darfur, Gen Dagalo led the Arab Janjaweed militia that fought on the government's side during the war in the 2000s and whose fighters are suspected of war crimes against civilians.

Former dictator Omar Al Bashir, who was toppled by the military in 2019, and several of his aides were indicted by the International Criminal Court more than a decade ago for genocide and war crimes in Darfur. Only one of Al Bashir's aides is in custody in The Hague.

Gen Dagalo, who is now deputy head of Sudan's ruling military-led Sovereign Council, has denied accusations that his Rapid Support Forces were involved in the latest violence in Darfur, saying the charges were unfair.

During his tour of Darfur, he accused parties he did not name of being behind the violence.

"We must be smart and find out who is behind these consecutive and continuing disasters. Who is behind the hate and racist speech ... we must discover our real enemy who walks among us sowing sedition," he said.

He acknowledged that the ruling military must take some of the blame.

"I confess that the state has been negligent in carrying out its duties; namely to impose its authority, shoulder its responsibility in maintaining security and going after saboteurs and criminals," Gen Dagalo said.

Darfur activist Moussa Dawoud traces the roots of the Darfur crisis to the 1980s — nearly two decades before war broke out there — saying the problems began when prime minister Sadeq Al Mahdi armed Arab tribesmen in 1986-1987 to reward them for supporting him in the 1986 general election.

“The fragility of society in Darfur has been taken advantage of by many,” Mr Dawoud said. “It is not always African versus Arab in Darfur as many think. Arab versus Arab is very common. The problems in Darfur are many and you cannot just blame one party and not the other.”

Another Darfur activist, Mohammed Bashir, views the problems in Darfur in a broader context, arguing that only when Sudan’s “general” problems are resolved will there be peace in Darfur.

“It is a conflict over land and resources and there’s also the settlement there by citizens of neighbouring countries,” said Mr Bashir, who contends that integrating rebels and members of Gen Dagalo’s paramilitary force into the armed forces is essential for peace in Darfur.

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Democratic Republic of the Congo

Official Website of the International Criminal Court

ICC Public Documents - Situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

DR Congo Gov’t Not Doing Enough to Eradicate Sexual Violence (Peace Nobelist)

By Chief Bisong Etahoben

June 20, 2022

Dr Denis Mukwege, Democratic Republic of Congo Nobel Peace Prize winner, has lamented the government’s lack of the political will to eradicate sexual violence during conflicts.

The Nobel laureate was speaking on Sunday, June 19, during the International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence During Times of Conflict celebration.

“Rape and sexual violence are used in all contemporary conflicts throughout the world, such as the current situation in Ukraine,” Dr Mukwege said.

Dr Mukwege, who is a gynaecologist, received the Nobel Peace Prize in 2018 for his actions favouring women who are victims of rape used as an arm of war.

“We notice with a shock that there is sometimes a lack of political will, that the financial means are insufficient,” he added.

Dr Mukwege argued that the “culture of impunity from which the authors and instigators of these acts benefit remains the norm and not the exception.”

“We call on the new community of states and the financial sponsors to mobilise human and financial means to combat the consequences of sexual violence committed during conflicts and to redouble efforts to prevent the repetition of these crimes.”

According to him, “it is also fundamental to ensure the promotion of equality between women and men and the active participation of women in politics”.

“Those who tolerate or order the transformation of the bodies of women and young girls, as well as men and young boys into battlefields, must be brought before the international community.”

“They must be banned from travelling and being issued visas, and their financial resources must be frozen without further delay.”

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WEST AFRICA

Côte d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast)

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Lake Chad Region – Chad, Nigeria, Niger, and Cameroon

ISWAP kills 16, kidnap aid workers in Borno (Daily Post)

By John Gabriel
June 19, 2022

Gunmen suspected to be members of the Islamic State West African Province (ISWAP) in Borno State, have reportedly killed 16 people in a coordinated attack

A source who disclosed this to DAILY POST on Sunday, claimed three members of the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF), are among those killed in the attack.

Other deceased victims of the attack according to sources include 13 metal scavengers who were shot dead by ISWAP fighters in Goni Kurmi village in Bama Local Government Area of the state on Saturday.

The source said the fighters, who came in about four utility vehicles and some others riding on motorcycles, surrounded the areas before unleashing terror on them.

Dozens of residents and others have now fled the area, said the source.

He said they abducted humanitarian workers in the northern part of Borno State on Friday. The incident occurred in Monguno Local Government Area Friday night.

It was also learnt that the attackers who stormed the town through the axis of Marte, through the Gana Ari community in Monguno, went straight to a compound of humanitarian workers and began shooting sporadically, wounding one person in the process.

“They attempted to steal three vehicles but could not take them out of the compound. They later abducted three workers and left the compound,” the source said.

The Nigerian Army was yet to issue any statement on the latest attack at the time of filing this report last night.

Six Nigerian Soldiers, Five Hunters Killed As Boko Haram Attacks Borno, Adamawa (Sahara Reporters)

June 28, 2022

Five Nigerian Army personnel have been killed after a military convoy struck an improvised explosive device (IED) in Baga, Borno State, as confirmed by the Islamic State-backed faction of Boko Haram, the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), formerly known as Jamā'at Ahl as-Sunnah lid-Da'wah wa'l-Jihād.

ISWAP in a post sighted by SaharaReporters on Monday night also said another soldier and five hunters were killed when its “fighters attacked Boloko village in the Adamawa State on June 24.”

It described Boloko as a “Christian community, hence the attack.”

Since the death of JAS leader, Abubakar Shekau, ISWAP has been consolidating its grip in locations around Lake Chad.

Just recently, it appointed Wali Sani Shuwaram, a 45-year-old as the new Leader (Wali) of ISWAP in Lake Chad.

The sect's membership has swollen with the defection of hundreds of Boko Haram fighters under Shekau.

The Nigerian Army has repeatedly claimed that insurgency had been largely defeated and frequently underplays any losses.

The terror group has caused over 50,000 deaths and displaced millions of individuals mainly in Adamawa, Borno, and Yobe states.

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Mali

Victims of Mali Violence Seek Closure At National Reckoning (Channels Television)

June 16, 2022

In a darkened hall in the capital Bamako, people are telling their own, personal horror stories from Mali's long-running conflict, even as the country weathers a renewed wave of unrest.

Mali's truth and reconciliation process is helping nearly 30,000 victims of violence to share their testimony and seek closure.

Last week a woman shrouded in a veil to conceal her identity took to the stage to recount her ordeal to the Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission.

"I was raped by seven people, in front of my 15-year-old child," she said.

The attack happened in 2012 in the northern city of Gao, the first major northern city to fall into the hands of pro-independence rebels and jihadists who had united to seize the territory.

Ten years on, Gao has been recaptured by government forces but Mali is still in turmoil.

Her disclosures, broadcast live on national television and social media, shocked many in the room, which was silenced by her testimony.

Abdoulaye Toure, a 32-year-old member of a local NGO, said he "did not know what to say in the face of such horrors".

"I cried a lot, I was in pain," said Fabiola Wizeye Ngeruka, an expert in the issue of gender-based violence with the UN.

"I was in pain when I heard these housewives who have nothing, who have lived through 10 years of suffering, and it's only today that we can listen to their voices.

"All the victims said 'we want a peaceful Mali', that's really all we can ask: peace in Mali," she said.

– Violence spreading – The commission was set up in 2015 when pro-independence insurgents in the north signed peace accords with the government they had fought against.

It is one of a number of mechanisms meant to help reconcile Malians.

But the jihadists have continued their expansion and the violence has spread further south and into neighbouring countries.

In public hearings over the past two years, the commission has heard from victims of a litany of crimes committed since independence in 1960.

Mali's modern history has been marred by coups, military dictatorships, Tuareg rebellions and since 2012 a spiral of violence in which jihadists affiliated to Al-Qaeda or the Islamic State group have created chaos.

Civilians have borne the brunt of the unrest with a recent UN report raising the alarm that recent months were the deadliest in

years for ordinary Malians.

The commission's investigators, who are scattered across the country, collected testimony from 28,877 victims.

"At each, before we started, we asked if they were ready for forgiveness and reconciliation," said Ousmane Oumarou Sidibe, the commission's head.

"We were surprised, everyone said yes. But the question remains about the conditions of this forgiveness.

– The 'conditions of forgiveness' – "The process of catharsis is long-term work that should not be carried by the commission alone," said Sidibe.

The most important thing, he added, was "that everyone finds their place in the country".

The commission will serve as a basis for further efforts.

The idea of financial reparations is being studied, Prime Minister Choguel Kokalla Maiga has said.

The question of justice for perpetrators of crimes is ever-present, as it was at similar commissions elsewhere in Africa with its head stressing it "is not a court".

The commission is "a formidable tool that has done important work," said Ibrahim Maiga, a Sahel researcher at the International Crisis Group.

"We have to see how to capitalise on this work, what role the structure that will take over from (it) could play," he said.

And some of those involved in the process believe that peace is impossible without engaging the jihadists themselves.

Mali: Latest attack against UN peacekeepers leaves Guinean 'blue helmet' dead (United Nations)

June 19, 2022

The Secretary-General strongly condemned on Sunday, an attack in Kidal, a city in northern Mali, against a convoy of UN peacekeepers that claimed the life of a blue helmet.

The Guinean peacekeeper was killed by an improvised explosive device, which detonated during a UN Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) mine detection operation.

"The Secretary-General conveys his heartfelt condolences to the family of the victim and his brothers in arms, as well as to the people and authorities of Guinea," Deputy Spokesperson Farhan Haq said in a message on behalf of the UN chief.

Possible war crime Mr. Guterres recalled that under international law, attacks targeting UN peacekeepers may constitute war crimes.

He called on the Malian authorities to "spare no effort" in identifying the perpetrators so that they can swiftly be brought to justice.

"The Secretary-General reaffirms the solidarity of the United Nations with the people and authorities of Mali in their pursuit of peace and security," the message concluded.

Not the first IED attack At the same time, the UN Special Representative for Mali and MINUSMA head, El-Ghassim Wane, also firmly denounced the attack and extended his deepest condolences to the Government of the deceased peacekeeper and his family.

Since the beginning of the year, several attacks involving IEDs have been recorded against MINUSMA uniformed personnel, which have killed a number of peacekeepers and injured others.

"This latest incident illustrates, once again, the complexity of the environment in which the Mission operates and of the security challenges it faces on a daily basis," said Mr. El-Ghassim Wane.

"I salute the commitment of our Explosive Ordnance Disposal teams who put their lives at risk to preserve those of their colleagues and the civilian population," he added. "Their role is crucial to the conduct of our operations".

The Special Representative reaffirmed the Mission's commitment to continue to implement its mandate in the pursuit of peace and security in Mali.

Armed Men Kill at Least 20 Civilians in Mali (VOA)

June 20, 2022

Raiders in Mali killed at least 20 civilians in attacks on villages near the northern town of Gao over the weekend, while a landmine killed a U.N. peacekeeper in the troubled region.

"Criminal terrorists" on Saturday killed at least 20 civilians in several hamlets in the Anchawadj commune, a few dozen kilometers north of Gao, said a senior police officer, who asked to remain anonymous.

A local official blamed the attacks on jihadists and put the death toll at 24, saying the killings occurred at Ebak, some 35 kilometers (23 miles) north of Gao, the region's main town.

The official described a "general panic" in the area.

The situation in Anchawadj was "very concerning," and civilians were fleeing the area fearing further violence, he added.

Peacekeeper killed

Following the bloodshed on Saturday, a landmine killed a U.N. peacekeeper on Sunday as he was out on patrol further north in Kidal, the head of the U.N.'s MINUSMA Mali force, El Ghassim Wane, tweeted.

The spokesperson for U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres condemned the killing of the peacekeeper, who he said was from Guinea.

"Attacks targeting United Nations peacekeepers may constitute war crimes under international law," deputy spokesman Farhan Haq said.

While there has been no official confirmation that the attacks were carried out by jihadist groups, fighters affiliated to either al-Qaida or the Islamic State group are active in the region.

Growing unrest

The region has become increasingly violent and unstable since Tuareg separatist rebels rose up against the government in 2012.

Jihadist fighters took advantage of their rebellion to launch their own offensive, threatening the capital Bamako in the south until a French-led force pushed them back in 2013.

The Tuareg separatists and the government agreed to a peace accord in 2015, but it has yet to be applied.

So now Mali's weak, national government faces both separatist and jihadist insurgencies in the north of the country — a largely desert region that is all but devoid of state infrastructure.

"A good part of the Gao region and that of Menaka" are occupied by the jihadists, said the official in Gao. "The state must do something."

Some of the rebel groups have also been fighting each other as they battle for influence and territory. Adding to the volatile mix are traffickers and other criminal groups.

Government stability meanwhile has been interrupted by military coups in August 2020 and May 2021.

Following his latest report into the area, U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres last month warned that instability in Mali and Burkina Faso were undermining attempts to stabilize the region.

The security situation in the Gao region had badly deteriorated in recent months, he said.

He also voiced concern over Menaka, the eastern region bordering Niger.

Initially captured by a Tuareg rebel group a decade ago, it was subsequently taken over by Islamist groups.

More than 100 civilians killed in Mali attacks: Gov't (ALJAZZERA)

June 20, 2022

Government says 132 people killed as armed group attacks villages in Mali's central Mopti region.

More than 100 civilians have been killed in attacks by suspected armed rebels in central Mali, the government has said.

Members of the Katiba Macina armed group assaulted at least three villages in the rural commune of Bankass, in Mali's central Mopti region, on the night between Saturday and Sunday, the government said in a statement on Monday.

At least 132 civilians were killed and some of the perpetrators have been identified, it added.

It said the civilians were "coldly killed by fighters of the Macina Katiba of Amadou Kouffa", an organisation affiliated to al-Qaeda.

The killings took place in Diallassagou and two nearby villages, Diaweli and Dessagou, in central Mali, which has long been mired in insecurity.

"Investigators are on the spot today to find out exactly what happened," Moulaye Guindo, the mayor of Bankass told The Associated Press news agency.

Mali and the central Sahel region have for months faced a string of civilian massacres blamed on armed groups.

The country has since 2012 been rocked by insecurity as groups linked to al-Qaeda and ISIL (ISIS) have attacked civilians, plunging the country into crisis.

Violence that began in the north has since spread to the centre and to neighbouring Burkina Faso and Niger.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the attacks in central Mali.

For several weeks rebels in central Mali have been blocking the road between the northern city of Gao and Mopti in central Mali.

The United Nations peacekeeping mission in Mali issued a statement about the attacks on Twitter saying it is concerned by "attacks against civilians in the Bandiagara region (the area of central Mali) perpetrated by extremist groups. These attacks have reportedly caused casualties and displacement of populations."

Attacks on UN peacekeepers In a separate incident, a UN peacekeeper died on Sunday from injuries sustained from an improvised explosive device, the UN mission to Mali said in a statement.

The head of the UN Mission to Mali, El-Ghassim Wane, said that since the beginning of 2022, several attacks have killed UN uniformed peacekeepers.

He said that attacks on peacekeepers can constitute war crimes under international law and reaffirmed the mission's commitment to supporting peace and security in Mali.

Since the beginning of the year, several hundred civilians have died in attacks in central and northern Mali.

The attacks are blamed on armed rebels as well as the Malian army, according to a report by the human rights division of the UN mission in Mali, known as MINUSMA.

The UN peacekeeping mission in Mali began in 2013, after France led a military intervention to remove rebels who had taken over cities and major towns in northern Mali the year before.

The mission now has about 12,000 troops in Mali and an additional 2,000 police and other officers. More than 270 peacekeepers have died in Mali, making it the UN's deadliest peacekeeping mission, say officials.

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Liberia

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EAST AFRICA

Uganda

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Kenya

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Africa: Last Stabs in the Darkness At the ICC On the Kenyan Case (All Africa)

By Janet Anderson

June 28, 2022

As if the historic failure of the Kenyan trial was not bitter enough, the Office of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court has taken it upon itself, in agreeing to prosecute Kenyan lawyer Paul Gicheru, to seek the truth in a web of lies. Yesterday in The Hague was the final act in this trial of darkness.

"I am completely recused," said earlier this month the International Criminal Court (ICC) prosecutor Karim Khan when pressed by journalists about his role in the case that was concluded yesterday against a Kenyan lawyer, Paul Gicheru, accused of interfering with witnesses while Khan represented Kenya's deputy president William Ruto. "I am not involved. I don't receive the evidence or the emails. This is dealt with by a deputy prosecutor. I won't comment further," said the incumbent ICC chief of prosecution.

If Khan were open to questions, they would centre on what role he played as defence counsel in one of the ICC's most notorious defeat. The case on charges of crimes against humanity against Ruto and fellow defendant Joshua Arap Sang, a radio broadcaster, collapsed in 2016. The main case against Ruto, and the other one against his opponent who then became his election partner Uhuru Kenyatta, concerned the ethnic violence which ripped through several communities in the country following the election at the end of 2007.

Some 1.100 people died and around 600.000 others were left homeless.

Witness interference

The then presiding judge described a "troubling" pattern of "witness interference". 16 out of the 42 witnesses had changed their stories or refused to testify. The prosecution alleged the changes were due to intimidation, bribery or fear of reprisals. Ruto and Sang's lawyers successfully argued that the court should not allow previous recanted testimonies. That left a bitter taste in the prosecution's mouth, who couldn't use the testimonies key to his case.

During Khan's candidature to the post of ICC prosecutor, Kenyan civil society critics noted that he had been intimately involved. His "closeness with his client" led him to adopt Ruto's political posture and language, one prominent human rights lawyer told Justice Info, "bullying" and "silencing" civil society. It was a "very slippery space for a defence counsel".

Truth out of contradictions

On Monday 27 June, the judges heard the closing arguments in the case against Gicheru. The Kenyan lawyer played an "essential role" states the ICC prosecutor Anton Steynberg in what he describes as a 'common plan' "to locate, contact and corruptly influence witnesses and potential witnesses in the Ruto and Sang case to withdraw and/or recant their evidence and

cease all cooperation with the Court."

The prosecution had called eight witnesses to testify. They were either alleged recipients of bribes or had been involved in the alleged scheme, and had previously made statements to the court that their latest evidence contradicted. Nevertheless, Steynberg told the court it should be "no surprise" that some had lied previously; their evidence should now be assessed individually to see the picture built up. "Inconsistencies, contradictions and inaccuracies may in fact speak in favour of the truthfulness of the witnesses account", states the prosecution closing brief.

The case was precipitated by Gicheru himself, who contacted the Office of the Prosecutor in 2018, recalls his lawyer Michael G. Karnavas. "My client reached out to the ICC. He just wanted to clear his name and get this thing over with. He just showed up at The Hague. He would like to be able to travel outside Kenya." Then Gicheru travelled to The Hague in 2020.

Gicheru's move set Kenyan political commentators alight with speculation that he might be prepared to spill the beans on the machinations behind the collapse of the trial, and thereby weaken Ruto's chances of becoming president after having been Kenyatta's vice president during more than nine years. But as Kenya is in the middle of another presidential race, Gicheru has remained tight-lipped, and Ruto remains the leading candidate.

The prosecution was unsure how to look at this 'gift horse'. In its closing brief it described Gicheru's "demeanour" during interviews as "evasive, failing to maintain eye contact, looking around while speaking or taking long pauses before responding to questions." To substantiate their allegations about his central role, it brought evidence such as bank records, mobile phone recordings.

The defence also poked holes in these forms of evidence, pointing out where they failed to directly connect to Gicheru. Karnavas suggested in its own closing brief that phone recordings were staged to provide evidence for the prosecution. That's "fanciful in the extreme", replies the prosecution. "It would require consistent coordination between the persons alleged to be responsible from diverse locations across the world and over a period of seven years, even persisting well after the supposed rewards had been received", it said.

"Confabulators of Olympic proportion"

"Corrupted by tunnel-vision due to a combination of ineptitude, indifference, lack of due diligence, self-imposed restrictions on investigating in the Rift Valley and elsewhere, and with no small measure of pre-conceived result-determinateness, the Office of the Prosecutor ("OTP") investigators conducted an irreparably flawed investigation, based on the lies, hearsay, and unsubstantiated claims by grifters, opportunists, con-artists, and confabulators of Olympic proportion", the defence didn't hesitate to write in its brief.

The defence presented no case and no witnesses. That is because they assessed "there was insufficient evidence" that they had to counter, Karnavas explained to Justice Info. Instead, he concentrated his fire on the prosecution methodology in Gicheru's case: "The OTP's investigation is a textbook lesson on how not to conduct an unbiased, methodical, and diligent investigation where the sole objective is to let the evidence lead where it may, as opposed to having a predestined outcome lead the evidence", reads its written brief.

"Myopic approach by the defence"

Prosecution "expects the Trial Chamber to find the needles of truth - if any exist - hidden in the massive haystacks of lies by each witness, inaptly cherry-pick through the witnesses' accounts with preference accorded to the most recent versions produced through countless and ever-evolving 'clarifications,' and to step into the breach and fill in the gaps. The evidence - if viewed holistically and objectively - does not rise to the level of proof beyond a reasonable doubt," reads the defence brief.

Interviewed by Justice Info, Karnavas does not mince his words either: "It is up to them to prove their case. If they are going to parade a bunch of liars and grifters. If the evidence is full of holes. If the witnesses are contradicting themselves. If they are relying on hearsay evidence, why should I as defence counsel try to find evidence to the contrary."

Steynberg described this as a "myopic approach by the defence" to the court, "assessing each witness in isolation and refusing to acknowledge the bigger picture the prosecutor case painted".

The short trial began in February 2022 before single judge Miatta Maria Samba who will now assess the credibility of the witnesses and whether the evidence proves that Gicheru was responsible for a scheme to interfere with a case at the ICC.

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Rwanda (International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda)

Official Website of the ICTR

Ongwen through the eyes of new lawyers (Monitor)

By Irene Abalo Otto and Anthony Wesaka

June 28, 2022

In three days, the International Criminal Court (ICC) will celebrate its 20th anniversary.

The court, established by the Rome Statute in 2002, had Uganda's Dominic Ongwen as the first suspect on referral by the Uganda government.

Ongwen, who tells his lawyers he was born around 1978, 44 years ago, has gone through some rehabilitation since he was first brought the enormous throne of justice set up to try suspects for war crimes, crimes against humanity, genocide and the crime of aggression.

To many, ICC can be a scary word. One would imagine that Ongwen must be either enjoying life or suffering as a result of the 25-year sentence slapped on him for 61 of the 70 counts of war crimes and crimes against humanity that his former lead defence counsel Krispus Ayena Odongo appealed.

As the world awaits the appeals chamber decision in December 2022, our reporters had an opportunity to chat with Ongwen's new lead defence lawyer, Mr Charles Achalette Taku, a Cameroonian with 25 years of experience in international law practice.

Mr Taku became lead counsel in June when Mr Oyena withdrew due to what the court termed as "breakdown in communication".

On Thursday last week, Mr Taku agreed to a lunch conversation with a group of nine Ugandan journalists. The arrangement was outside the Hague-based court at around 1pm.

The casual conversation away from Mr Taku's formal court duties gave our journalists a hint into what life is like for Mr Ongwen, a man his lawyer says is "passionate about the education of his children (in northern Uganda)".

Mr Taku together with another defence lawyer on the Ongwen team, Mr Thomas Obhof, referred to their client as a likeable person compared to what he was when he was first brought to the ICC on January 4, 2015.

Before lunch was served, Mr Obhof excused himself to answer a phone call. On return, he said: "I want to apologise for 'moving out'. Dominic (Ongwen) actually called and I had to receive. I thought the meeting was later today and I am like 'no,' we are having a lunch meeting."

Asked whether he was communicating to Ongwen in English, Mr Obhof said: "Yes. But when you ask me about Dominic's English level, he is definitely not fluent. He is not even intermediate yet, maybe kindergarten. His English teacher said he understood around 450 English words. He can read and differentiate between present, future, past tenses."

Whereas Ongwen has time to learn English or play soccer within the detention centre, the lawyers said he loves music and his piano classes are his favourite.

He used to learn together with Military Chief of Staff Bosco Ntaganda convicted of war crimes in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Ntaganda also taught Ongwen how to bake cakes, Mr Obhof says.

This attention to details of detainees' lives perhaps shows how close Ongwen is to his lawyers.

Mr Obhof also says Ongwen can averagely communicate in many languages, including Lingala, Arabic, and Kiswahili, besides his mother tongue, Acholi. By the age of nine when he was abducted by the LRA, Ongwen could mainly speak Acholi.

"He is very passionate about his native Acholi language. Anybody from Acholi makes him nostalgic. If you were to ask me, the Dominic I see now is a very likeable person. There are very few times he calls and he is very calm except if provoked," says Mr Taku.

He adds that most of the things that make Ongwen angry are witness statements in court. But he usually calls and talks to his lawyers on a regular basis to let off his 'steam'.

“I do not know how many times he calls you,” Mr Taku says, pointing to Mr Obhof, who responds; “He is strange. He will not call me for two days then he will call me five times the next two days.

The person he is most consistent with calling is Gordon [lawyer] because he knows a little bit of Acholi and when they are stuck on a word, they go back and forth trying to make it simpler for him.”

During the trial, the lawyers say Ongwen often claimed that LRA Leader Joseph Kony was appearing and talking to him in his dream.

Without disclosing what medication Ongwen was taking, Mr Taku says after the trial, he had stabilised and was not on medication until recently.

Ongwen also has access to a priest once a week and through interactive television he communicates to others on request. He usually inquires about his family back in Uganda through his lawyers who have to find out and give him feedback.

Ongwen has access to teachers and lawyers at all times.

This could be a rehabilitation measure that provides suspects and convicts with options to study languages that can help them communicate better with the people around them, without requiring an interpreter all the time.

Ongwen’s first encounter with things legal involved a lot of interpretations from English to Luo.

The court also uses French but for Ongwen, learning not just English but music occupies his time as he awaits the Appeals Chamber on his years in jail.

Unmasking Ongwen

A man whose novel case involves a lot of jurisprudence that will guide other future rulings on international humanitarian law is but a wonder to many on how he manages to live in solitary confinement until another decision to either reduce his sentence, let him out or have him serve his sentence when he shall perhaps walk back home to his people in Acholi land or decide what to make of his life on earth.

For now, journalists from different countries go through the request procedure to talk to Ongwen from the ICC detention facility through interactive television. This comes after a ban by the court on any journalist talking to Ongwen was relaxed.

“When someone goes through the right procedure and asks Ongwen if they can talk to him and he says yes, as his lawyer, I cannot stop him and I have no control over what he must have told the journalists from Canada (who recently visited and talked to him),” Mr. Taku says to emphasize that access to Ongwen is available but upon request.

The visitors who see Ongwen at the detention centre or prison in the Hague are not allowed to publish content about the actual case until after the decision of the Appeals Chamber.

Background

On May 6, 2021, the Trial Chamber of the International Criminal Court (ICC) sentenced Dominic Ongwen to 25 years in prison after he was found guilty of 61 crimes comprising crimes against humanity and war crimes, committed in Northern Uganda between July 1, 2002, and December 31, 2005. However, he has appealed the case before the ICC Appeals Chamber.

Rwanda: Activists Renew Call to Return UN Court Archives to Rwanda (All Africa)

By Edwin Musoni

June 29, 2022

Following the appointment of the new president of the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals (IRMCT), activists have renewed call to bring to Rwanda physical archives of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR).

The IRMCT took over the work of the ICTR, which was set up by the UN Security Council to try masterminds of the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi.

The UN Secretary-General on Monday, June 27, appointed Judge Graciela Gatti Santana of Uruguay, as the new President of the Mechanism, replacing Carmel Agius who has led the court since 2019.

Although the Security Council had suggested to deduct and digitalise the archives to make them accessible by everyone including those in Rwanda, calls remain to have the physical archive transferred to Rwanda.

Currently, the archives are kept at a facility located in Arusha, in Tanzania, the near the former headquarters of ICTR.

Jean Damascene Ndabirora Kalinda an academic specialising in international criminal justice and human rights, says that although the Security Council opted for digitalisation, it is not too late to repatriate the physical archive to Rwanda, saying that there are many reasons to back this push.

"Time solves a lot of things; at one point, we didn't expect the archives to be digitalized for us to have access. The MICT may never stay forever and when time to close it down comes, who knows, may be a decision will be taken to transfer the ICTR archives to Rwanda," Kalinda.

'Protected witnesses are among us'

For long, Rwanda pushed for the transfer of the ICTR archives to Rwanda but the United Nations urge that the reason of not transferring the archives to Rwanda is because they contain full details of protected witnesses who testified during the trial.

These protected witnesses are prosecution witnesses, majority of whom are survivors of the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi.

However, Kalinda, who is also a genocide survivor, disagrees with the UN's position.

"We met with the outgoing MICT president, Agius, on Monday June 27, and tabled our reemphasis our need to have the archives at home. These protected witnesses are among us, in fact, it's us who are protecting them. How best is the UN protecting them than we are?"

"Our history and its records plays a big part in our reconciliation and the ICTR archives are part of our historical records, this is why we need them here," said Kalinda.

The ICTR's archive contains a staggering 4 km of documents. Sitting at the heart of the archive lies the testimony of the witnesses, who formed the main evidence base at the ICTR.

Given tribunal's history, this totals 26,000 hours of testimony, produced by 3,200 witnesses across 6,000 trial days. In addition to this, thousands of exhibits have been entered into the archive, along with the countless records of motions, correspondence, decisions, strategic reports and other administrative documents.

Part of Rwanda's history

Several experts share a position that the archives are part of Rwanda's history and would be more resourceful if they were in Rwanda.

Speaking at a recent online symposium held under the them; 'The Forgotten Tribunal: The Lessons and Legacy of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda' the lead prosecutor in the trial of Theoneste Bagosora and his co-accused, Barbara Mulvaney, expressed disappointment that the archives are not in Rwanda.

She believes they would give survivors some closure if they get to know how their family members ended up.

"I feel very strongly that the archives should have been relocated to Rwanda and it's a real a disappointment. This is their history; I mean the kind of detail that we have on the death of the prime minister (Agatha Uwiringiyimana) on what happened on those nights. This is Rwanda's history and it's the people's history. They should own it," Mulvaney said.

She added that, "It's like we have details of where people were killed, where they were if people are searching for them. People would want to know where their families ended up and what happened and things like that we have in the archive. We have detailed information on that and when I left the tribunal, we had binders on every witness we had."

Mulvaney said that after trials were concluded, she spoke to most protected witnesses asking them if they would have their testimonies made public, "most of them said yes. If the defence had access to our protected witnesses, then Rwanda should as well have it. It is time to move the archive to the people who were affected."

The first official spokesperson of the International Criminal Court in The Hague, Ernest Sagaga, who is currently the head of Human Rights and Safety Department at the International Federation of Journalists said that if the ICTR wants to leave any legacy, the international community should fund the establishment of the archive in Rwanda.

His ideas are shared by Stephen J. Rapp who was the lead prosecutor in the 'Media Trial' and led prosecution of Charles Taylor at the Special Court for Sierra Leone.

Fundamentally, you're thinking about where the archives should go, they should go to Rwanda and if there are any particular

security issues, they should be dealt with appropriately," said Rapp who is a former US Ambassador-at-Large for War Crimes in the Office of Global Criminal Justice.

Rapp says that currently the MICT has good presidents that can make determinations of where the archives would go.

Although the archives are in the hands of MICT and currently located in Arusha, Tanzania, Andrew Wallis, author and researcher into the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi says that traveling a long journey to Arusha can be frustrating yet the archives still remain not easily accessible.

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Ethiopia

Ethiopia's Invisible Ethnic Cleansing (Human Rights Watch)

By Kenneth Roth

June 16, 2022

For more than a year and a half, a largely invisible campaign of ethnic cleansing has played out in Ethiopia's northern region of Tigray. Older people, women, and children have been loaded onto trucks and forced out of their villages and hometowns. Men have been herded into overcrowded detention sites, where many have died of disease, starvation, or torture. In total, several hundred thousand Tigrayans have been forcibly uprooted because of their ethnicity.

These crimes are an outgrowth of a war that began in November 2020, pitting Ethiopian federal forces and their allies, including troops from Eritrea and the neighboring Ethiopian region of Amhara, against forces linked to the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), which once led Ethiopia's coalition government. Early in the conflict, Amhara security forces and officials gained control of Western Tigray, a long-contested area of the region, where with the acquiescence and possible participation of Ethiopia's federal military, they have carried out a brutal campaign of ethnic cleansing against Tigrayan communities.

Many of these abuses have been hidden from view. Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's government has imposed communication restrictions throughout Tigray and obstructed the efforts of independent investigators, journalists, and humanitarian workers, making it difficult to verify accounts from the region. In the first half of 2021, chilling reports of rapes, killings, and mass displacement nonetheless trickled out, prompting U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken to condemn the ethnic cleansing and call on Ethiopian and Amhara troops to withdraw. Ethiopian authorities, however, have since sealed off Tigray almost entirely, severing telecommunications and even banking services.

But as investigators for Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have shown, the atrocities have continued. For over ten months after Blinken's condemnation of the ethnic cleansing, Amhara regional officials and security forces carried out a systematic campaign of war crimes and crimes against humanity, including murder, unlawful imprisonment and torture, forced displacement, sexual violence, possible extermination, and other inhumane acts. The United States and other countries have pressed for a cessation of hostilities and sought to negotiate humanitarian access to Tigray, but they have largely ignored the horrors in the west of the region. They can no longer afford to look away.

"GO OUT OR WE WILL KILL YOU"

Western Tigray is a fertile area of northwestern Ethiopia that borders Sudan and Eritrea. In the early 1990s, Ethiopia's previous government, led by the TPLF, incorporated the zone into the newly formed regional state of Tigray, setting the stage for decades-long disputes over boundaries, self-government, and identity. Some ethnic Amharas viewed these changes as an annexation, believing that the territory should have become part of the Amhara regional state. At various times, Amharas in Western Tigray sought to gain greater recognition and representation in government, unsuccessfully petitioning regional and federal officials and staging protests that were violently suppressed.

The outbreak of war in 2020 brought these longstanding grievances to the fore. Officials from Amhara, whose forces fought alongside Ethiopian federal troops, established administrative control over Western Tigray. Soon, war crimes and ethnic cleansing were underway. Ethiopian federal forces indiscriminately shelled towns and villages while Amhara Special Forces—paramilitary forces accountable to the Amhara regional government—and allied Amhara militias carried out extrajudicial

executions in towns across the area. Tens of thousands of Tigrayans were forced to flee. Amid the offensive, Tigrayan militiamen and other residents killed scores of Amhara residents and seasonal laborers in the town of Mai Kadra. In subsequent days, Amhara forces and Ethiopian federal troops targeted Tigrayans in a wave of revenge killings, arbitrary detentions, and eventual expulsions.

In the months that followed, the new Amhara administrators, Amhara Special Forces and allied militias, and Eritrean troops pillaged Tigrayan crops and livestock and looted and occupied Tigrayan homes. These forces also subjected Tigrayan women and girls to sexual violence, including gang rape and sexual slavery. A shop owner from the town of Dansha reported that she was raped by half a dozen Amhara militiamen and recalled her attackers saying, “You Tigrayans should disappear from the land west of Tekeze”—a river that marks the boundary between Western Tigray and the rest of the region. “You are evil, and we are purifying your blood.”

The authorities and forces in Western Tigray went to great lengths to coerce Tigrayans to leave. They refused to issue new identification cards to Tigrayans, restricted their movement and access to humanitarian assistance, and sought to intimidate them. “Every night they keep saying, ‘Tigrayans, go out [or] we will kill you. Go out. Go out of the area,’” recalled a 45-year-old woman who eventually fled to Sudan. In several towns, signs were displayed ordering Tigrayans to leave, and local administrators discussed in public meetings their plans to remove Tigrayans. Pamphlets appeared giving Tigrayans 24-hour or 72-hour ultimatums to leave or be killed.

Amhara forces also killed many Tigrayans in custody. In a single day in January 2021, Amhara Special Forces rounded up and massacred about 60 Tigrayan men on the banks of the Tekeze River in reprisal for the Amhara forces’ battlefield losses. By March 2021, hundreds of thousands of Tigrayans, reeling from months of abuse and in dire need of humanitarian assistance, had been forcibly removed from the area or coerced into leaving.

Then in late 2021, Amhara forces carried out yet another wave of forced expulsions and killings in Western Tigray. Remaining Tigrayans were rounded up and held in detention sites. According to the United Nations, 29,000 people—some of them taken directly from detention—were forcibly transferred to other parts of Tigray in November alone. There, they faced the brunt of an effective siege imposed by the federal government, which, despite promising a humanitarian truce, continues to restrict aid and basic services in the region.

DEATH IN PRISON

For the Tigrayans who remain incarcerated in Western Tigray, the horror has continued. Since January 2022, Amhara security forces have held hundreds, possibly thousands, of Tigrayans in overcrowded facilities, where detainees have been killed, tortured, and denied adequate food and medical care. Some have starved to death.

In the town of Humera, where Amhara militias—at times assisted by Ethiopian federal troops and Amhara Special Forces—oversee a network of formal and informal detention sites, former prisoners recall horrific living conditions. “The guards would wait three, four, five days and then take [the bodies] and throw them into the valley,” said one man who was detained in a warehouse known as Enda Yetbarek in Humera. “They would wait for the bodies to smell and swell up. . . . [They] would even make the prisoners” dispose of the bodies. At another prison, called Bet Hintset, a detainee who escaped described a similar experience: “On the last day I was there, about four people died, and they picked about 12 of us to help get the bodies out there and put them on a tractor that was waiting outside.”

This treatment of Tigrayan detainees may amount to extermination, a crime against humanity that is defined in the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court as the “intentional infliction of conditions of life, inter alia the deprivation of access to food and medicine, calculated to bring about the destruction of part of a population.” By denying prisoners needed medical care and adequate food—and barring relatives and neighbors from bringing them food—Amhara authorities are acting with more than callous disregard for the lives of their charges; they may well intend to cause their deaths.

TOWARD JUSTICE

To halt these crimes and end the suffering of detained and displaced Tigrayans, Ethiopia’s federal and regional authorities should immediately allow international aid agencies to access these detention facilities and operate unhindered throughout Tigray. This means reining in abusive security forces, as well as suspending and holding accountable those implicated in crimes.

None of this will happen without international action, however. Both the African Union’s Peace and Security Council and the UN Security Council have failed to act to address the crisis in Ethiopia, once again calling into question their ability to protect vulnerable populations and prevent mass atrocities. These international bodies must include Ethiopia on their formal agendas, press for immediate access to detention facilities in Western Tigray, and insist on sustained and unimpeded access by humanitarian organizations. As part of any agreement between Ethiopia’s warring parties, they should support the

deployment of an AU-led international peacekeeping force to Western Tigray with a mandate to protect civilians and monitor human rights.

The United States, the European Union, and regional powers should also call for credible independent investigations into the abuses in Western Tigray. The International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia, mandated by the UN Human Rights Council, and the Commission of Inquiry established by the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights should make it a priority to document human rights abuses in Western Tigray and press for credible justice and redress for serious crimes. As the veil lifts on the atrocities in Western Tigray, the Ethiopian government and international bodies need to stop the abuses and put an end to impunity. At stake is the survival of thousands of detained Tigrayans and hundreds of thousands more who either live in fear or have fled their homes and live under near-siege conditions.

Ethiopia: Prosecuting Crimes Against Humanity in Ethiopia - Where Is the Law? (All Africa)

By Tadesse Simie Metekia

June 21, 2022

In June 2018, Ethiopia's Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed Ali told Parliament that the post-1991 government used torture and killing to terrorise its people. Perpetrated in police detention centres, dungeons and prisons across the country, the state-sanctioned violence recounted by the prime minister amounts to crimes against humanity in international criminal law. That is, a widespread or systematic attack directed against the civilian population.

Abiy's statement represented an exceptional case of an incumbent Ethiopian government leader publicly admitting state involvement in crimes against humanity. Promises of accountability followed. The (then) attorney-general explicitly used the expression 'crimes against humanity' when vowing to bring alleged perpetrators to justice. Unlike the promises of accountability, allegations of crimes against humanity in Ethiopia aren't new. Such claims have recently been heard from previously silent organisations such as the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC). In 2021, the EHRC concluded that crimes against humanity were perpetrated in connection with the violence that followed the assassination of prominent Oromo singer Hachalu Hundessa. The EHRC and United Nations Joint Investigation Team (JIT) found in March 2022 that all parties to the Tigray conflict had perpetrated crimes against humanity. To effectively prosecute crimes against humanity, domestic legislation is necessary. The JIT's conclusions are being reviewed by the Inter-Ministerial Task Force (IMTF), established by the government in late 2021 to investigate gross violations of international human rights and humanitarian laws committed in the conflict in Ethiopia's north. The government has promised to bring perpetrators to justice if the IMTF-led inquiry into the Tigray war confirms the JIT's findings. Ethiopia has made efforts to fulfil its promises. In December 2020, the Ministry of Justice organised a brainstorming workshop in Addis Ababa to examine the challenges and prospects of prosecuting crimes against humanity in Ethiopian courts. Several law enforcement officials and experts, including the author of this ISS Today, attended. The workshop reiterated a finding already well known in academic circles - Ethiopian criminal law doesn't proscribe crimes against humanity. Indeed, the phrase 'crimes against humanity' under Article 28 of the Ethiopian Constitution is a misnomer meant to denote international crimes. The reference to the phrase under Article 44 of the Ethiopian Criminal Code is another misconception that refers to the other two core international crimes, genocide and war crimes. Although the workshop highlighted that fully incorporating crimes against humanity into Ethiopian law was key, there hasn't been a meaningful effort to do so. The delay could be attributed to reservations by some prosecutors and workshop participants who were not keen on having a domestic law. They opined that Ethiopia would be able to prosecute crimes against humanity by referring to the relevant international criminal law or focusing on underlying/predicate offences. The call for prosecutors to focus on predicate offences is futile as several are unknown in Ethiopian law. Yet, to effectively prosecute crimes against humanity, domestic legislation is necessary. First, Ethiopian courts cannot directly apply customary international criminal law, which embodies rules governing crimes against humanity. They may use criminal provisions enshrined in international conventions to which Ethiopia is a party. But Ethiopia isn't a state party to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, which includes crimes against humanity. Further, unlike genocide and war crimes, there is no international convention on crimes against humanity. Second, focusing on prosecuting the predicate offences of crimes against humanity disregards the crime's fundamental notions and origin. Predicate offences such as murder, rape and grave wilful injury are 'ordinary crimes'. Crimes against humanity are more serious international crimes in terms of gravity and harm, and carry unique contextual elements - such as the attack being widespread or systematic - which are not required for any of its predicate offences. By criminalising such horrendous crimes, the international community tries to safeguard the world's peace, security and wellbeing. The government's role in prosecuting crimes against humanity is, therefore, to act not only on behalf of the victims but also the international community. This cannot be fulfilled when the offence is mischaracterised and prosecuted as an ordinary crime that carries purely national interests. Contrary to Ethiopia's promises, prosecuting crimes against humanity as ordinary crimes can hardly be different from the inability or unwillingness to prosecute. It could be seen as an attempt to shield perpetrators from justice, and doesn't consider relevant rules on statutory limitations, immunities, superior orders and command responsibility. Be that as it may, the call for prosecutors to focus on predicate offences is futile as several of them are unknown in Ethiopian law. Apartheid, torture, enforced disappearance,

internal displacement, deportation, extermination and persecution are not criminalised as discrete offences. The absence of crimes against humanity law has led to the politicisation of violence and trials. The absence of crimes against humanity law in the country poses not just a hypothetical problem. It has practically led to the politicisation of violence and trials, says a senior prosecutor who talked to the Institute for Security Studies on condition of anonymity. Temesgen Lapiso, a former director-general at the Ministry of Justice, concurs. He says that potential crimes against humanity cases have often been mischaracterised as crimes against the constitutional order and the state's internal security. This includes violence and displacements against Amharas in the Benishangul-Gumuz region (2015), Oromos in the Ethiopian Somali region (2017), and Gedeos in Southern Ethiopia (2020). Likewise, the crimes against humanity cases that Abiy acknowledged in 2018 were prosecuted as ordinary crimes. Former intelligence chief Getachew Assefa and several defendants were indicted for corruption and abuse of power. Despite its commitments, Ethiopia won't be able to uphold its promises unless its domestic law criminalises crimes against humanity. This could be done in a relatively straightforward legislative process, as it essentially involves adopting the crime's international definitions. Assuming the political will existed, a draft by the Ministry of Justice could be approved by the Council of Ministers and sent to Parliament without delay.

How Many More Amharas Must Be Slaughtered for Genuine Ethiopians and the West to Condemn Abiy Ahmed's Government? (Borkena)

June 22, 2022

Following Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's recent speech in the Ethiopian Parliament, viewed by many as a cunning ploy to propagate the ongoing Amhara ethnic cleansing by Oromo ethno-fascists, thousands of Amharas have again been massacred in one day and thousands more forced to seek shelter in the wilderness in the Wollega zone of the Oromia region.

Paradoxically, the sector of the population back home which is not yet affected by the genocidal violence has become tone deaf to the plights of the Amhara, numbed by and kowtowing to Abiy Ahmed's ethnocentric system of government. Those in the Diaspora, while shedding crocodile tears, have yet to organize themselves under a common goal, and manage to effectively mobilize their sizable resources to contribute in a measurable way to save the Amhara from genocidal violence and ethnic cleansing. The international community and institutions, especially those Western governments and organizations that profess human rights and democracy, have turned deaf ears and blind eyes to the continuing Amhara massacre by Oromo ethno-fascists. Irrefutably, the current genocidal violence against Amharas and other ethnic groups, such as Wolayta, Gambela and Afar, has intensified since Abiy Ahmed took power in 2018, and is likely to continue unabated until the realization of the primary goal of asserting Oromumma supremacy. Ominously, the horrific atrocities are committed in a systematic fashion, under the watchful eyes of Abiy Ahmed's government, drawing lessons from the Rwandan genocide of 1994 to thwart world outcry, with a protracted campaign of brutal killings and displacements, in increments of hundreds and thousands at a time. Then the major enigma of the day is: "How many more Amharas must be slaughtered for genuine Ethiopians and Western governments and institutions to condemn Abiy Ahmed's government for crimes against humanity? Vision Ethiopia, while denouncing the interminable genocidal assault against Amharas, perpetrated under the auspices of Abiy Ahmed's government, calls upon all peace-loving Ethiopians as well as Western governments and institutions to stand on the side of the victims of genocide and save themselves from the harsh judgement of history and future generations. In particular: 1. We call upon the people of Ethiopia that stand for peace and justice to hold the government of Abiy Ahmed accountable for the crimes committed against the Amharas, and to pledge to pay any sacrifice to prevent further atrocities against Amharas who live in different parts of the country; 2. We call upon all friends of the Amhara people in the Diaspora to come together under a common banner of preventing genocidal violence by Oromo and other ethno-centric extremists, and wage coordinated and unrelenting efforts both inside the country and externally; 3. We call upon Western news outlets, which hitherto have disregarded the Amhara predicaments under successive TPLF and Oromumma repressive rules, to break their silence and discharge their journalistic responsibilities with the documentation and reporting of the ongoing genocidal campaign against the Amhara people; 4. We call upon the current US Administration and other Western nations, to curb the onslaught against the Amhara people by imposing sanctions against Abiy Ahmed's government, as they have been quick to do so in support of the people of Ukraine; and 5. Finally, we call upon the United Nations and other humanitarian organizations to heed the plights of the Amhara people, as they have staunchly been advocating for the TPLF extremist groups. The Board of Vision Ethiopia

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EUROPE

The Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina, War Crimes Chamber

Official Court Website [English translation]

BiH Court sentences Two Persons for War Crimes against Serb Population (Sarajevo Times)

June 17, 2022

The Appellate Chamber of the Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina sentenced Senad Džananović to 11 years in prison and Edin Gadžo to five years in prison for war crimes against Serb civilians in the Sarajevo settlement of Alipasino Polje in 1992.

The second-instance verdict rejected the appeals of the Prosecutor's Office of BiH and the defense attorneys of the accused as unfounded, which confirmed the first-instance verdict handed down on June 11 last year, the Court of BiH announced.

Džananović and Gadžo are accused that, as members of the Territorial Defense Staff "Stela" and Special Units of the Army of RBiH, from mid-April to August 1992 on Alipasino Polje, together with their superiors Jusuf Prazin Juk and Samir Kahvedžić Krusko, consciously and willingly participated in illegal detention of Serb civilians.

Serb civilians were illegally deprived of their liberty in the Sarajevo area, taken to the Stela Territorial Defense Headquarters in Alipasino Polje (former Borsalino Cafe and Mladost Local Community) and detained in prisons in the basements of a residential building in Alipasino Polje. "B" phase, and the butcher" Pester "and other premises of the same residential building. According to the indictment, in these facilities, the accused and other persons subjected Serb civilians to murder, rape, torture, inhuman treatment, forced labor, during which they were exposed to mortal danger, and subjected to various forms of physical and psychological abuse.

Džananović and Gadžo were acquitted of charges of certain incriminations in the manner stated in the first instance verdict, according to which they would be charged with the criminal offense of War Crimes against Civilians of the Criminal Code of BiH.

In relation to certain incriminations, the Court rejected the accusation that Džananović committed the criminal offense of War Crimes against Civilians under the Criminal Code of BiH.

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International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY)

Official Website of the ICTY

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Domestic Prosecutions In The Former Yugoslavia

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Turkey

41 orgs in Syria and abroad calls on UN to place Afrin, Serêkaniyê and Tal Abyad under international protection (Hawar News Agency)

June 28, 2022

At the beginning of their letter, a copy of which we received, the organizations said: "Today, the United Nations is experiencing a real and unprecedented test that threatens more than ever its credibility, the purposes and reasons for its existence and its emergence, especially after a series of frankly dubious failures in the performance of its responsibilities regarding what is happening in the world of crises, wars and issues widen in scope and exacerbate their disastrous effects and results from time to time.

The areas of Afrin, Ras al-Ain/Sere-Kaniye, and Tal Abyad are living examples that are appropriate for our letter to you."

It added: "These regions live as a reality of shame that will be mentioned in the pages of human history, as they experienced it, starting as a result of the Turkish "Olive Branch" operation in 2018, and the "Peace Spring" operation in October 2019, and under your authority, charters, declarations and laws. covenants and agreements of rights and freedoms, or lived through it after all the trials, sacrifices, tragedies and wars that the world has gone through, which was never a solution to a cause or a right.

The organizations shed light on the Turkish occupation attacks on the areas of Afrin, and then Ras al-Ain / Serêkaniyê and Tel Abyad in Syria, and a large number of crimes and atrocities in breach of international laws, "in breach of not only international laws relating to prisoners of war and the conditions and rules of their treatment, but also breached and disregarded against the wall all the rules and texts of international humanitarian law and international human rights law, charters, declarations and covenants of those rights, especially those related to obligations to protect and secure the safety and security of the civilians during wars.

Declaring the occupied territories openly, planned and systematically

It added to its message that "the Turkish occupation and its mercenaries prosecuted Afrin, Ras al-Ain / Sere Kani and Tel Abyad in all its meanings. They robbed, looted, killed, practiced kidnapping, enforced disappearance, torture, forced displacement, extortion and resettlement, and prevented the return of the displaced and sexual violence against both sexes."

Turkey did not practice all of this in secret, but rather in an open, planned and systematic manner, and for purposes that are extremely malicious and bad, perhaps the most important of which is to strike the Syrian religious, ethnic, sectarian and other components together, and sow sedition, hatred and grudges passed down from generation to generation, with the aim of passing its colonial goals, which certainly the most dangerous of them is its desire and targeting of the Kurds as a component that Turkey seeks to exterminate and ethnically cleanse, especially if we know that the Kurds constitute more than 95% of the population of Afrin.

We do not make these judgments arbitrarily, nor do we make accusations out of frivolity. Rather, the picture and the reality on the ground are the clearest proof."

War crimes and genocide The organizations emphasized that the Turkish occupation state, along with its affiliated groups, is committing crimes, most of which fall within the crimes considered by international humanitarian law as war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide, specifically according to the texts and articles of the Hague Conventions (1899-1907), the four Geneva Conventions, especially the Geneva Convention Fourth (1949), and its two annexes (1977), in addition to what was stated in the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (1998).

The crimes of aggression committed by Turkey against citizens, their arbitrary arrest, torture and taking them to unknown destinations, are described as explicitly stated in the Rome Statute, especially Article VII of it related to enforced disappearance, or what is stated in the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (Articles 1-2-7 is an example).

On another aspect of importance, the organizations pointed out in their letter that the Turkish occupation state committed "the crimes of systematic forced displacement against the local population, expelling them from their homes and properties and preventing them from them, emptying villages and regions, deporting them and bringing others in return from different regions of Syria and settling them instead of the original population, as well as preventing the displaced as a result of the war

prevents them from returning to their homes and properties and closing the crossings for them, all in a step aimed at changing the demographics of Afrin and Ras al-Ain /Sere Kani and targeting the privacy and demographics of those cities, which can undoubtedly or ambiguously be considered crimes of ethnic and religious cleansing and genocide of an ethnic group, the Kurds, and religious ones targeting the Kurdish Yezidis, and with this description it falls under the items discussed and dealt with by international laws, in particular the Fourth Geneva Convention (Article 49 thereof), the Rome Statute (Article 7, Clause 1, Paragraph D), the Convention on the Prevention of the Crime of Genocide approved by the United Nations (1948) (Article 2)

Not to mention the occurrence of many other crimes and acts of sabotage based on sectarian hatred that affect all facilities of life in Afrin, Ras al-Ain /Sere-Kaniye and Tel Abyad, including destruction of properties, all service bases, infrastructure, monuments, crops, trees and forests, and burning them, in a way that made these region mire in chaos and instability.

It pointed out that what was previously mentioned is only a summary and a brief picture of the reality of the situation in the areas occupied by Turkey, and said: "The continuation of the situation and the failure to remedy it and put an end to it portends more terrible and catastrophic calamities whose effects extend for an unknown period, and that the threats of the Turkish state recently launching a new military operation in the northern Syrian regions (Tal Rifaat and Manbij) under the name of a safe area, the voluntary return of Syrian refugees from its lands, and the deportation of nearly (500) refugees, according to the statements of the Turkish Interior Minister. and the displaced."

Demands The organizations called on the international institution to immediately assume its responsibilities and obligations, and to take all measures to put an end to crime that occurs in Afrin, Ras al-Ain /Sere Kani, and Tal Abyad, and against the rights of its people, and work mainly on: * Calling on Turkey, as a member state of the international organization, to respect and abide by its charter, by immediately stopping its violations and crimes, and its loyal factions, and withdrawing from Afrin, Ras al-Ain /Sere-Kaniye, Tal Abyad, and other Syrian areas immediately.

* Calling on Turkey to immediately release all the disappeared and abducted by it and its Syrian factions, and to stop enforced disappearances, physical attacks, torture and all manifestations of violence against civilians.

* Demanding Turkey to abide by the treatment of prisoners and detainees who participated in hostilities against it in accordance with the international laws of war and international humanitarian law, especially the relevant articles of the Geneva Conventions.

* Demanding Turkey to ensure the safe and secure return of all displaced and civilians to their homes and the restoration of their properties, and to stop the practices of extortion and intimidation in all its forms, and to provide protection and the means and requirements for a decent living and services for the population, as all of these are among the obligations of the occupying power under the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949.

* Immediate cessation of the settlement operations of Arab families inside the occupied areas by Turkey, especially Afrin and Ras al-Ain /Sere-Kaniye, and the immediate expulsion of settlers, and securing them in other places until they can return to their original areas.

* Demanding Turkey to allow all media, committees, international humanitarian, relief and human rights organizations, and civil society organizations to enter Afrin, Ras al-Ain /Sere-Kaniye and Tel Abyad, and to bring in all relief supplies and materials, and to provide adequate protection and guarantees for the competent authorities and fact-finding committees to report and document violations, crimes and abuses all.

* The United Nations, through its institutions and branches, and in coordination and cooperation with the International Criminal Court, seeks to open investigations and trials to prosecute and punish the perpetrators of crimes and violations in Syria, whatever their status, and to compensate those affected by those crimes.

* Most important of all is placing Afrin, Ras al-Ain /Sere-Kaniye and Tel Abyad under international supervision and protection, as these areas are subjected to genocide and systematic ethnic and religious cleansing targeting their Kurdish component and the Yezidi Kurds in them.

The signatory organizations are: Human Rights Organization Afrin-Syria, Afrin Lawyers Union, Civil Society Organizations in al-Shahba, Organization for Human Rights Defense Initiative, Union of Syrian Yazidis, National Initiative for Afrin, Center for Research and Protection of Women's Rights in Syria, Human Rights Organization in Jazira, Human Rights Organization in Al-Furat, Lawyers Union in Northeast Syria, Afrin Post News Network, "T'azur" Association for Victims, "Wheat and Olive" platform, Afrin platform, Ras al-Ain /Sere Kaniyeh platform, Syrian National Alliance in Washington, Sere-Kaniye Displaced Committee (Ras al-Ain) Afrin Social Association, Rojava Coordinating Organizations for Kurdistan Civil Society Forces, Human Rights Committee in Syria (MAF), Medical Council under the Medical Emergency Unit, Kurdish Jurists and Lawyers Association, Human Development Association, Barwa Printing and Publishing House, Jakar Khoen Cultural Forum, Helen

Children's Organization, Rojkar Relief Organization, Veterinarians Association, Kurdish Artists Forum, Reconciliation Committee, Religious Forum, People with Special Needs Association, Work Team Association, Health Care Association, Agricultural Studies and Consultation Center, Al-Shahba Displaced Persons Association, Ra Association What Children in Qamishli, Educational Curriculum Association, Association of Kurdish University Students and Academics, Forum of Kurdish Notables, Kongra Star.

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Kosovo Specialist Chambers

Kosovo Arrest of War Crime Suspect Angers Serbia (Balkan Transitional Justice)

By Xhorxhina Bami

June 27, 2022

The Kosovo prosecution said on Monday that police have arrested a man identified only by the initials M.D. on suspicion of committing war crimes in the Peja/Pec region of Kosovo in May 1999.

“The case concerns an offensive by Serbian military, paramilitary, and police forces on May 7, 1999 in the Peja region, where it is suspected that nine ethnic Albanian civilians died and five other persons, also Albanian civilians, disappeared,” the prosecution said in a statement.

The suspect is being held in detention waiting to appear before a pre-trial judge.

The prosecution described him as an ethnic Montenegrin who is a citizen of Kosovo, from the village of Vitimirice in the Peja/Pec municipality.

Serbian media outlets have named the man who was arrested as Milorad Djokovic, and have described him as a Serb.

The Serbian government's office for Kosovo condemned the arrest, claiming that it was an example of the intimidation of Serbs in Kosovo.

It alleged that war crimes indictments are being used to obstruct Serbs who were displaced from Kosovo from returning and said that it would inform senior European Union officials about the “endangerment of the personal and collective rights of Serbs” in Kosovo.

Kosovo-based Serbian-language media outlet Radio Gorazdevac reported that the suspect is the only post-war returnee in the village of Vitimirica.

Radio Gorazdevac said that over the past ten years he has been involved in court proceedings in an attempt to get back a house and a plot of land that was seized from him by the authorities.

Kosovo's Supreme Court ruled in his favour but the decision has not yet been implemented by the Peja/Pec municipality.

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Azerbaijan

Armenia should ensure independent and impartial investigations of war crimes - Amnesty International (News.Az)

By Ulviyya Zulfikar

June 16, 2022

In its report called “Life in a Box” Amnesty International says that according to Azerbaijani government statistics, an estimated 8,000 Azeri civilians were killed in the conflict between 1988 and 1994. All of the people interviewed for this report experienced grave violations of their rights during those years: some were harassed and intimidated into fleeing; others saw their homes targeted with explosive devices or burned to the ground; while still others fled artillery attacks by the Armenian military on populated civilian areas. These experiences left lasting impressions and,

in some cases, impacted the long-term physical and mental health of displaced people.

The report refers to Azerbaijani Eighty-eight-year-old Hasan M., who was 60 at the time he fled his home in Kalbajar region amidst intense fighting in 1993, recalled the difficulties he and others faced in escaping the violence. “Walking many kilometres through the snow on foot is very difficult as an older person,” he said. “A lot of people who were my age struggled.” (Page: 6)

Another part of the report says that the Armenian forces committed and oversaw the widespread destruction or seizure of civilian property and infrastructure, including cultural property, in the regions of Azerbaijan they occupied in the 1990s. Almost all of the people interviewed for this report said that, according to younger relatives or others who had visited their villages or towns and brought back photos or videos after the 2020 conflict, their homes, and in some cases even trees, gardens, and gravestones, had been destroyed. (Page: 6)

Report includes suffer of Azerbaijani refugees. “When more than half a million people from Nagorno-Karabakh and the seven surrounding districts were forcibly displaced to other parts of Azerbaijan in the 1990s, many were forced to live in overcrowded tent camps, dormitories, schools, sanatorium buildings, or abandoned railway cars, sheds, or buildings. They shared toilets and showers with dozens of people, and sometimes lived without electricity, heat, or running water. They struggled to meet their basic needs and pay for essential food and medication”. (Page: 6)

The report includes Prospect of Return And The Way Forward also. It says that in Azerbaijan, where Armenian forces destroyed much of the civilian housing and infrastructure in districts seized in the 1990s, that is a monumental task, and the Azerbaijani government has earmarked 2.2 billion manats (US\$1.3 billion) in both 2021 and 2022 for demining efforts and rebuilding infrastructure. (Page: 7) While their interviews with Azerbaijani refugees almost all of them told Amnesty International that they had witnessed civilian deaths during the fighting or while fleeing. Several people said that older people from their communities were more likely to be killed or injured because they had health issues or disabilities that made them unable or slower to flee. “For example, Ibrahim O., a 60-year-old man who fought with Azerbaijani forces during the 1990s conflict, recalled going back to his village in Aghdam district to recover bodies after intense fighting there in 1994: “Five out of nine people who had died were close to 90 years old, and the rest were over 50 [years old]. The Armenian attack was very sudden, so most of the people who were older could not flee”. (Page: 14)

The report also includes that under international humanitarian law, civilian objects, including homes and other civilian infrastructure, are protected from military attack unless they become military objectives; the targeting of civilian objects as well as indiscriminate or disproportionate attacks that destroy or damage civilian objects are prohibited. The “extensive destruction and appropriation of property, not justified by military necessity and carried out unlawfully and wantonly” amounts to a war crime. As the occupying power in these areas, Armenia was also prohibited from destroying or seizing civilian property, “unless required by imperative military necessity,” which could again amount to war crimes. In addition, any targeting of Azerbaijani cultural property, including religious monuments and institutions as well as museums and artefacts, was prohibited and a war crime. (Page: 15)

“Ali S., 82, who is from Lachin, a region that borders with Armenia and which contains the only road connecting Armenia with Nagorno-Karabakh, spoke of his fears of returning: “My only concern and fear is that the issue is not resolved. Some of our lands are under the control of [Armenians] and personally I don’t trust them. I will go back, but I have the feeling that someday they could do something to us. Mehriban M., 72, who is from Martuni, which is still under Armenian control, said that before the war her house was targeted with an explosive device and that ethnic Armenian police forces then told her family to leave the town. About returning, she said: “I have huge security concerns when it comes to living close to Armenians... There is lots of trauma between our two nations, I know lots of people who were killed.” (Page: 27-28)

The report touches upon landmines issues also. It says that in 2021 alone, Azerbaijan removed 41,503 landmines and unexploded ordnance (UXO) from regions previously under Armenian control. Demining and UXO remediation efforts are still ongoing. Azerbaijan has repeatedly called for Armenia to hand over maps of existing landmines. As noted above, on page 15, the director of the Azerbaijan Campaign to Ban Landmines said it was extremely unlikely that the maps provided by Armenia to date have captured the complete picture of the landmine situation in the region. (Page: 28) According to the UN Guiding Principles, the relevant authorities “have the primary duty and responsibility to establish the conditions, as well as provide the means, which allow internally displaced persons to return voluntarily, in safety and with dignity, to their homes or places of habitual residence.” Armenia should do everything in its power to facilitate demining efforts, including by transferring information about the location of landmines.

As a Conclusions and Recommendations to The Armenian Government Amnesty International in its reports recommends:

Ensure independent and impartial investigations are conducted into allegations of war crimes and other serious violations of international humanitarian law, including crimes against older people, and that anyone against whom there is sufficient

evidence of responsibility should be prosecuted in fair trials;

Fully cooperate with demining efforts in Azerbaijan, including with the exchange of the most accurate and comprehensive landmine maps available;

Without delay, provide full and adequate reparations to all victims of violations of international humanitarian and human rights law, including older people;

Fully respect international humanitarian law, including the obligation to protect civilians from the effects of hostilities, affording special protections to older people, among other groups.

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Russia

German Authorities Investigating Several Hundred Possible Russian War Crimes In Ukraine (Radio Free Europe)

June 18, 2022

German authorities are investing several hundred possible war crimes committed by Russian personnel in Ukraine, a top police official said.

Holger Muench, chief of the BKA federal police, told The Welt am Sonntag newspaper in an article published on June 18 that "up to now, we have received a triple-digit number of leads" concerning potential war crimes.

Muench said the probes do not only cover those suspected of directly committing war crimes but also political or military officials who may have ordered them.

"It's the most difficult part of our inquiry, intricate puzzle work," told the newspaper. "Our clear goal is to identify those responsible for atrocities, to prove their actions through our investigations, and bring them to justice," including in Germany.

German authorities are being aided by the country's foreign intelligence service, using such evidence as recorded radio conversations of Russian soldiers.

Germany is operating under universal jurisdiction, which allows a foreign country to prosecute crimes against humanity, war crimes, and genocide, regardless of where they were committed.

However, "that may take time" because probes tied to the conflict in Ukraine conflict are still at their "very beginning," the police chief said.

He added that German investigators could be sent to Ukraine but only under an international mandate.

Attorney General Merrick Garland becomes latest Biden official to visit Ukraine as he meets with country's top prosecutor to discuss Russian war crimes (Daily Mail)

By Emily Goodin

June 21, 2022

Attorney General Merrick Garland made an unannounced visit to the Ukraine on Wednesday where he met with the nation's top prosecutor to discuss Russian war crimes.

Garland sat down Ukrainian Prosecutor General Iryna Venediktova 'to discuss U.S. and international efforts to help Ukraine identify, apprehend, and prosecute those individuals involved in war crimes and other atrocities in Ukraine,' the Justice Department said in a statement.

Garland made the stop as part of a previously scheduled trip to Paris and Warsaw.

'I'm here to express the unwavering support to the United States for the people of Ukraine, in the midst of the unprovoked and unjust Russian invasion,' he told reporters upon his arrival.

'I'm here to continue our discussions between myself and the prosecutor general about the actions that the United States is taking to assist the Ukrainian authorities and holding accountable those responsible for the atrocities for the war crimes that the entire world has seen.

'The United States is sending an unmistakable message, there is no place to hide. We and our partners will pursue every avenue available to make sure that those who are responsible for these atrocities are held accountable,' he noted.

During the trip, Garland announced the launch of a War Crimes Accountability Team to hold accountable those who have committed war crimes and other atrocities in Ukraine.

One role the team will play is looking into potential war crimes over which the U.S. possesses jurisdiction, such as the killing and wounding of U.S. journalists covering the war in Ukraine.

He and Venediktova met in Washington D.C. in May. Garland and FBI director Christopher Wray have said they are working with Ukraine to prosecute war crimes.

The two top prosecutors met for about an hour in Krakovets, on the Ukraine border with Poland.

They discussed technical, forensic and legal support that Garland's Justice Department might be able to provide prosecutors in Ukraine, department officials told The New York Times.

Garland is the latest Biden administration official to visit the wartorn country since Russian President Vladimir Putin launched his invasion in February.

First lady Jill Biden, Secretary of State Anthony Blinken and Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin have all made secret visits.

In April, Biden called Putin a 'war criminal' and said he should be held accountable for his actions in the Ukraine.

'He is a war criminal,' Biden said of Putin after reports of the mass murder of civilians by Russian-controlled troops in the town of Bucha, Ukraine.

Bucha's mayor has said about 300 residents of the town had been killed at the time that Russian fighters controlled the area.

'This guy is brutal, and what's happening in Bucha is outrageous and everyone's seen it,' Biden said.

'I think it is a war crime. ... He should be held accountable,' the president said.

Biden has yet to make a trip to Ukraine.

He said on Monday he won't be making a stop there during his upcoming trip to Europe but he said he talks to President Volodymyr Zelensky three or four times a week.

Biden leaves on Saturday for a G7 meeting in Germany and then heads to a NATO summit in Spain.

'On this trip, not likely,' he said when asked if he'll travel to the Ukraine.

He said a visit to Kyiv depends on 'whether or not it causes more difficulty for the Ukrainians, whether it distracts from what's going on.'

'I have been meeting with Zelensky – I talk to him three, four times a week,' he told reporters during a walk on the beach in Rehoboth, where he is spending Father's Day weekend with his family.

Biden and Japanese Prime Minister Katsura Tarō are the only two G7 leaders who haven't visited Zelensky in Kyiv.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson visited the Ukraine last week for a second time since the Russian invasion began in February.

The leaders of France, Germany and Italy made a joint trip there last week to meet with Zelensky as Ukraine has submitted its application to join the EU. The three head the European Union's three largest economies and said they backed Ukraine's candidacy to join the 27-member bloc.

The EU will debate the matter at its summit next week. Ukraine needs approval from all 27 member nations in order to be approved.

Biden said he expected Ukraine's application to join the EU to be approved.

'I think that's very likely to happen,' he said.

Kremlin says death penalty possible for U.S. fighters said to be held by pro-Russia separatists

(Los Angeles Times)

By Nabih Bulos, Laura King, and Tracy Wilkinson

June 21, 2022

Fears mounted Tuesday over the fate of two Americans reportedly taken captive while fighting for Ukraine, as Russia declared that international protections for prisoners of war did not apply to foreign “mercenaries” and that capital punishment could not be ruled out if they were put on trial in separatist territory.

Those comments out of Moscow came as U.S. Atty. Gen. Merrick Garland visited Ukraine to meet with the country’s top prosecutor and offer U.S. assistance in investigating and prosecuting alleged war crimes committed by Russian troops during the nearly 4-month-old war.

The trip came against a backdrop of intense fighting for a pair of strategically important cities in eastern Ukraine, a bloody war of attrition in which Russian forces are trying to wear down outgunned Ukrainian troops with unrelenting artillery barrages.

Western countries including the United States are sending Ukraine more heavy weaponry to try to counter Moscow’s military superiority in the battle for the country’s eastern industrial heartland, but Ukraine has repeatedly appealed for additional armaments.

In his latest overnight address to compatriots, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky denounced Russia’s “brutal offensive” in the region, known as the Donbas. He acknowledged difficult fighting as Moscow presses its advance on the twin cities of Severodonetsk and Lysychansk, which are separated by a river.

Ukrainian defenders of Severodonetsk are concentrated in a besieged industrial complex, where civilians are sheltering as well under sustained Russian shellfire.

In the environs of both cities, there were signs that the Ukrainian defenses were crumbling.

A Ukrainian commander, who asked his name not be used so he could speak freely, described a Russian advance in the front-line village of Toshkivka, saying his battalion was forced to withdraw after losing too many fighters.

“There aren’t enough forces or weapons,” he said. “For every shot of ours, the Russians respond with 20.”

Later, the head of the district military administration, Roman Vlasenko, told Ukrainian television that the village was “controlled entirely by the Russians.”

Moscow’s threat against captives purportedly held by pro-Russia separatists was delivered by Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov in a call with reporters Tuesday.

He said foreign fighters who have taken up arms for Ukraine are mercenaries, not prisoners of war, and thus are not entitled to protections under the Geneva Convention, which forbids prosecution of captured fighters for lawful participation in combat.

Two captured Britons and a Moroccan were sentenced to death earlier this month in what British authorities described as a show trial held in Russian-controlled separatist territory. The episode prompted speculation the captives would be used to try to extract concessions, such as a prisoner swap.

The two Americans — Alexander Druke, 39, and Andy Tai Ngoc Huynh, 27 — went missing this month while fighting near Ukraine’s second-largest city, Kharkiv, 25 miles from the Russian border. Both are military veterans from Alabama.

Russia’s state-controlled RT network last week showed interviews with the pair at what it said was a detention center in the self-declared Donetsk People’s Republic, or DPR, a separatist statelet recognized only by Russia. Russia has a moratorium on the death penalty, but the DPR does not.

The U.S. State Department says it still cannot confirm that two and possibly three U.S. citizens have been captured, as their families assert, nor the whereabouts of the men.

A senior State Department official, briefing reporters in Washington on the condition of anonymity, said Moscow had responded to official U.S. and British queries by saying it was not a Russian matter, because any such captives would have been in the hands of separatists.

U.S. officials said Tuesday the government has “vigorously” protested the Kremlin’s assertion that foreigners captured fighting in Ukraine, including Americans, would not be covered by the Geneva Conventions.

State Department spokesman Ned Price said U.S. diplomats have made repeated inquiries to the Russian government, as well

as to the International Committee of the Red Cross, Ukrainian officials and others, to get information on the missing men.

From the Russian government, Price said, “we have not received any formal or official response.”

U.S. officials said the Russian evasiveness is typical of how Moscow responds to cases of captured, arrested or otherwise detained U.S. citizens, including that of basketball star Brittney Griner.

A planned telephone call from Griner to her wife in the United States failed to take place despite numerous attempts. The couple blamed the U.S. Embassy. The White House said Tuesday the call would be rescheduled.

Russian authorities have set up numerous obstacles for U.S. consular officers to meet with Griner, much as they have done for other detainees, the anonymous senior State Department official said. Arrested at the Moscow airport in February on drug charges, Griner has regular phone contact with her Russian lawyers, the official said, but U.S. consular personnel have not seen her since May 19.

Garland’s unannounced trip to Ukraine to meet with the country’s prosecutor general, Iryna Venediktova, came as Ukrainian authorities are attempting to deal with more than 15,000 war crimes complaints. Other countries, including France and Britain, have also stepped in to offer technical, forensic and legal assistance to Ukraine in investigating and prosecuting alleged atrocities.

After his visit, Garland vowed that “there is no place to hide” from accountability for war crimes.

Moscow says evidence of grisly crimes against civilians in previously occupied areas of Ukraine, including a string of towns and suburbs outside the capital, Kyiv, is fabricated.

Reverberations from Russia’s Feb. 24 invasion of Ukraine, meanwhile, continued to be felt worldwide, including looming food shortages caused by Ukraine’s inability to ship grain from Black Sea ports blockaded by Russia, and a fuel crunch in Europe triggered by Moscow’s reduction of natural gas supplies. The Kremlin blames both crises on the West.

Although Russian warships make it impossible for commercial shipping traffic to reach Ukrainian ports, Ukraine has staged attacks challenging Moscow’s maritime superiority in the Black Sea.

British military intelligence said Tuesday that Ukraine’s claim last week to have successfully attacked a Russian naval tug with Harpoon antiship missiles was “almost certainly” accurate.

NATO has refrained from direct confrontation with Russia while supporting Ukraine. But a potential confrontation has emerged in the Russian enclave of Kaliningrad, which borders alliance member Lithuania, a Baltic state that is accustomed to threats from Moscow.

Russia’s security chief on Tuesday threatened “significant negative consequences” over Lithuania’s refusal to allow land transit of some goods to the tiny patch of Russian territory. The remarks by Nikolai Patrushev, the secretary of Russia’s security council, came on a visit to Kaliningrad and were reported by the RIA-Novosti news agency.

Also Tuesday, the Russian Foreign Ministry summoned the European Union’s envoy to Russia to press the issue, according to news reports. The ministry had already summoned Lithuania’s top diplomat to demand the reversal of what it called the “openly hostile” moves.

The government in Vilnius says the partial blockages are in line with European Union sanctions. Kaliningrad remains accessible by sea.

This is not the first time in the course of the war that Moscow has menaced NATO members on the alliance’s eastern flank, raising fears of a wider confrontation. It has previously aimed harsh rhetoric at Poland, which has been instrumental in shipping weaponry to Ukraine and has taken in the largest number of Ukrainian refugees.

As fighting in the east grows fiercer, Zelensky said Russia’s offensive against Severodonetsk and other eastern areas was intensifying in part because of Moscow’s fears that Ukraine is advancing in its aspirations to join the EU.

Although the process will likely take years, EU meetings later this week are expected to yield formal support for creating a path for Ukrainian membership in the bloc.

“Russia is very nervous about our activity,” Zelensky said.

In his overnight address to the nation, the president also extended thanks to Hollywood actor-director Ben Stiller, with whom he met on Monday.

Stiller, who has most recently garnered critical acclaim for the streaming TV series “Severance,” is a goodwill ambassador for the U.N. refugee agency. As part of a visit to the region, he met with refugees and officials, including U.S. Ambassador Bridget Brink, and visited a Kyiv suburb devastated during a Russian occupation early in the war.

“I am grateful to Ben for his constant attention to the needs of Ukrainians,” said Zelensky, who shares with Stiller a background as a comic actor. Stiller in turn described the Ukrainian leader as his “hero.”

In The Heart Of Russia, A Hunt For Soldiers Accused Of War Crimes In Ukraine (Radio Free Europe)

June 25, 2022

The last time Maria Knyazeva saw her grandson, Private Vasily Knyazev, was when he visited over the New Year holiday, traveling from the Far Eastern region of Khabarovsk. That’s where he had been serving as a soldier in the 64th Separate Guards Motor Rifle Brigade

“He had served under a contract three years ago,” Knyazeva, 70, told Idel.Realities as she planted potatoes in the yard of her house in a rural village. “His unit was from Khabarovsk. He came here from there.”

Knyazeva said she is not sure what her grandson is up to now. She said she didn’t know that he is, in all likelihood, among the tens of thousands of Russian soldiers who have been fighting in Ukraine in the biggest war in Europe in nearly eight decades.

She doesn’t know that he’s been implicated in war crimes that Ukrainian authorities, rights groups, and survivors say were committed by Russian military units against civilians in the districts north of Kyiv in March.

Now in its fifth month, Russia’s “special military operation” -- as the Kremlin insists on calling the war -- has shifted away from north-central Ukraine, where Ukrainian forces beat back an invasion force that had sought to seize the capital and topple the government.

In the wake of the withdrawal of Russian forces -- who pulled out of areas north of Kyiv and Chernihiv in late March and shifted east and south, to concentrate on seizing and holding territories there -- Ukrainian and international investigators have uncovered a trail of atrocities allegedly committed by Russian military units in the districts they had occupied: Bucha, Irpin, Hostomel, and others.

The bodies of at least 403 people who were killed by the Russian troops had been located and are being identified, Bucha’s mayor said on April 12.

While eyewitnesses have provided brutal first-hand accounts of civilians being summarily shot, in some cases executed with their hands tied behind their backs, investigators have also said they located a trove of computer files that were left at the temporary Russian military headquarters in Bucha when the soldiers retreated.

The files include a list of 1,600 soldiers from the 64th Separate Guards Motor Rifle Brigade who served in Bucha and nearby districts.

On April 28, Ukraine’s prosecutor-general, Iryna Venediktova, published a list of 10 names that she said had been identified as being members of the rifle brigade.

Agents from the Security Service of Ukraine, the country’s main intelligence agency, also said they had obtained a cell phone that had been left behind in the Bucha area by a Russian soldier from the 64th Separate Guards Motor Rifle Brigade.

The phone, according to the service, contained personal photographs that were then provided to a group of open-source researchers called InformNapalm.

InformNapalm later said it had identified the phone’s owner as a sergeant who served in a reconnaissance unit of the Khabarovsk-based rifle brigade.

From photographs and other data on the phone, the group compiled its own list of soldiers it said had served in the rifle brigade in Bucha.

Volga Soldiers

Using the lists compiled by Ukrainian prosecutors and the open-source researchers, Idel.Realities, a project of RFE/RL’s Tatar-Bashkir Service, identified and sought to contact 11 soldiers who had served with the rifle brigade who were originally from Russia’s central Volga region. All were contacted initially using VK, the Russian social media giant, where they had

profiles.

One man, identified on the lists as Aleksandr Koloyarov from the Saratov Oblast, told RFE/RL via a VK private message that he had served with the 64th brigade but had retired in 2018. His rank was unknown.

Another man, Viktor Loktionov, responded to RFE/RL via a VK message: "Send an article or at least a source so I can read what I'm talking about there, having nothing to do with it." He later stopped communicating.

Loktionov's passport was issued in the Orenburg region, according to InformNapalm's data. His rank was also unknown.

Another man who appeared on InformNapalm's list was Aleksandr Yegorov. He denied he had ever served in the 64th Brigade.

Yet another name that appeared on the lists was Private Aleksei Shiyani. RFE/RL located his mother, Yelena Zakharova, who lives in the Urals region of Perm. She responded to questions about the Bucha events, replying via VK: "Who came up with this? This is some kind of nonsense."

Shiyani had never been in Ukraine, she said.

"Everything is fine with my son. He has a family -- a wife, and their daughter is growing up," she told RFE/RL before she then blocked a reporter from communicating further with her.

Vasya Knyazev From Mari-El

Private Knyazev, whose name appears on the list compiled by Ukrainian prosecutors, hails from the Mari-El region, a small, poor region on the Volga River about 800 kilometers east of Moscow.

On VK, Knyazev called himself Vasya -- a diminutive of his name. One of the photographs on the account -- dated January 20, 2021 -- contains precise coordinates where it was taken: the home base of military unit No. 51460 of the 64th Rifle Brigade.

In another photograph, posted on December 19, 2021, a young man believed to be Knyazev is shown in a dark down jacket and white sneakers next to a monument near the Kremlin in Moscow.

Knyazev did not respond to multiple messages sent to him via VK.

Passport data published by InformNapalm shows that Knyazev's main ID document was issued in the village of Sernur in Mari-El. The birthdate given on the list compiled by InformNapalm and the birthdate listed on Knyazev's VK account are the same.

RFE/RL contacted one of Knyazev's friends listed on VK, a person named Pyotr Knyazev. The person replied that Vasily Knyazev had not served in the military since 2020.

According to Maria Knyazeva, Pyotr is Vasily's brother.

Other information on Knyazev's VK account indicated his hometown was Russkaya Lyazhmar, where he graduated from high school, though it was unclear when.

Knyazeva told RFE/RL that Knyazev's mother had been killed several years ago, by his father.

RFE/RL did not speak to the father, who also lives with Knyazeva, and could not confirm that he killed his wife.

Another name identified by prosecutors was Mikhail Kashin, a 24-year-old from Votkinsk, a town in another central region, Udmurtia. Kashin, whose rank was unknown, did not respond to messages sent via VK seeking comment.

Contacted by RFE/RL, Kashin's sister, Yekaterina Cherepanova, declined to discuss her brother's military service:

"I don't know anything about it at all," she said via a VK message.

'Mass Heroism And Bravery'

The efforts of Ukrainian and international prosecutors have drawn support from United Nations and European Union officials, and from some of Ukraine's biggest financial supporters.

During an unannounced visit to Kyiv this week, the top law enforcement official in the United States, Attorney General Merrick Garland, said he was appointing a veteran prosecutor with experience tracking former Nazis to help Ukraine in

tracking Russian war criminals.

For Russia's part, neither the Kremlin nor Russian commanders have made any public acknowledgment of the mounting evidence and allegations that Russian troops may have committed war crimes.

On April 19, President Vladimir Putin issued a decree lauding the work of the 64th Separate Guards Motor Rifle Brigade and praising it for "mass heroism and bravery, steadfastness, and fortitude" and for "distinguishing itself in military action for the protection of the Fatherland and state interests."

Ukraine war: Russian strike on shopping centre a war crime - G7 leaders (BBC)

By Tiffany Wertheimer

June 28, 2022

At least 18 people have died in a missile strike on a shopping centre in the Ukrainian city of Kremenchuk.

Some 1,000 civilians were estimated to be inside the busy mall at the time of the attack at around 15:50 (12:50 GMT), President Volodymyr Zelensky said.

The leaders of the G7 group of richest nations - who are meeting in Germany - condemned the attack as "abominable".

"Indiscriminate attacks on innocent civilians constitute a war crime," they said in a joint statement.

Russia has been blamed for the attack, which also injured at least 59 people, and there are fears the death toll will continue to rise.

Pictures online showed the building engulfed in flames and thick black smoke billowing into the sky.

Ukraine's President Zelensky described the attack as one of the "most brazen terrorist acts in European history".

He said the mall had no strategic value to Russia and posed no danger to its forces - "only the attempt of people to live a normal life, which so angers the occupiers".

"Only totally insane terrorists, who should have no place on earth, can strike missiles at such an object," he added.

Russia's Deputy Ambassador to the UN, Dmitry Polyanskiy, called the attack a "Ukrainian provocation", but cited no evidence to suggest that the missile strike had been staged.

The local governor, Dmytro Lunin, described the attack as a crime against humanity, writing on Telegram that it was "an obvious and cynical act of terror against the civilian population".

Authorities say 440 people from emergency services are working on location, including 14 psychologists brought in to support those affected.

Photos from the scene show the blackened and charred shell of the building with the roof caved in.

In one video taken shortly after the strike, a man can be heard calling out: "Is anybody alive... anybody alive?" Soon after, ambulances arrived to take the injured to hospital.

But there are still people missing and as night fell, family members gathered at a hotel over the road, where rescue crews have set up a base to wait for any news. Lights and generators have been brought to the site so crews can continue the search overnight, Reuters news agency reports.

The central-eastern city of Kremenchuk is located about 130km (81 miles) from Russian areas of control.

At the scene

Sophie Williams, BBC News

Here in Kremenchuk, you can still smell the smoke throughout the town, hours after the missile strike on the shopping mall.

All that is left is the mangled shell of the building.

The area is eerily quiet: the only sound is that of the rescuers moving debris as they search for people underneath.

An official informs us that the fire has been fully extinguished, but smoke is still billowing from the building.

The mall was struck at 16:00 local time and it is not yet clear how many people were inside when it happened. But there are fears that the death toll could rise.

The Ukrainian Air Force command said the shopping centre was struck by Kh-22 missiles launched from Tu-22M3 long-range bombers. However, the BBC has been unable to verify this.

"The centre was just destroyed. Before, we had strikes on the outskirts of the city, this time around, this is the centre of the city," an eyewitness, Vadym Yudenko told the BBC.

"I'm out of words," he added. "I did not expect that something like this could happen in my town."

The missile strike took place as the leaders of Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the US and UK gathered in Germany for the G7 summit to discuss - among other things - toughening sanctions against Russia.

In addition to strongly condemning the attack, a joint statement issued by the Western leaders vowed to "continue to provide financial, humanitarian as well as military support for Ukraine, for as long as it takes".

Kremenchuk, in the Poltava province of Ukraine, is one of Ukraine's largest industrial cities, with a population of nearly 220,000 people in a 2021 census.

It is not the first time the city has been hit by missiles - there was one strike recorded in April and another 10 days ago at a nearby oil refinery.

Speaking after the shopping mall attack, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken called it the "latest in a string of atrocities", while UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson said it would strengthen the resolve of Western allies to stand by Ukraine.

"This appalling attack has shown once again the depths of cruelty and barbarism to which the Russian leader will sink," Mr Johnson said.

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MIDDLE-EAST

Syria

41 orgs in Syria and abroad calls on UN to place Afrin, Serêkaniyê and Tal Abyad under international protection (ANHA Hawar News Agency)

June 28, 2022

At the beginning of their letter, a copy of which we received, the organizations said: "Today, the United Nations is experiencing a real and unprecedented test that threatens more than ever its credibility, the purposes and reasons for its existence and its emergence, especially after a series of frankly dubious failures in the performance of its responsibilities regarding what is happening in the world of crises, wars and issues widen in scope and exacerbate their disastrous effects and results from time to time.

The areas of Afrin, Ras al-Ain/Sere-Kaniye, and Tal Abyad are living examples that are appropriate for our letter to you."

It added: "These regions live as a reality of shame that will be mentioned in the pages of human history, as they experienced it, starting as a result of the Turkish "Olive Branch" operation in 2018, and the "Peace Spring" operation in October 2019, and under your authority, charters, declarations and laws. covenants and agreements of rights and freedoms, or lived through it after all the trials, sacrifices, tragedies and wars that the world has gone through, which was never a solution to a cause or a right.

The organizations shed light on the Turkish occupation attacks on the areas of Afrin, and then Ras al-Ain / Serêkaniyê and Tel Abyad in Syria, and a large number of crimes and atrocities in breach of international laws, "in breach of not only international laws relating to prisoners of war and the conditions and rules of their treatment, but also breached and disregarded against the wall all the rules and texts of international humanitarian law and international human rights law, charters, declarations and covenants of those rights, especially those related to obligations to protect and secure the safety and security of the civilians during wars.

Declaring the occupied territories openly, planned and systematically

It added to its message that "the Turkish occupation and its mercenaries prosecuted Afrin, Ras al-Ain / Sere Kani and Tel Abyad in all its meanings. They robbed, looted, killed, practiced kidnapping, enforced disappearance, torture, forced displacement, extortion and resettlement, and prevented the return of the displaced and sexual violence against both sexes."

Turkey did not practice all of this in secret, but rather in an open, planned and systematic manner, and for purposes that are extremely malicious and bad, perhaps the most important of which is to strike the Syrian religious, ethnic, sectarian and other components together, and sow sedition, hatred and grudges passed down from generation to generation, with the aim of passing its colonial goals, which certainly the most dangerous of them is its desire and targeting of the Kurds as a component that Turkey seeks to exterminate and ethnically cleanse, especially if we know that the Kurds constitute more than 95% of the population of Afrin.

We do not make these judgments arbitrarily, nor do we make accusations out of frivolity. Rather, the picture and the reality on the ground are the clearest proof."

War crimes and genocide

The organizations emphasized that the Turkish occupation state, along with its affiliated groups, is committing crimes, most of which fall within the crimes considered by international humanitarian law as war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide, specifically according to the texts and articles of the Hague Conventions (1899-1907), the four Geneva Conventions, especially the Geneva Convention Fourth (1949), and its two annexes (1977), in addition to what was stated in the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (1998).

The crimes of aggression committed by Turkey against citizens, their arbitrary arrest, torture and taking them to unknown destinations, are described as explicitly stated in the Rome Statute, especially Article VII of it related to enforced disappearance, or what is stated in the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (Articles 1-2-7 is an example).

On another aspect of importance, the organizations pointed out in their letter that the Turkish occupation state committed "the crimes of systematic forced displacement against the local population, expelling them from their homes and properties and preventing them from them, emptying villages and regions, deporting them and bringing others in return from different regions of Syria and settling them instead of the original population, as well as preventing the displaced as a result of the war prevents them from returning to their homes and properties and closing the crossings for them, all in a step aimed at changing the demographics of Afrin and Ras al-Ain / Sere Kani and targeting the privacy and demographics of those cities, which can undoubtedly or ambiguously be considered crimes of ethnic and religious cleansing and genocide of an ethnic group, the Kurds, and religious ones targeting the Kurdish Yezidis, and with this description it falls under the items discussed and dealt with by international laws, in particular the Fourth Geneva Convention (Article 49 thereof), the Rome Statute (Article 7, Clause 1, Paragraph D), the Convention on the Prevention of the Crime of Genocide approved by the United Nations (1948) (Article 2)

Not to mention the occurrence of many other crimes and acts of sabotage based on sectarian hatred that affect all facilities of life in Afrin, Ras al-Ain / Sere-Kaniye and Tel Abyad, including destruction of properties, all service bases, infrastructure, monuments, crops, trees and forests, and burning them, in a way that made these region mire in chaos and instability.

It pointed out that what was previously mentioned is only a summary and a brief picture of the reality of the situation in the areas occupied by Turkey, and said: "The continuation of the situation and the failure to remedy it and put an end to it portends more terrible and catastrophic calamities whose effects extend for an unknown period, and that the threats of the Turkish state recently launching a new military operation in the northern Syrian regions (Tal Rifaat and Manbij) under the name of a safe area, the voluntary return of Syrian refugees from its lands, and the deportation of nearly (500) refugees, according to the statements of the Turkish Interior Minister. and the displaced."

Demands

The organizations called on the international institution to immediately assume its responsibilities and obligations, and to take all measures to put an end to crime that occurs in Afrin, Ras al-Ain / Sere Kani, and Tal Abyad, and against the rights of

its people, and work mainly on:

- * Calling on Turkey, as a member state of the international organization, to respect and abide by its charter, by immediately stopping its violations and crimes, and its loyal factions, and withdrawing from Afrin, Ras al-Ain / Sere-Kaniye, Tal Abyad, and other Syrian areas immediately.
- * Calling on Turkey to immediately release all the disappeared and abducted by it and its Syrian factions, and to stop enforced disappearances, physical attacks, torture and all manifestations of violence against civilians.
- * Demanding Turkey to abide by the treatment of prisoners and detainees who participated in hostilities against it in accordance with the international laws of war and international humanitarian law, especially the relevant articles of the Geneva Conventions.
- * Demanding Turkey to ensure the safe and secure return of all displaced and civilians to their homes and the restoration of their properties, and to stop the practices of extortion and intimidation in all its forms, and to provide protection and the means and requirements for a decent living and services for the population, as all of these are among the obligations of the occupying power under the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949.
- * Immediate cessation of the settlement operations of Arab families inside the occupied areas by Turkey, especially Afrin and Ras al-Ain / Sere-Kaniye, and the immediate expulsion of settlers, and securing them in other places until they can return to their original areas.
- * Demanding Turkey to allow all media, committees, international humanitarian, relief and human rights organizations, and civil society organizations to enter Afrin, Ras al-Ain / Serêkaniyê and Tel Abyad, and to bring in all relief supplies and materials, and to provide adequate protection and guarantees for the competent authorities and fact-finding committees to report and document violations, crimes and abuses all.
- * The United Nations, through its institutions and branches, and in coordination and cooperation with the International Criminal Court, seeks to open investigations and trials to prosecute and punish the perpetrators of crimes and violations in Syria, whatever their status, and to compensate those affected by those crimes.
- * Most important of all is placing Afrin, Ras al-Ain / Serê Kaniyê and Tel Abyad under international supervision and protection, as these areas are subjected to genocide and systematic ethnic and religious cleansing targeting their Kurdish component and the Yezidi Kurds in them.

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Yemen

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Special Tribunal for Lebanon

Official Website of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon
In Focus: Special Tribunal for Lebanon (UN)

Lebanon tribunal sentences two men to life imprisonment for Hariri bombing (Reuters)
June 16, 2022

International appeals judges on Thursday sentenced two men in absentia to life

imprisonment for their role in the 2005 assassination of former Lebanese prime minister Rafik al-Hariri.

The men remain at large despite being tried and convicted in absentia by the U.N.-backed Special Tribunal for Lebanon in The Hague.

"The attack terrorized not only the direct victims but more generally the people of Lebanon," presiding judge Ivana Hrdlickova said as she handed down the maximum sentence on Hassan Habib Merhi and Hussein Hassan Oneissi.

Hariri served as prime minister of Lebanon five times following the 1975-90 civil war. He and 21 others died in a massive truck bomb on Feb. 14, 2005.

In March this year the appeals chamber reversed an earlier acquittal and found Merhi and Oneissi guilty of terrorism and murder.

In 2020, a lower trial chamber convicted a former member of the Shi'ite movement Hezbollah, Salim Jamil Ayyash, for the bombing that killed veteran Sunni Muslim politician Hariri and 21 others. Ayyash also received a life sentence in the trial which saw a prosecution case based almost entirely on mobile phone records.

The Lebanon tribunal was created by a 2007 U.N. Security Council resolution. It is funded by voluntary contributions and by the Lebanese government.

Thursday's ruling concludes the court's main case.

It is expected that the court, which has been plagued by a funding crisis in the past years, will close down with only minimal staffing to handle residual issues.

UN chief calls on Lebanon to respect Hague court's verdict on Hariri killing (Arab News)

By Ephrem Kossaify

June 18, 2022

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has called on authorities in Beirut to respect the decision of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon, which on Thursday imposed life sentences on two members of Hezbollah for involvement in the 2005 bombing that claimed the life of former prime minister Rafik Hariri.

Hariri was killed on Feb. 14, 2005, by a suicide bomber who targeted his armored convoy on the Beirut waterfront. The blast killed 21 other people and injured 226.

The attack triggered nationwide protests that drove Syrian troops out of Lebanon after almost 30 years of military deployment in the country.

Salim Ayyash was convicted by the STL in 2020 and sentenced to life imprisonment for his part in the assassination, but the tribunal ruled that there was insufficient evidence to convict Habib Merhi and Hussein Oneissi. Prosecutors appealed against the acquittal and in March both men were found guilty.

All three men were tried, convicted and sentenced in their absence. They remain at large and are unlikely to serve any time in jail because Hassan Nasrallah, the leader of Iran-backed Hezbollah, does not recognize the authority of the court and refuses to hand them over.

Guterres said his thoughts "are with the victims of the Feb. 14 attack, and their families." He also expressed his "deep appreciation for the dedication and hard work of the judges and staff involved in this case throughout the years."

Noting "the independence and impartiality of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon," he called on Lebanese authorities "to respect the decision of the Tribunal."

Farhan Haq, a spokesperson for the UN in New York, told Arab News that the organization "welcomed the progress and the work being done by the Special Tribunal for Lebanon and we believe that this is a case where the people of Lebanon deserve justice."

The STL was established at The Hague in the Netherlands in 2009 in line with a UN Security Council resolution. It eventually tried four suspects in absentia, one of whom, Assad Sabra, was acquitted.

Plagued by political issues in Lebanon, the court announced last year that it would have to close after dealing with outstanding

appeals because it was running out of funding. This means the trial of Ayyash in a separate case involving three attacks on Lebanese politicians in 2004 and 2005 is unlikely to take place.

Shutting down Hariri tribunal a reckless move (Arab News)

By Nadim Shehadi

June 25, 2022

The Special Tribunal for Lebanon may have performed its final act. Unless an intensive campaign is launched to reactivate it, on July 1 it will move to what is called a “residual phase,” leading to its eventual shutdown. The impact of its closure will go far beyond the tribunal and even Lebanon — it will be felt throughout the region. It is also a blow to the overall effort to establish an international criminal justice system, which is a field that is still in its infancy. Here is an update for understanding where we are, what the residual phase means and where we can go from here.

On June 16, the tribunal’s court of appeal issued its final sentencing in the Hariri case. The court had reversed a judgment from August 2020 that found one of the defendants in the case guilty and acquitted the other two due to insufficient evidence. These two were found guilty on appeal, with the judgment issued on March 10.

The Appeals Chamber concluded that a network of phones, labeled by the prosecution as belonging to the “Green Network,” was used to coordinate the attack on Hariri. Two of those convicted were members of the network. It also concluded that this network was coordinated by Mustafa Amine Badreddine, who was found to be a Hezbollah military commander during 2004 and 2005 and who was reportedly killed in Syria in 2016.

This concluded the work of the tribunal in the Hariri case itself, but not its mandate. There is another connected case in which the tribunal has issued an indictment and engaged in the pre-trial process, only for it to be suspended last June barely two weeks before the start of the trial. The case involves Salim Ayyash, who has already been found guilty and sentenced in the Hariri case. If Ayyash is involved in both cases, this further strengthens the assumption of a Hezbollah hit squad operating in Lebanon.

The suspension of this case does not make economic sense, as the bulk of the costs have already been met and the incremental costs of the trial itself are justified and minimal in comparison. But given the suspension of the case, the work of the tribunal is considered done and the residual phase will begin as scheduled. The decision to shut down the tribunal is still reversible but, once it happens, the creation of any similar process in the future will be close to impossible.

It is not yet clear what the residual phase will lead to. Technically, the original mandate of the tribunal, which was given by the UN Security Council, is still in effect. Practically, however, it has been in shut-down mode since June last year due to a lack of funds. The most important part of the residual phase will be to make sure the archives are deposited in a safe place and made available to the public. There is also the need for a thorough evaluation of the work of the tribunal and its contribution to the field of international criminal justice. The lessons learned will be valuable for any future endeavor in that field.

There are implications for the region. One of the principal contributions of the tribunal was its definition of the Hariri assassination as an act of terrorism and describing it as a threat to international peace and security. Developments have shown that such political assassinations, which mainly target the critics of Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps and its militias, have spread in the region and are a threat to security. In Iraq alone, there have been more than 36 such assassinations and there is a revolt against them.

The summary of the judgement by the tribunal after this month’s sentencing includes a wording on terrorism with significance beyond Lebanon. It deserves to be quoted in full: The judges found that “terrorism is a particularly heinous crime, an intolerable threat to the peace, safety and harmony of the community. It destabilizes a country and its social and governmental institutions. Terrorism is employed to spread fear or to coerce governmental authorities to do or to refrain from doing that which its perpetrators wish. Terrorism has the potential to disturb international peace and security.”

The most controversial aspect of the tribunal is that it accepted the principle of trials in absentia, which means the possibility of sentencing without actual arrests. But there is another debate that argues that the truth is far more important than the conviction of a bunch of individuals. Indeed, even after the Nazi trials in Nuremberg, the punishment of a few people was not deemed to be sufficient to deliver justice, given the immensity of the crime. The truth itself, established through the rigorous work of such a tribunal, becomes undeniable and an important component of any political process to follow. It can replace or encourage the acknowledgment of the crime, which is important in any political resolution.

The archives of the tribunal, including the case files from its predecessor organization, the UN Independent International Investigation Commission, form an important body of data. The tribunal’s reports and proceedings contain important details

that go beyond the case itself. Those included in the judgment of August 2020 are extremely valuable and include a narrative of developments in great detail. Such archives should be made available to researchers just like the Caesar files on Syria or documentation about atrocities and international crimes committed by other non-state actors like Daesh or the IRGC.

Badreddine, who was part of the original indictment in the Hariri case but was taken off after he was killed in Syria, was reportedly a senior member of Hezbollah, which is an organization affiliated with the IRGC. There were crimes committed by IRGC affiliates in Syria, Iraq and Yemen that are also documented and could serve in building cases. There are many Syrian and Iraqi refugees in Germany and other European countries who were witnesses to such crimes. In Syria, the massacres in Baba Amr in Homs and in the Qalamoun region were perpetrated by many of these militias.

There are nongovernmental organizations and UN bodies mandated to investigate war crimes in Syria and these are active in processing archives. They mainly concentrate on crimes by the regime and by Daesh, but they also have the capacity to expand their scope to include other non-state actors. The recent trials of former Assad regime officials in Germany are a case in point, with indictments made under universal jurisdiction for international crimes, and these cases were built on such archives.

Reactivation of the tribunal will require a colossal effort and massive political will on behalf of the international community to push for enough funding to continue with the mission. There is a role that Lebanese civil society can play to raise awareness and put pressure on the Lebanese government, the UN and the sponsors of the tribunal. There can also be cooperation with other regional movements, such as those in Iraq and Syria, to assert the need for accountability and protection from such crimes.

There is a whole minefield of issues embedded in the Special Tribunal for Lebanon's project, including the definition of terrorism as an international crime and the possibility of trials in absentia. These will remain controversial among different schools of law, with endless arguments and no agreements reached. But such debates are precisely how a field grows stronger and should not be a reason to shut it down.

Judge Antonio Cassese, the first president of the tribunal, was a pioneer and a giant in that field. He was also the first president of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia. He was generous with his time when I visited him at the Special Tribunal for Lebanon in November 2010 and was patient in explaining the complex issues that were at stake. I felt like a student in the presence of a great educator. He accompanied me personally to introduce me to other members of his team.

One of Cassese's contributions has been in expanding the definition of "culpable negligence" to make it closer to "recklessness" (there are complex and endless debates about these terms among lawyers). But recklessness is such a good word to describe the negligence that can lead to the closure of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon. If it cannot be rescued, then its mandate of accountability should be maintained by other means.

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Israel and Palestine

Israel/OPT: Quash flawed conviction of aid worker Mohammed al-Halabi (Amnesty International)
June 16, 2022

Amnesty International is calling on Israeli authorities to quash the conviction of Mohammed al-Halabi, a Palestinian aid worker from Gaza who was yesterday found guilty in a deeply flawed trial of diverting millions of dollars to the Hamas de facto administration. The majority of the evidence used against him remains secret.

Mohammed al-Halabi, who was formerly the head of US-based charity World Vision's Gaza office, has already spent six years in pre-trial detention. Heba Morayef, Amnesty International's Regional Director for the Middle East and North Africa, said:

"The Israeli authorities' treatment of Mohammed al-Halabi violates all the basic guarantees on due process which are set out in international human rights law. He was detained for a staggering six years before the verdict, interrogated without legal representation, tried in secret hearings, and convicted on secret evidence and a forced "confession".

"Israeli authorities have utterly disregarded Mohammed al-Halabi's allegations that he was tortured and ill-treated in

detention. Yesterday's verdict is unsafe and unjust, and simply serves to highlight how the Israeli justice system is rigged against Palestinians.

"Mohammed al-Halabi should be retried in proceedings that meet international fair trial standards or released. There must be an investigation into his allegations of ill-treatment, and any unlawfully obtained evidence, including through torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, must be excluded. Mohammed al-Halabi's case is one of many which illustrates how Israeli authorities, who are perpetrating the crime against humanity of apartheid, use the justice system to dominate and discriminate against Palestinians."

Mohammed al-Halabi worked for World Vision since 2005, and in 2014 was promoted to manage the charity's operations in the Gaza Strip.

The Israeli Security Agency arrested him on 15 June 2016 at the Erez crossing between Israel and Gaza. He was transferred to a detention centre at Ashkelon, Israel, where he was interrogated before being moved to Nafcha prison in the Negev desert.

Mohammed al-Halabi was denied access to a lawyer and held incommunicado for the first weeks of detention, facing intensive interrogations without legal representation. According to his lawyer and media reports, he was severely beaten and his 'confession' to stealing 7.4 million USD a year was obtained under duress. His allegations of torture have not been investigated. Mohammed al-Halabi was not charged with a crime until 4 August, more than seven weeks after his arrest.

Israel to begin live fire training in Palestinian community facing forced expulsion (Middle East Eye)

By Edna Mohamed

June 17, 2022

Palestinians in Masafer Yatta say such drills are a scare tactic aimed at facilitating their eviction

The Israeli army has announced that it will conduct a live-fire military exercise in the south of Hebron in the occupied West Bank starting next week, in what Palestinian residents view as an attempt to force them out.

According to notices handed out by the military, drills will take place from Monday until Wednesday in Masafer Yatta, a Palestinian community where more than 1,000 Palestinian are facing imminent expulsion to make way for an Israeli firing zone.

The military exercise comes a month after the Israeli Supreme Court rejected the residents' claims to the land in favour of the military, declaring the region a closed-off training area following a two-decade legal battle.

The Israeli rights group B'Tselem said that, according to information provided to residents, the army plans to conduct live-fire training from Monday.

The live drills, which will include light arms training, are expected to take place near seven villages. Still, Palestinians living in the area were not given the exact location or time the exercises were expected to take place.

It's the first military drill involving the use of live fire in the area for 20 years. The exercises are expected to last for a month, the Israeli army told Haaretz.

Palestinians living in the area say the use of live fire is a scare tactic to facilitate their eviction by pushing them out.

"This will not be the only military training they conduct, they will do it constantly and move from one location to another," Palestinian activist Jamal Juma told Middle East Eye.

"So this is a way they think is a smart way, instead of loading these people in trucks and throwing them outside."

"They destroy the Palestinian resources, take it over so the Palestinians will be blocked in a densely populated area, isolated in ghettos, another [manifestation] of the apartheid system."

Last weekend, the Israeli army outlined homes in several villages in the area and took photos of residents' IDs despite announcing the previous year that they would stop mapping villages except in extenuating circumstances.

'War crime' The struggle of the Palestinian communities in Masafer Yatta began in 1981, when the Israeli army declared the 3,500 hectares on which Palestinians reside in the area a closed military zone, or Firing Zone 918.

In 1999, the army began removing parts of the community before a petition from the residents led to the Supreme Court temporarily freezing the evictions pending a final decision.

In early May, the green light was given to the evictions. A week later, Israeli authorities told Palestinian residents in the area to stop the construction of homes, agricultural buildings, and sheep pens ahead of an order to demolish and evict the community.

The planned evictions have been widely condemned by rights groups.

In a statement, B'Tselem said: "The justices have thus proved once again that the occupied cannot expect justice from the occupier's court.

"The decision, weaving baseless legal interpretation with decontextualised facts, makes it clear that there is no crime which the court justices will not find a way to legitimise."

In late May, more than a dozen members of US Congress sent a letter to Secretary of State Antony Blinken, calling on the White House to take immediate action to halt the forced expulsions which they said "would amount to a war crime."

Three Palestinians killed by Israeli forces in Jenin raid (Al Jazeera)

June 17, 2022

Three Palestinians have been killed and 10 wounded as Israeli forces raided Jenin in the occupied West Bank, the Palestinian health ministry has said.

About 30 Israeli military vehicles raided Jenin in the early hours of Friday and surrounded a car in al-Marrah area in the east of the city, firing shots at four men sitting inside. Three of them were killed and a fourth seriously injured.

Palestinian news agency Wafa named the men killed as Baraa Lahlouh (24), Yusuf Salah (23) and Laith Abu Suroor (24).

The Israeli army said in a brief message in Hebrew that it was conducting an operation to locate weapons from two different locations, and that they had been fired upon.

"Shots were identified towards the soldiers who thwarted the terrorists' plans to target them," the army said, adding that they found weapons, including two M-16 assault rifles and cartridges at the scene.

Residents in Jenin said they suspected the Israelis had intended to demolish the home of Raed Hazem, who carried out a shooting attack in Tel Aviv on April 7 that killed three Israelis before he was shot dead.

The Israeli army has ramped up raids in and around the occupied Jenin camp, in an attempt to crack down on growing Palestinian armed resistance there.

Fears are rampant of a possible large-scale Israeli invasion of the camp, where the armed wings of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad and Fatah movements are active.

According to the Palestinian health ministry, more than 60 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli forces this year, many of them in raids.

A string of Palestinian attacks since March has also killed 19 people in Israel.

Journalist Shireen Abu Akleh, a prominent TV reporter with Al Jazeera, was killed by Israeli forces last month in Jenin while she was covering an Israeli army operation.

A Palestinian investigation said the reporter – who was wearing a bullet-proof vest with "press" written on it and a reporting helmet when she was shot – was shot dead in what it described as a war crime.

Israel has backtracked from its initial insinuation that Abu Akleh could have been killed by a Palestinian gunman, but has now said it will not pursue a criminal investigation.

Israeli Occupation Forces Kill Palestinian Child in Ramallah (Palestinian Centre for Human Rights)

June 26, 2022

The Palestinian Centre for Human Rights (PCHR) condemns Israeli Occupation Forces' (IOF) murder of a Palestinian child, who was directly shot by Israeli soldiers stationed in a military watchtower in Silwad village, northeast of Ramallah. PCHR's investigations affirm that IOF unjustifiably opened fire at the child from a distance of 50 meters when the latter was on the street, where no events took place. The child was left to bleed for about two hours while IOF denied him first aid.

According to PCHR's investigations, at approximately 16:30 on Friday, 24 June 2022, when Palestinian young men and boys gathered in al-Junadi area adjacent to the Bypass Road (60) at the entrance to Silwad village, northeastern Ramallah, Israeli soldiers in a military watchtower at the village entrance opened fire at Mohammed 'Abdullah Salah Suliman (16). As a result, he was injured and fell on the ground. IOF left Mohammed to bleed for about 2 hours, prevented Palestinian ambulances from reaching him and indiscriminately and heavily opened fire to prevent anyone from approaching him as well. Afterwards, an Israeli ambulance arrived and provided first aid to him before taking him to a hospital in occupied East Jerusalem. At approximately 01:40 on Saturday, 25 June 2022, Mohammed's family was informed of his death after succumbing to his wounds.

The child's father, 'Abdullah Suliman, said that the Palestinian civil liaison informed them that Mohammed was injured by IOF fire and then taken via an Israeli helicopter to Hadassah-'Ein Karem Hospital in Jerusalem. He added that he was later informed of Mohammed's death after succumbing to a live bullet wound in his chin.

Since the beginning of 2022, IOF murdered 63 Palestinians, including 49 civilians: 14 children, 5 women (one was a journalist Sherin Abu 'Aqlah), a Palestinian stabbed by an Israeli settler and the rest were activists; 6 of them were assassinated. Also, hundreds of Palestinians were injured.

PCHR reiterates its call upon the international community to take immediate action to end Israeli occupation's crimes, and its call upon the ICC Prosecutor to investigate the situation in Palestine without any delay similar to its prompt action in Ukraine. PCHR also demand the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention fulfil their obligations as per Common Article 1 of the Convention, "undertake to respect and to ensure respect for the present Convention in all circumstances." PCHR also calls upon the High Contracting Parties to uphold their commitment to Article 146 of the same Conventions, i.e., to hold accountable persons accused of committing grave breaches of the Convention, and to ensure protection for Palestinian civilians in the occupied territory.

Israel refuses early release of prisoner Ahmad Manasra (Middle East Monitor)

June 29, 2022

The parole board in Israel's Ramla Prison yesterday rejected the appeal to free Palestinian prisoner Ahmad Manasra at a time when his mental health is deteriorating.

Member of Manasra's defence team, lawyer Khaled Zabarqa, said the parole board refused to discuss Manasra's appeal for early release.

The appeal was submitted by his defence team due to the serious deterioration in his physical and mental health.

According to Zabarqa, the parole board said that Manasra's case was classified under the "terrorism law."

Manasra has been unlawfully detained for seven years by the Israeli occupation under horrific circumstances and is currently suffering from serious mental health issues. He was arrested at just 13 and violently interrogated without a lawyer or his parents present.

He was handed a 12-year jail term – later reduced to nine – for the attempted murder of a 20-year-old and a 12-year-old boy in an illegal Jewish settlement in occupied East Jerusalem, this is despite him not taking part in the attack. His cousin was shot dead by an Israeli in 2015, while Manasra was brutally beaten up by an Israeli mob and crushed by an Israeli driver, leaving him with head injuries. At the time of his arrest, Israeli law stated that children under the age of 14 could not be held criminally responsible.

He was diagnosed with mental health issues due to months of brutal interrogation, torture and solitary confinement in Israeli detention centres.

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Gulf Region

Saudi Arabian dissidents 'sexually assaulted, murdered' in prison: Report (PressTV)

June 25, 2022

A new report has revealed that imprisoned political opponents and pro-democracy campaigners in Saudi Arabia are being murdered, sexually assaulted, and subjected to "sheer" brutality at detention centers across the kingdom.

The study, compiled by the Britain-based human rights group Grant Liberty, identified 311 prisoners of conscience who have been imprisoned since Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman took de-facto control of the ultra-conservative country.

The report showed that 53 prisoners have been tortured, six were sexually assaulted, and 14 were pushed into undergoing hunger strikes.

It also looked at the plight of 23 women's rights activists, 11 of whom were still behind bars and identified 54 journalists.

A total of 22 of the prisoners were arrested for crimes that they carried out when they were still children – five of them were later put to death. According to the report, an additional 13 were facing the death penalty, while four had died in custody.

"Sadly the abuse of the prisoners of conscience continues as the world watches on, women are subjected to sustained and brutal violations with no basic human rights," Lucy Rae of Grant Liberty said.

"Imprisoning, torturing, and abusing an elderly mother such as Aida al-Ghamdi because her son has sought asylum, surely is abhorrent and wrong in any nation," she stated.

Abdullah al-Ghamdi, a political and human rights activist who is the son of al-Ghamdi and lives in the United Kingdom, said he escaped Saudi Arabia after being threatened for campaigning against repressive measures in the kingdom.

His mother, Aida, and two of his brothers were arrested after he left, he added.

"They were arrested not because they had committed a crime, but because of my activism," Ghamdi stated.

"For over three years, my dear aging 65-year-old mother and my younger brother have been held by the Saudi royal family," he said, adding, "they have been held in solitary confinement and subjected to physical torture by cigarette burning, beating, and lashing."

"I have a hard time contacting my family as this will put them in danger. The Saudi government told them not to contact me and give me any updates on my mother and brother's case, so as yet I am unsure of my mother's charges," Ghamdi added.

He said his mother was held for over a year in Dhahban Central Prison in Jeddah before being transferred to the maximum-security Mabahith Prison in the city of Dammam. He wishes she was "safe, free and be able to rejoice with her loved ones."

Rae also cited the case of prominent Saudi women's rights activist Loujain al-Hathloul.

Human rights organizations say Hathloul has been forced to endure abuse, including electric shocks, flogging, and sexual harassment while in jail.

Loujain, who successfully campaigned to win Saudi women the right to drive, was arrested alongside 10 other women's rights activists in Saudi Arabia in May 2018 – weeks before the country reversed the driving ban.

Ever since bin Salman became Saudi Arabia's de facto leader in 2017, the kingdom has arrested dozens of activists, bloggers, intellectuals, and others perceived as political opponents, showing almost zero tolerance for dissent even in the face of international condemnations of the crackdown.

Muslim scholars have been executed and women's rights campaigners have been put behind bars and tortured as freedom of expression, association, and belief continues to be denied.

Over the past years, Riyadh has also redefined its anti-terrorism laws to target activism.

Mass Executions in Saudi Arabia (LAProgressive)

By Christine Gossin

June 26, 2022

On a range of charges including inciting sit-ins and protests, eighty-one men were executed in Saudi Arabia on March 12, 2022. This was the largest mass execution in decades.

On June 15, 2022, Amnesty International, ALQST for Human Rights, Human Rights Watch and Gulf Center for Human Rights wrote a formal plea to the United Nations Human Rights Council urging them and their state members to “hold Saudi Arabia to its international human rights obligations” in response to these executions (ALQST).

It is known that forty-one of these men were Shia. Of them, only three were executed on a charge of murder. In a report by Human Rights Watch on March 15, 2022, “Saudi activists have said that none of the 41 Shia men executed were children at the time of the crimes they were accused of committing. It is unclear whether any of the others were.”

Signs of Progress are Dubious

In 1996, Saudi Arabia ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the most important international treaty on the rights of children. In 2014, they passed their own bill of law, the Child Protection Law. The document produced by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia’s Ministry of Social Affairs, which outlines all the protections covered by the Child Protection Law, Executive Regulations of Child Protection Law, defines a child as, “every human being below the age of eighteen”(Article 1, Item 1) and forbids, “discriminating against children for any ethnic, social or economic reason” (Article 3, Item 11) and bestows the responsibility to protect children to all relevant authorities, which includes the Ministries of Justice, Islamic Affairs, the Interior, Education, Human Rights, and nearly every government, religious and military body, “Every public or private Authority entitled to provide the child with protection” (Article 1, Item 5, Sub-item 31).

It would seem by the long list of inclusions of “relevant authorities,” only the King himself stands outside the obligation to protect the children within his kingdom. Saudi Arabia has long been urged to rectify a great number of child rights violations and to eliminate the death penalty for children under 18, Saudi Arabia is still, today being called to the table by the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, the organization charged with reviewing the status of each member state in upholding the Convention.

Catch and Release, Hook Again and Finally Kill

The Saudi commitment to human rights is full of contradictions. This practice of “catch and release” then catch again, has been going on for decades.

Abdullah al-Huwaiti is a current example. Announced widely throughout the press world-wide that al- Huwaiti, who was arrested in May 2017 at age 14, and sentenced to death following confession under torture, had his sentence over-turned in November 2021 only to find himself on death-row once again this year, March 2, 2022.

Abdullah al-Huwaiti at 14 years of age was convicted despite having an alibi putting him 200km away from the scene of the crime (Human Rights Watch).

Now at nineteen years of age, Abdullah al-Huwaiti could soon be executed for a crime he did not commit!

On May 31, 2022, United Nations News posted, “We are alarmed by the confirmation of the death sentence against Mr. Al-Howaiti, on 2 March 2022, without initiating any investigation into the allegations of torture or determining the veracity of the coerced confession of guilt.”

Some young men formerly on death row have been released. Ali ar-Nimr was released in October 2021, which is a blessing his uncle, Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr, a prominent Shia cleric, did not receive, as he was executed in 2016 (BBC News). Others, Dawoud al- Marhoun and Abdullah al-Zaher have had their sentences reduced to 10 years in prison, which is a very long time in a young person’s life.

Yet, others, accused of their crimes when under the age of 18, remain on death row: Sajjad al-Yassin, Jalal al-Labbad, Yosuf al-Manasif and Hassan Zaki al-Faraj are currently in need of our attention.

Without continually engaged publicity and international pressure from Human Rights organizations, the Saudi government will continue to shed the blood of any young person with the spirit and heart to speak up against injustice through torture and take their lives in the cruel fashion akin to the Dark Age of Europe if they cannot be silenced.

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Afghanistan

End Violence and Serious Human Rights Violations Against Afghan Refugees (Human Rights Watch)
June 20, 2022

To mark World Refugee Day, members of the Alliance for Human Rights in Afghanistan stand together to honour Afghan refugees around the globe. We honour their strength and courage as they have been forced to flee their home countries to escape conflict and persecution. We acknowledge the profound hardships they have endured and reaffirm our commitment to carry their voices and defend their rights. The Alliance for Human Rights reminds the international community of its obligations to uphold and protect the right to seek asylum, the right to life and other fundamental human rights of Afghan refugees under the international human rights law regime.

The Afghan refugee crisis is one of the largest protracted refugee situations in the world. Today, over 6 million Afghans have been driven out of their homes and their country by conflict, violence and poverty. Of those, 3.5 million are displaced within Afghanistan, with 2.6 million Afghan refugees living in other countries. These numbers have been exacerbated by the Taliban's seizure of power in Afghanistan in August 2021 and the critical humanitarian crisis Afghanistan is facing today. The impact of the situation has been particularly devastating for women and children, who account for 80 percent of newly displaced Afghans, as they face increased protection risks such as family separation, psychosocial stress and trauma, exploitation and gender-based violence.

Refugee rights are fundamental human rights. The 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol protect the rights of refugees. This includes the right not to be expelled except under certain strictly defined conditions; the right not to be punished for illegal entry into a state; the rights to work, housing, education, public relief assistance, freedom of religion, access to the court system, freedom of movement within the territory and receiving identity and travel documents.

Regrettably, many Afghan refugees, including in Iran, Pakistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Malaysia and Turkey do not enjoy their rights under international law. They continue to face brutality, violence, ill-treatment and pushbacks. They face discrimination and struggle to access basic services, education, work, identity and travel documents. In the worst cases, they face arbitrary detentions, penalties and forced deportation.

We are appalled by the increasing number of incidents of violence and serious human rights violations against Afghan refugees. In the face of such egregious abuses, many governments are ignoring the great suffering of individuals in need of international protection, particularly women and children.

States must uphold their commitments and respect fundamental human rights, including the right to life and the right to seek asylum. We call on states to:

Ratify the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol;

Take all necessary measures to ensure the safe passage out of Afghanistan for all those targeted by the Taliban and other parties. This includes ensuring that border crossings remain open, visas are expedited, support for evacuations is delivered, and relocation and resettlement support is provided;

Immediately end forcible return of Afghan refugees and heed the call of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to suspend the forced return of nationals and former habitual residents, including anyone whose asylum claims have been rejected, until the situation in the country has stabilized sufficiently as determined by an independent human rights assessment, and the security, rule of law and human rights situation in Afghanistan has significantly improved to permit returns in safety and dignity;

Allow all Afghan seekers to access a clear, transparent and functioning asylum system, lodge a claim for international protection and apply for resettlement;

Provide individuals at particular risk including human rights defenders, journalists, women leaders and activists, and

LGBTIQ+ persons, immediate practical support at all levels, including through diplomatic and political channels, with specific and enhanced protection measures for women human rights defenders and women journalists. Use their influence, including in economic, political, or religious realms, to ensure compliance with the above demands.

We stand in solidarity with Afghans – both at home and in exile.

Amnesty International

Human Rights Watch

Freedom House

Freedom Now

International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)

MADRE

World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT)

Iran Calls on US to Free Afghanistan's Blocked Money (ABNA)

June 25, 2022

Iran's Ambassador to the United Nations called for the release of Afghan assets confiscated or blocked by the United States, as Afghanistan is struggling with the aftermath of an earthquake that killed at least 1500 people.

In a statement to the UN General Assembly on Thursday, Ambassador and Deputy Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations Zahra Ershadi expressed "sympathy and deepest condolences" to the people of Afghanistan for the deadly earthquake in this country.

Ershadi urged the international community to mobilize its resources and take prompt action to respond to the urgent humanitarian disaster.

"We also call upon countries that have confiscated or blocked Afghan assets, contrary to basic humanitarian and international norms, to release them for the sake of humanity," she said, referring to the US' freezing of billions of dollars of Afghanistan's money and confiscation of a portion of the assets.

Elsewhere in her statement, Ershadi reiterated Iran's "unwavering commitment to the noble goal of the protection of civilians as well as the prevention of genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, crimes against humanity and prosecution of their perpetrators."

Early warning initiatives along with preventive diplomacy, including resorting to the appropriate peaceful settlement of disputes, serve as the cornerstones for these efforts in order to achieve this goal.

We acknowledge the inevitable role of the youths in this process and emphasize the commitment of all countries to protect all their citizens especially children, as well as youths during catastrophic humanitarian situations.

In this regard, we take note of the recent report of the Secretary-General under this Agenda item.

She also urged in-depth legal as well as humanitarian discussions on the concept of "Responsibility to Protect" as there's no consensus on the scope, definition and elements of the concept.

Ershadi said that the failure to effectively prevent atrocity crimes can be attributed more to the failures of the Security Council rather than due to the lack of a relevant normative framework.

She also mentioned the outstanding role of some mainstream medias in the hands of certain states and lobbies that willfully portray humanitarian situations while manipulating the realities on the ground.

"This nonconstructive role manifests in an exaggeration of particular situations while downgrading or censoring certain critical conditions, such as the cases concerning Afghanistan, Palestine and Yemen," she noted.

Afghan Prisoner Asadullah Haroon Gul Freed From Guantanamo, Where 36 Men Now Remain, 20 Approved for Release (Eurasia Review)

By Andy Worthington

June 27, 2022

Good news from Guantánamo, where the prison's population has dropped to 36 with the release of the Afghan prisoner Asadullah Haroon Gul.

In a deal negotiated with the ruling Taliban government in Afghanistan, Gul was flown to Qatar, where he was welcomed by Taliban representatives who then arranged for him to be flown home to Afghanistan, to be reunited with his family, including his parents, his wife and his daughter, who he has not seen since she was a baby.

Gul's release brings to an end a 15-year ordeal of imprisonment without charge or trial, which began when he arrived at Guantánamo in June 2007, at the age of 25 or 26, as one of the last detainees to arrive at the prison, having been seized in Afghanistan four months earlier. Although the Pentagon described him as a "dangerous terror suspect," who was "known to be associated with high-level militants in Afghanistan," and had apparently "admitted to serving as a courier for al-Qaeda Senior Leadership (AQSL)," the authorities didn't even know his name, describing him only as Haroon al-Afghani ("the Afghan").

In addition, he was never given a Combatant Status Review Tribunal, a requirement for all prisoners facing a trial by military commission, and in fact he was never given a Guantánamo Internment Serial Number (ISN), his prisoner number, 3148, having been allocated to him at Bagram.

Swallowed up in Guantánamo, Gul subsequently disappeared from view. It took three years before the International Committee of the Red Cross were able to get a letter to his family to explain that he was still alive, and was at Guantánamo, and another six years before he managed to secure legal representation, via lawyers at Reprieve.

By this point, in 2016, Gul had been made eligible for a Periodic Review Board, a parole-type process established by President Obama to ascertain whether 64 men who had not been put forward for trials, and had not already been approved for release by Obama's first review process, the Guantánamo Review Task Force, should be recommended for release. The men in question had to convince the board — made up of representatives of the Departments of State, Defense, Justice and Homeland Security, as well as the office of the Director of National Intelligence and the Office of the Joint Chiefs of Staff — that it was safe to release them. Gul had only just met, for the first time, his attorney, Shelby Sullivan-Bennis, who memorably described him as a "bright-eyed, chatty young man," but despite her best efforts — and those of Gul — to persuade the board that he should be released, his ongoing imprisonment without charge or trial was upheld in July 2016, and again in April 2017. By now, of course, Donald Trump was president, and had made it clear that he had no interest in releasing any more prisoners from Guantánamo, and so it took until the start of Joe Biden's presidency for any further progress to be made.

Throughout this whole period, it had been difficult to work out if Gul had been seized by mistake, or if he had been involved to some extent with Hezb-e-Islami Gulbuddin (HIG, or HIA), a militia led by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, a recipient of CIA funding during the Russian occupation of Afghanistan, but who had aligned himself with al-Qaeda after the US-led invasion of Afghanistan in October 2001.

Crucially, however, Hekmatyar had reached a peace agreement with the Afghan government in 2016, meaning that the US no longer had any justification for holding anyone affiliated with HIG. This was made clear when an HIG-affiliated former Guantánamo prisoner, Hamidullah, was repatriated from the United Arab Emirates, where he had been sent with other Afghans in 2016, in December 2019, and yet, at Guantánamo, the peace deal was treated by the authorities as though it was irrelevant.

In an effort to secure Gul's release, his attorneys submitted a habeas corpus petition on his behalf to the District Court in Washington, D.C., and last March the Afghan government joined the case, submitting an amicus brief as part of the efforts to secure his release and repatriation, pointing out that HIG "ceased all hostilities with the United States" in 2016, following the peace agreement, and adding that "[d]etainees who are not a member of Al Qaida or the Taliban must be released if their organization is no longer engaged in hostilities with the United States." Despite this, when Gul's case was heard in court, prosecutor Stephen McCoy Elliott claimed that, although the government "does not take lightly the fact that [Gul] has been detained more than 10 years," we "have been and remain at war with al-Qaeda," and that, as a result, his "detention, while lengthy, remains justified," taking a position that, as I stated at the time, thoroughly undermin[ed] the HIG peace deal, and indicat[ed] that, at Guantánamo, as is so often the case, the basis for prisoners' continued imprisonment works to its own horrible logic, which has nothing to do with external reality."

In October 2021, Gul finally had his release approved by a PRB, with the board members noting his "lack of a leadership role in an extremist organization and the limited timeframe of his associations with [al-Qaeda] members," and just weeks later he also triumphed in the District Court, when his habeas petition was granted by Judge Amit Mehta, an Obama nominee, who confirmed that his ongoing imprisonment was unlawful.

Tara J. Plochocki of Lewis Baach Kaufmann Middlemiss, who also represents Gul, and who argued his case in court last May, responded to the ruling by stating, "What the ruling means is that Mr. Gul's detention is illegal. The grant of the writ does not

mean the judge can order the government to put him on a plane to Kabul, but the government is required to obey court orders and to comply, it must release him.”

It is reassuring that, despite the change of government in Afghanistan, this has now happened, and Gul has been enthusiastically welcomed back to Afghanistan, and is reunited with his family. Now all that remains is for President Biden to discover some haste when it comes to also freeing the 20 other men still held who have been approved for release, 15 of whom have had those decisions taken by PRBs since he took office. As I have unfortunately become accustomed to saying, approving men for release means nothing until they are actually freed.

Whistleblower David McBride Remains the Only One Charged Years After Brereton Report (Sydney Criminal Lawyers)

By Paul Gregoire

June 28, 2022

Due to mounting evidence that war crimes were being perpetrated by Australian special forces in Afghanistan, the federal Coalition government established the four-year-long Brereton inquiry, which tabled its final report in November 2020.

The report recommended that the Australian Federal Police inquire into 36 matters as potential war crimes, which relate to 23 credible incidents occurring in the Central Asian nation that involved 19 Australian troops.

Somewhat beating Brereton to the post, former military lawyer David McBride commenced disclosing classified documents to the ABC mid-last decade, which led to the war crime revelations set out in the 2017 report *The Afghan Files*.

A year and a half after the Brereton report was released, however, the only person facing criminal charges is McBride, with the Commonwealth Director of Public Prosecutions having commenced proceedings against him in 2018, while the AFP raided the ABC over its report in June 2019.

Whistleblowers protections fail McBride served two tours in Afghanistan as an ADF lawyer: the first in 2011 and the next in 2013. What he witnessed during his deployment made him question the foundations of Australia's entire operation in the country and he went to his superiors with these concerns. But nothing came of it.

In raising these issues with ADF officials, McBride was following the legal whistleblowing process set out in the Public Interest Disclosure Act 2013 (Cth), which dictates that following a failed attempt to raise a corruption matter internally, a whistleblower can then go public with the information.

Yet, in its function of providing whistleblowers with protection on their having leaked classified information, the PID Act fails. And McBride is now facing multiple national security and defence charges that carry up to 50 years imprisonment.

The lawyer's case is one of a handful of political prosecutions launched by former Liberal attorney general Christian Porter. And while newly incumbent Labor AG Mark Dreyfus has announced he'll review the prosecution of ACT barrister Bernard Collaery, he's yet to comment on McBride.

The new chief lawmaker has indicated that he'll be overhauling the PID laws that he drafted and oversaw the enactment of in 2013. These reforms will reflect the 2016 Moss report recommendations, which the Coalition took four years to respond to and then failed to act upon.

Failing the laws of conflict As recently reported in the Age, during a speech he delivered this month to the Military History Society, Brereton called out the lack of action on the alleged war crimes that he spent four years investigating.

An AFP inquiry into troop crimes in Afghanistan commencing in 2018, and an agency set up in 2021 to investigate war crimes, the Office of the Special Investigator, have both failed to get to the stage where any prosecutions have been launched.

A NSW Court of Criminal Appeal justice, Brereton told the history society that a failure to act upon the war crime allegations damages the nation's international standing and this further leads to the Australian laws relating to war crimes becoming redundant.

The final recommendation of the Senate Inquiry into Press Freedom's May 2021 report was that the CDPP "urgently reconsider, on strong public interest grounds, whether the prosecution of Mr David McBride should be continued".

However, at present, McBride's trial over his having exposed the truth commences in September.

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Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC)

**Official Website of the Extraordinary Chambers [English]
Official Website of the United Nations Assistance to the Khmer Rouge Trials (UNAKRT)
Cambodia Tribunal Monitor**

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Bangladesh International Crimes Tribunal

**Tribunal sentences one to death, three others to prison until death over Habiganj war crimes (BD News 24)
June 29, 2022**

The International Crimes Tribunal has sentenced Md Shafi Uddin Moulana of Habiganj's Lakhai to death and three others to prison until death for murder, kidnapping, torture and looting during the 1971 Liberation War.

A three-member tribunal led by Justice Md Shahinur Islam delivered the verdict on Thursday.

The three suspects who received prison until death are Md Jahed Miah aka Jahid Miah, Md Salek Miah aka Sayek Miah and Tajul Islam aka Forkan.

Another suspect, Sabbir Ahmed, was acquitted.

Shafi Uddin Moulana and Sabbir Ahmed have been absconding since the start of the case. The three other suspects were in court to hear the verdict.

The suspects faced two charges including allegations of murder, kidnapping, detention, torture, looting and arson in the Liberation War.

On March 21, 2016, the tribunal's investigation agency completed its investigation into the case. The investigation report was later submitted to the prosecution and presented to the tribunal.

The prosecution and defence completed their arguments on May 17 and the tribunal set Jun 30 for the verdict.

Prosecutor Sultan Mahmud Simon said they were happy with the verdict, but would think about appealing the acquittal of Sabbir and the prison sentence of three others. Defence lawyer Abdus Sattar Palwan alleged that his four clients were "framed by the tribunal's investigators". The defence will challenge the verdict in the High Court. "We didn't get justice. I believe my clients will be acquitted by the High Court."

MH Tamim, the lawyer for Sabbir, thanked the tribunal for acquitting his client despite the fact that he has been absconding.

This is the 46th verdict delivered by the tribunal since the first in 2013 after its formation in 2010.

Of the 129 accused in these cases, 14 died before the verdict, 78 got the death penalty, 25 were sentenced to prison until death, four were jailed for life and six received different prison terms. Two of the accused were acquitted due to old age and another for being a minor during the time of the crime.

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War Crimes Investigation in Myanmar

Myanmar Junta Executions' Plan Possible War Crimes, United Nations Warns (NDTV)

June 21, 2022

Myanmar: Four people, including former MP Phyo Zeya Thaw and democracy activist Ko Jimmy, "who were sentenced to death will be hanged according to prison procedures", junta spokesman Zaw Min Tun said.

Geneva: The Myanmar junta's plans to execute political opponents may amount to war crimes or crimes against humanity, a UN official said Monday. The junta said on June 3 it would execute a former lawmaker from Aung San Suu Kyi's party and a prominent democracy activist, both convicted of terrorism, in what would be the country's first judicial executions since 1990.

Four people, including former MP Phyo Zeya Thaw and democracy activist Ko Jimmy, "who were sentenced to death will be hanged according to prison procedures", junta spokesman Zaw Min Tun told AFP then.

Nicholas Koumjian, head of the UN's Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar, said he was following this case closely.

"The available information strongly suggests that under international law, fundamental rights of the convicted persons were blatantly violated in these proceedings," Koumjian said of the trials, which were closed to the public.

"Imposing a death sentence, or even a period of detention, on the basis of proceedings that do not satisfy the basic requirements of a fair trial may constitute one or more crimes against humanity or war crimes," he added.

The junta has sentenced dozens of anti-coup activists to death as part of its crackdown on dissent after seizing power last year, but Myanmar has not carried out an execution for decades.

For a trial to be considered fair it must be held in public to the greatest extent possible, said Koumjian.

"Exceptions based on national security or other considerations must be limited to the extent that they are strictly justified," he said.

But in these cases, "it appears that there were no public proceedings nor are the judgments publicly available".

This raised doubts as to whether the tribunal was impartial and independent, he added.

The UN mechanism for Myanmar was created by the UN human rights council in 2018.

Its task is to gather evidence of international crimes and human rights violations in the former Burma and document them with a view to facilitating criminal proceedings.

Cover Stories and Burner Phones: How Myanmar Journalists Report Under Myanmar Rule (VOA News)

By Tommy Walker

June 25, 2022

From cover stories to burner phones, Myanmar's journalists are resorting to unconventional methods to report on life under military rule.

The space for media has shrunk drastically since Myanmar's military seized power in 2021. More than 120 journalists have been detained, the junta revoked licenses at about a dozen outlets, and other media groups and reporters now work in exile.

Those who remain say they are taking a range of precautions to stay safe under military rule.

The junta, which refers to itself as the, says media and activists are spreading "fake news." And spokesperson Major General Zaw Min Tun told VOA in June the junta "never arrests any journalists for doing their job, as I have said repeatedly."

But journalists who spoke with VOA described how they or colleagues have been targeted for arrest.

One of those is Win Zaw Naing, who works for the independent news website Red News Agency.

The military detained him briefly last year for his coverage of the coup. He later discovered the township police had a list of people to arrest.

“They are trying to arrest us because they want some of our sources,” Win Zaw Naing said. “They are investigating the neighborhood and the house where they [the sources] used to live.” Under those circumstances, reporting takes careful preparation, said a journalist who goes by the alias KLT to protect his identity.

The freelance journalist has created a set of safety measures, including moving regularly. So far, he has moved at least five times in Yangon.

“When I go outside of the place where I live, I usually bring another phone which is totally private and not related to my work at all — like the contacts are only my wife, my mom, my non-journalistic friends and so on,” he said.

And when he does phone interviews, he uses secure methods.

“I make the calls to my sources through the Signal and Telegram [apps]. But at times when the sources are from the internet blackout areas, I make calls with non-registered Sim cards and so on,” he added.

The threats to journalist safety have prompted many to work undercover so they can keep reporting on the conflict.

KLT explained to VOA how he created a cover story about being the owner of a mobile phone shop to try to avoid being detained.

The journalist discussed his story with a friend who actually owns a shop. Now, the reporter said, “If there is any emergency or interrogation, I can just make a call to him and prove that I’m a mobile phone service shop owner.”

As he travels, so, too, does his cover story.

“Every time when I reach to a new ward, I let the neighbors know that I’m a mobile shop owner,” KLT said.

But even with a cover story and safety precautions, gaining access to sources is hard.

Journalists often have “zero possibility” to get out in the field, he said.

“We have to mostly work just by interviewing on phone and internet. And most of the times, it is very hard to get in touch with the sources, contacts and at times it is very hard to get a good photo or video footages,” he said.

With Myanmar’s military accused of atrocities, gaining access to witnesses and footage is vital to document what is happening.

The military has killed more than 2,020 people and detained more than 14,000, according to the Thailand-based Assistance Association for Political Prisoners.

Political analyst Aung Thu Nyein said the junta has no tolerance for “free media” in Myanmar. “Generally, the environment of free media is shrinking,” Aung Thu Nyein told VOA. “They want to control the media outlets other than their state media.”

However, the analyst said the military isn’t the only group concerned about negative reporting. “The opposition, especially newly emerging resistance groups, such as People Defense Force [PDF] and local defense forces [LDFs] has the same tendency, to threaten the media reporting against them and their wrong deeds.”

A knock-on effect to the repression is a drop in the number of outlets still publishing. “Some media agencies stopped working as they feel limited media freedom and see no profit from their business,” Aung Thu Nyein said. “There are almost fewer quality reports, as the quality of media agencies is decreasing and no promotion by their own agencies.”

The sharp decline for media freedoms has resulted in Myanmar falling to nearly the bottom of the World Press Freedom Index in 2022.

The country now ranks 176 out of 180 countries, where one is the freest, according to Reporters Without Borders.

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AMERICAS

North & Central America

Julian Assange's extradition to U.S. approved by British government (CBC)

June 17, 2022

The British government on Friday ordered the extradition of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange to the United States to face charges of spying, a milestone - but not the end - of a decade-long legal saga sparked by his website's publication of classified U.S. documents.

Home Secretary Priti Patel signed the extradition order on Friday, her department said. It follows a British court ruling in April that Assange could be sent to the U.S.

The Home Office said in a statement that "the U.K. courts have not found that it would be oppressive, unjust or an abuse of process to extradite Mr. Assange.

"Nor have they found that extradition would be incompatible with his human rights, including his right to a fair trial and to freedom of expression, and that whilst in the U.S. he will be treated appropriately, including in relation to his health."

The decision is a big moment in Assange's years-long battle to avoid facing trial in the U.S. — though not necessarily the end of the tale.

Assange has 14 days to appeal.

"Today is not the end of the fight. It is only the beginning of a new legal battle," said Assange's wife, Stella Assange. She said the U.K. decision marked "a dark day for press freedom and for British democracy."

"Julian did nothing wrong," she said. "He has committed no crime and is not a criminal. He is a journalist and a publisher, and he is being punished for doing his job."

A British judge approved the extradition in April, leaving the final decision to the government. The ruling came after a legal battle that went all the way to the U.K. Supreme Court.

The U.S. has asked British authorities to extradite Assange so he can stand trial on 17 charges of violating the Espionage Act and one charge of conspiring to commit unlawful computer intrusion over WikiLeaks's publication of a huge trove of classified documents more than a decade ago. American prosecutors say Assange unlawfully helped U.S. Army intelligence analyst Chelsea Manning steal classified diplomatic cables and military files that WikiLeaks later published, putting lives at risk.

Journalism organizations and human rights groups have called on Britain to refuse the extradition request.

Supporters and lawyers for Assange, 50, argue that he was acting as a journalist and is entitled to First Amendment protections of freedom of speech for publishing documents that exposed U.S. military wrongdoing in Iraq and Afghanistan. They argue that his case is politically motivated.

Barry Pollack, Assange's U.S. lawyer, said it was "disappointing news that should concern anyone who cares about the First Amendment and the right to publish."

Assange's lawyers said they would mount a new legal challenge, and legal experts say the case could take months or even years more to conclude.

"We will appeal this all the way, if necessary to the European Court of Human Rights," Assange attorney Jennifer Robinson said.

Robinson asked U.S. President Joe Biden to drop the charges brought against Assange during Donald Trump's presidency,

arguing they posed a "grave threat" to free speech.

Assange's lawyers say he could face up to 175 years in jail if he is convicted in the U.S., though American authorities have said any sentence is likely to be much lower than that.

Amnesty International secretary general Agnes Callamard said Friday that extraditing Assange "would put him at great risk and sends a chilling message to journalists the world over."

"If the extradition proceeds, Amnesty International is extremely concerned that Assange faces a high risk of prolonged solitary confinement, which would violate the prohibition on torture or other ill treatment," she said. "Diplomatic assurances provided by the U.S. that Assange will not be kept in solitary confinement cannot be taken on face value given previous history."

Assange has been held at Britain's high-security Belmarsh Prison in London since 2019, when he was arrested for skipping bail during a separate legal battle. Before that, he spent seven years inside the Ecuadorian Embassy in London to avoid extradition to Sweden to face allegations of rape and sexual assault.

Sweden dropped the sex crimes investigations in November 2019 because too much time had elapsed.

In March, Assange and his wife, who have two sons together, married in a prison ceremony.

U.S. Vows to Hunt Russian War Criminals - but Gives a Pass to Its Own (the Intercept)

By Nick Turse

June 25, 2022

"THERE IS NO place to hide," said U.S. Attorney General Merrick Garland during a surprise trip to Ukraine this week, announcing that a veteran prosecutor known for hunting down Nazis would lead American efforts to investigate Russian war crimes. "We will pursue every avenue available to make sure that those who are responsible for these atrocities are held accountable," he added.

Garland didn't need to travel 4,600 miles in pursuit of war criminals. If he wanted to hold those responsible for atrocities accountable, he could have stayed home.

In a suburban Maryland neighborhood, just over an hour away from Garland's office, I once interviewed a U.S. Army veteran who confessed to shooting, in Vietnam, an unarmed elderly man in 1968. He didn't just tell me. He told military criminal investigators in the early 1970s but was never charged or court-martialed. He retired from the Army in 1988.

The United States is awash in war criminals. Some are foreigners who fled accountability in their homelands. Most are homegrown. They live in places like Wheelersburg, Ohio (a confessed torturer), and Auburn, California (a West Point grad who presided over a massacre). Like these veterans, most have never been charged, much less tried or convicted. If Garland or Eli Rosenbaum, whom he tapped to lead the Ukraine War Crimes Accountability Team, want to find them, I can provide addresses.

I located those veterans through the records of a secret war crimes task force set up by the Pentagon during the Vietnam War. Today, even that bare modicum of accountability has vanished. It's now anathema for the Defense Department to mention U.S. personnel and "war crimes" in the same breath.

Last month, a Pentagon investigation of a 2019 attack in Syria that killed dozens of people, including women and children, found "numerous policy compliance deficiencies" in the military's initial review of the airstrike, but ultimately held that no one violated the laws of war and no disciplinary action was warranted.

The anonymous personnel involved in the Syria strike - including the F-15 pilot, drone crew, lawyers, analysts, and members of a Special Operations task force - are typical of Americans involved in civilian deaths during the 20-plus years of the so-called war on terror who have rarely been publicly identified, criminally investigated, or subjected to the scrutiny of anything like a war crimes accountability team. We generally don't know their names though due to the work of journalists and nongovernmental organizations, we know their handiwork.

There was the August 2021 "righteous strike" against a terrorist target in Afghanistan that actually killed 10 civilians, seven of them children. There were the air and artillery attacks in Raqqa, Syria, that the Pentagon said killed 159 civilians, but Amnesty International and Airwars, a U.K.-based airstrike monitoring group, found had left more than 1,600 civilians dead. There was the drone strike that killed 30 pine nut farm workers in Afghanistan in 2019. An April 2018 attack in Somalia that killed a 22-year-old woman and her 4-year-old daughter. An airstrike in Libya, later that year, that killed 11 civilians. The attack that same year in Yemen that killed four civilians and left another, Adel Al Manthari, gravely injured. The seven separate attacks in Yemen by the United States - six drone strikes and one raid - between 2013 and 2020 that killed 36 members of the

intertwined al Ameri and al Taisy families. And the military's confidential assessments of more than 1,300 reports of civilian casualties from airstrikes in Iraq and Syria from 2014 to 2018, published as "The Civilian Casualty Files" by the New York Times late last year, among so much other evidence.

Last year, then-Pentagon (now National Security Council) spokesperson John Kirby claimed that "no military in the world works as hard as we do to avoid civilian casualties." Experts said otherwise. "Civilian protection is not prioritized. We're not the best because we're choosing not to be the best," Larry Lewis, who spent a decade analyzing military operations for the U.S. government, told The Intercept. The seemingly endless number of known civilian casualty incidents that deserve an investigation or reinvestigation also indicates that Kirby's spin just isn't true. What's also clear is that the Pentagon, as Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin put it in April, has no intention to "re-litigate cases."

This week, a leaked draft of House Armed Services Committee Chair Adam Smith's version of the 2023 defense spending bill called for a Commission on Civilian Harm to investigate the human toll of 20-plus years of war. "At a minimum, the Commission has the potential to provide the most comprehensive assessment and accounting of civilian harm during the war on terror," Brian Finucane, a senior adviser at the International Crisis Group, told The Intercept. A war crimes accountability team assembled by Garland could put iron in the commission's glove.

Recently, Beth Van Schaack, the State Department's ambassador at large for global criminal justice, noted that Russian war crimes were not the actions of "a rogue unit, but rather a pattern and practice across all the areas in which Russia's forces are engaged." She added that responsibility extended to "individuals up the chain of command who are aware that their subordinates are committing abuses and who failed to do what is necessary to either prevent those abuses or to punish the perpetrators." To that end, before conducting investigations of civilian harm committed by drone pilots and special operators across war zones from Syria to Somalia, and Libya to Yemen, the U.S. should start with the original architects of the "war on terror" and the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, including former President George W. Bush, Vice President Dick Cheney, and national security adviser Condoleezza Rice.

If Garland is truly outraged by "heart-wrenching accounts of brutality and death" and committed to pursuing "every avenue of accountability for those who commit war crimes," he doesn't need to dispatch investigators abroad. There are plenty of war criminals, hiding in plain sight, right here.

G7 leaders work to 'starve' Russia of oil money as Zelensky says he wants the war over by the end of the year (CNN)

By Keith Liptak

June 27, 2022

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky told G7 leaders during a virtual meeting Monday that he wants the war in Ukraine to end by the end of 2022, according to a source familiar with his remarks, as leaders worked to starve Russia of its oil revenues and mitigate the economic fallout of the conflict.

The dual missions- sustain support for Ukraine while easing economic pressures at home -have defined this year's summit of leading democracies, held high in the Bavarian Alps. While largely united, the leaders are all facing their own political imperatives to see a momentum shift in the fighting and bring an end to the conflict quickly.

To that end, leaders were nearing an agreement to try capping the price of Russian oil, depriving the country of revenues that have soared amid the global spike in energy prices. Details were still being ironed out, including whether the top buyers of Russian oil would agree to the limits, but US officials sounded confident in the prospects of the plan.

As the war in Ukraine grinds ahead, the question of how to end the conflict has loomed over the talks here. Zelensky's timeframe, delivered via video conference during a morning session at the Schloss Elmau castle, was as clear a sign as he has given about where he sees the trajectory of the war headed.

A top adviser to President Joe Biden said Zelensky was focused on regaining momentum in Ukraine over the coming months - and not years - when he spoke to leaders.

The Ukraine conflict has been at the center of the Group of 7 summit being held inside a century-old mountainside castle in Germany's Bavaria region. Leaders have decided on new steps to isolate Russia's economy, including a ban on new imports of Russian gold, and unveiled new sanctions on Monday.

In a joint statement after their meeting with Zelensky, the leaders pledged to continue supporting Ukraine "for as long as it takes."

The United States is expected to announce as soon as this week it's purchased a new advanced medium-to-long range missile defense system that Ukraine has been requesting, along with new shipments of ammunition and radar systems, as it works to

turn the momentum in the war away from Russia, which has been making small gains in the East.

Ukraine had requested the system to help sustain its fight against Russia. In a brief glimpse of the leaders' meeting with Zelensky, the Ukrainian President could be seen on a screen set up in the conference room as the leaders took their seats.

G7 leaders also plan to announce a lengthy set of new sanctions, including on Russian defense supply chains, Russians responsible for human rights abuses and war crimes, private military companies and new visa restrictions on 500 officials. The US will also announce \$7.5 billion in new funding for Ukraine, part of a broader commitment from G7 nations to help the country make up its budgetary shortfalls.

"Here at this meeting of the G7, as well as at NATO, we will continue to do, collectively, everything we can to make sure that the Ukrainians have what they need in their hands to repel the Russian aggression," US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said in an exclusive interview with CNN's "State of the Union" on Sunday.

There are other important topics on the agenda, including a new effort to counter China's infrastructure investments in the developing world that have extended Beijing's influence across the globe.

But how much longer the Western front can remain united against Russia is the question looming over these talks. The rising cost of energy, fears of global food shortages and the certain inevitability that war fatigue will set in have lent urgency to the discussions about where the conflict goes next.

Meeting his host, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, on Sunday, Biden sought to underscore the importance of sticking together.

"Putin has been counting on, from the beginning, that somehow NATO and the G7 would splinter," he said. "But we haven't, and we're not going to."

Zelensky, who is also planning to address this week's NATO summit in Madrid, has pressed the West for accelerated sanctions on Moscow and heavy artillery to beat back the Russian invaders.

His entreaties will become more urgent following Sunday's missile hits on two residential buildings in Kyiv, the Ukrainian capital that had enjoyed relative calm in recent weeks as the fighting moved eastward. Biden condemned the attack as "barbarism."

Yet how much further leaders will be willing to go in applying new sanctions on Russia remains to be seen. High oil prices mean Russia is making more revenue from its energy exports, despite bans in Europe and the United States.

Western leaders gathering at the G7 have decided to try capping the price of Russian oil, officials say, the latest step toward punishing Moscow while attempting to mitigate the economic effects of the war in Ukraine. How, when and by how much the price of Russian oil will be capped remains to be seen. Officials said the precise mechanism for accomplishing the cap was still being worked out.

How, when and by how much the price of Russian oil will be capped remains to be seen. Officials said the precise mechanism for accomplishing the cap was still being worked out.

But leaders will instruct their teams to work urgently toward finding a way to limit the price at which Russia can sell its oil, depriving Moscow of a key revenue source.

"The goal here is to starve Russia, starve Putin of his main source of cash and force down the price of Russian oil to help blunt the impact of Putin's war at the pump," said a senior US administration official.

As oil prices have skyrocketed, Russia's oil revenues are actually up, despite global import bans. Leaders want to use their collective leverage to cut the revenue Russia receives from the countries still purchasing its oil.

How, exactly, that is done remains to be seen, though the official suggested the G7 nations have leverage through oil transportation networks that could help toward applying the cap.

High gas prices for US and European consumers are putting pressure on leaders to find ways to ease the pain.

Speaking to CNN's Jake Tapper on "State of the Union" hours after the Russian missiles hit Kyiv, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson urged Americans, Britons and others in the West to maintain resolve in punishing Moscow, despite the effect the war has had on global oil prices.

"I would just say to people in the United States that this is something that America historically does and has to do, and that is to step up for peace and freedom and democracy," Johnson said. "And if we let Putin get away with it, and just annex, conquer

sizable parts of a free, independent, sovereign country, which is what he is poised to do "then the consequences for the world are absolutely catastrophic."

Putin, whose country was ejected from the then-G8 in 2014 after Russia's annexation of the Ukrainian territory of Crimea, was the subject of light mockery as leaders sat down to a working lunch Sunday.

Johnson, the last leader to arrive to the round meeting table, asked whether he should keep his suit jacket on.

"Jackets on?" he asked, before joking about how the leaders had to look tough during their talks.

"We have to show that we're tougher than Putin," he said.

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau made a suggestion: "Barechested horseback ride," he said, as the leaders chuckled.

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South America

Colombia truth commission outlines dramatic toll from brutal civil war toll (NBC)

June 29, 2022

A Truth Commission presented its final report on Colombia's armed conflict Tuesday, urging the government, military and rebel groups that are still fighting in the countryside to recognize the suffering victims have endured and ensure that political disputes are no longer solved through violence.

The commission is made up of academics and representatives of civil society groups and was set up as part of a 2016 peace deal between the government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia that ended five decades of conflict in which at least 450,000 people were killed.

It was tasked with documenting war crimes and publishing its findings in a digital format that will be available to the public. The commission also issued a series of recommendations aimed at stopping future conflicts from taking root in Colombia, including changes to drug policy and transformations in the nation's military forces.

The commission's final report is based on interviews with 30,000 war victims, military leaders, former guerrilla fighters and five former Colombian presidents.

The 900-page report said 50,000 people were kidnapped between 1990 and 2018 as a result of Colombia's armed conflict, often by rebel groups who kept hostages for ransom. It also mentioned that more than 7 million people were forced to flee their homes and that 56,000 civilians were killed by Colombia's armed forces, including 6,300 people who were murdered in remote areas and presented to authorities as rebel fighters killed in action.

The report called for major changes to Colombia's military and police forces, which have received more than \$8 billion from the U.S. over the past two decades.

It said the military's objectives should be re-evaluated and that all human rights violations committed by security forces should be tried by civilian courts.

The truth commission's report also discussed drug related violence in Colombia and called on the nation's government to regulate the drug trade so that its profits go to government agencies and not drug trafficking groups. It suggests that Colombia restart peace negotiations with the National Liberation Army, Colombia's largest remaining rebel groups.

The Truth Commission's recommendations are not legally binding. But some will likely be implemented by Colombia's new government which will take over in August. President-elect Gustavo Petro attended the ceremony where the report was presented to the public and said its recommendations would "effectively become part of Colombia's history."

The leftist senator, who was once a member of a rebel group, said during his campaign that he will re-establish diplomatic

relations with neighboring Venezuela whose socialist government is not recognized by the United States. Petro has also called for reforms to Colombia's defense forces, suggesting he police should stop being used for military operations and be placed under greater civilian oversight.

The presentation ceremony was not attended by President Ivan Duque, who was in Portugal for the UN Ocean Conference. So the Truth Commission's president, Jesuit priest Francisco de Roux, handed the report and its recommendations to Petro instead.

"We are confident that President Petro will incorporate these recommendations into institutional spaces of dialogue and debate, so that we can make the changes that are needed" De Roux said.

A separate war crimes tribunal called the Special Jurisdiction for Peace is also investigating crimes that happened during the armed conflict.

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Venezuela

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TOPICS

Truth and Reconciliation Commission

Colombia truth panel calls for move toward 'legal regulation' of drugs (Washington Post)

By Samantha Schmidt and Diana Duran

June 28, 2022

Colombia's truth commission on Tuesday called on the government to stop focusing on prohibiting illicit drugs - a cause of violence, it said, in the country's decades-long civil conflict - and instead become a global leader in "strict legal regulation."

The commission's recommendations are part of a final report to serve as the most detailed account yet of the atrocities committed by all sides in the country's 52-year civil conflict, the longest-running in the hemisphere.

The commission gives a scathing critique of Colombia's war on drugs, a joint effort with the United States, the country's most important ally. It recommends a new approach to combating the cultivation of illicit crops, centered more on sustainable development and less on the eradication of coca, the base plant of cocaine.

"The current drug policy is ineffective in preventing consumption," the panel writes in a nearly 900-page report. "The policy of the war on drugs and narco-trafficking has been a factor in the persistence of conflict and violence in Colombia."

It did not provide more details of which drugs should be decriminalized, or how they would be regulated. The recommendations are advisory, not binding. They would require government action to implement. But Colombia's president-

elect, Gustavo Petro, said he would comply with the report's recommendations.

The commission envisions sweeping reforms to the country's justice system, calling for greater independence for the attorney general's office and more robust investigations into human rights violations. It urges the government to separate the national police from the Defense Ministry, an unusual structure that critics say has led to a militarization of law enforcement. It calls for a comprehensive review of military doctrine and more transparency and disciplinary oversight of security forces. It says the state must ensure compliance with international standards for the use of force, and should consider reforming or eliminating the country's controversial riot police force.

The recommendations follow four years of research and more than 27,000 interviews with victims, government officials, civil organizations and participants on all sides of the country's complex history of armed violence. The commission plans to release the full report in installments in the coming weeks. It is expected to shed light on human rights violations committed by Colombia's military and armed leftist rebels - as well as previously unreported details about the role of the United States, which provided training and billions of dollars of funding to the country's armed forces.

Its report presents stunning new figures capturing the toll of Colombia's conflict: More than 450,000 people died, more than 121,700 were "forcibly disappeared" some 50,000 were kidnapped, about 8 million were displaced from their homes, and more than 16,200 children and teenagers were recruited to armed groups.

Some recommendations differ sharply from the approach taken by the administration of President Iván Duque, who has supported eradication of coca and a militarized response to drug trafficking. Critics say Duque, who opposed the peace deal, has failed to adequately implement the accords. As violence grows in rural Colombia, so has coca cultivation, which has tripled since 2012, according to U.S. figures.

The report comes at a critical juncture for Colombia, just over a week after voters elected the country's first leftist president. Petro and Vice President-elect Francia Márquez, who will take office in August, attended the truth commission's ceremony Tuesday.

"The approach to the truth cannot be one of revenge," Petro said. "It must be seen ... as the possibility of reconciliation."

Duque, notably, did not attend; he was traveling out of the country.

Petro has been a fierce critic of the war on drugs, and has said he would support legalizing marijuana. If he manages to move the country in the direction of "legal regulation" of drugs, as the truth commission recommends, he could draw strong opposition from the United States, which has long hailed its relationship with Colombia in combating the drug trade.

The Biden administration has taken a more holistic, harm-reduction approach than its predecessors to counternarcotics strategy in Colombia. But it seems unlikely that the U.S. government would support legalization of a drug as addictive and harmful as cocaine, said Adam Isacson, director for defense oversight at the Washington Office on Latin America.

"With a midterm election going up there's not going to be a lot of courage in the Democratic Party to endorse this," Isacson said. But a move toward legalization would be "almost entirely a win for Colombia."

"If you could take the profit out of the drug trade you'd take so much of the money out of organized crime," Isacson said.

Neither the U.S. State Department nor the U.S. Embassy in Bogotá immediately responded to requests for comment.

"The report of the [commission] symbolizes the end of a process of listening and the beginning of a stage of reflection on the past and the future," the embassy tweeted. "We hope that the plurality of voices present in this story will make real the rights of victims and reconciliation."

The civil conflict grew out of generations of armed violence and land disputes in rural parts of the country. Beginning in the 1960s, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, the leftist rebel group known as the FARC, took up arms, railed against inequality and sought to overthrow the government. For decades, FARC insurgents terrorized the country with kidnappings, bombings and other attacks. At its peak, the group, buoyed by cocaine profits, boasted nearly 20,000 fighters and controlled as much as a quarter of Colombia's territory.

As the FARC gained power, paramilitary forces rose up across the country to fight the rebels - sometimes with the complicity of the country's armed forces. The Colombian army, backed and trained by the U.S. military, responded with brutal force, often against innocent civilians.

In April, top military leaders accepted responsibility for war crimes and crimes against humanity in an infamous scandal known as Colombia's "false positives" case. Between 2002 and 2008, an estimated 6,402 Colombians were killed by

government forces in what the military labeled falsely as combat deaths, according to the country's Special Jurisdiction for Peace. Top military leaders used the body counts to show they were winning the war.

The commission, in its final report Tuesday, says these were "not isolated cases." It placed "institutional responsibility" on the armed forces.

Through the 2016 peace deal, for which then-President Juan Manuel Santos was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, more than 13,000 FARC combatants disarmed and committed to reintegrating into society. The government committed to comprehensive reforms to help prevent further violence.

But much of the country continues to suffer from armed conflict. FARC dissident groups, led by rebels who have rejected the peace deal, and paramilitary groups continue to terrorize and displace residents. The rate of killings of human rights defenders and environmental activists is among the highest in the world.

Tuesday's ceremony was held in a Bogotá theater named after Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, the presidential candidate whose assassination in 1948 helped set off decades of violence in the country.

Colombia's peace process follows similar post-conflict transitions around the world, such as in South Africa and Uganda, and in Latin America, as in Peru, Uruguay and Argentina. But unlike the others, the commission's report takes an intersectional approach, with separate chapters focused on the conflict's impact on women, LGBTQ people, Indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities.

"Why didn't the country demand that the guerrillas and the state bring an end to the political war?" asked Francisco de Roux, president of the truth commission. "How did we dare let this happen? And how dare we allow it to continue?"

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Terrorism

Dogecoin Worth Millions Linked To Illicit Activity Including Terrorism: Elliptic (Decrypt)

By Andrew Asmakov

June 22, 2022

Dogecoin is increasingly connected to illicit activity including Ponzi schemes, the financing of terrorism and child sex abuse material (CSAM), according to a new report by blockchain analytics firm Elliptic.

Per the report, the meme coin has enjoyed growing popularity as a method of payment; however, aside from legitimate causes, it has also caught the attention of bad actors, with "millions of dollars worth of Dogecoin transactions connected to illicit activity," identified.

"While the vast majority of this activity consists of fraud, scams and ponzi schemes, it also includes the most serious types of crime, including terrorism financing and vendors of child sexual abuse material (CSAM)," said Elliptic.

Pointing to the "increasing adoption" of Dogecoin for terrorism financing, the report cited a July 2021 seizure order conducted by Israel's National Bureau for Counter Terror Financing against 84 crypto addresses believed to be linked to militant group Hamas or otherwise used in terror-related activity; among the crypto addresses were wallets containing \$40,235 in DOGE.

The report also flagged up a "small and growing number" of CSAM vendors operating both on the darknet and clearnet that have received payment in Dogecoin. Although the actual amount of Dogecoin identified by Elliptic in this case is low-less than \$3,000-analysts warned that it points to an "appetite for criminal actors to adopt a wide range of cryptoassets in a bid to avoid notice."

Scams and Ponzi Schemes

The "most notable" crime relating to Dogecoin, according to Elliptic, is thefts, scams and Ponzi schemes.

According to the firm, to date it has identified more than 50 instances of thefts, frauds and Ponzi schemes which helped criminals to make "hundreds of millions of dollars worth of Dogecoin."

These include the \$6 billion PlusToken Ponzi scheme, which resulted in the seizure of more than \$20 million worth of DOGE by Chinese authorities in 2020, and an alleged theft of \$119 million worth of Dogecoin linked to a Turkish Ponzi scheme in 2021.

Far-right extremists embrace crypto

Far-right extremist groups-when excluded from traditional methods of raising funds-have also turned to cryptocurrencies including Dogecoin, Elliptic noted.

According to the firm, these include numerous far-right news sites, blogs and video sharing platforms.

One such news website, Infowars, which claims it is "battling globalism and promoting a pro-human future worldwide," has so far raised more than \$1,700 (£1,383) in Dogecoin.

Elliptic's findings mirror those of the Financial Action Task Force, which last year reported that far-right groups are increasingly turning to cryptocurrencies including Bitcoin and privacy coins.

Dogecoin, which in recent months has been heavily promoted by Tesla CEO Elon Musk, is currently the world's 10th largest cryptocurrency with a market capitalization above \$8 billion.

Oslo shooting near gay bar investigated as terrorism, as Pride parade is canceled (CNN)

By Jessie Yang, Mayumi Maruyama, James Frater, Niamh Kennedy, Sarah Diab, and Li-Lian Ahlskog Hou
June 26, 2022

Oslo's annual Pride parade was canceled on Saturday following a deadly shooting at a gay bar that Norwegian police are investigating as a possible terrorist attack.

Two people were killed and eight others taken to hospital after the shooting near the London Pub, which describes itself on its website as "the largest gay and lesbian venue in Oslo."

Police received multiple calls about the shooting at 1:14 a.m. local time, and arrived at the scene minutes later. They apprehended the male suspect three minutes after arrival, police said.

The suspect, charged with terrorism, is a Norwegian citizen originally from Iran, and was "known to the police," but has only received "minor convictions" up until now, prosecutor Christian Hatlo told reporters in Oslo Saturday.

Norway's domestic intelligence service said it was working to clarify whether more acts of violence may be planned after the shooting. The Norwegian Police Security Service (PST) announced in a tweet Saturday that it was "informed about the shooting in Oslo on Saturday."

"We are now contributing all the relevant information we have to the Oslo police district and are working to clarify whether more acts of violence may be planned. We do not currently have any indications of that," the PST said.

Hatlo said police had charged the suspect with "murder, attempted murder and terrorist acts."

He said the terrorism charge was justified on the basis of the number of injured and dead people, the number of crime scenes and an "overall assessment" indicating that the accused intended to "create serious fear in the population."

At the time of the press conference, police had attempted to question the suspect but had not yet been successful in doing so, Hatlo said. The suspect was taken to the police station, and police told CNN there were currently no other suspects.

As for the charges, Hatlo said the authorities will see "what the investigation shows."

The suspect was armed with two weapons during the shooting, police said. They did not confirm what weapons he used due to the pending investigation.

There were wounded people on the ground inside and outside the bar when the police arrived. "The scene was chaotic, it was a warm evening and a lot of people were outside, so there were people running everywhere," police told CNN.

Among the eight in hospital, three people are in critical condition. Another 14 victims sustained minor injuries. In a statement published on Facebook after the shooting, the London Pub condemned the incident as "absolutely awful and pure evil." The bar said all its employees were safe, and expressed condolences for the victims and their families.

Oslo's annual Pride parade, scheduled to take place on Saturday, was canceled in the wake of the shootings after "clear advice

and recommendation from the police."

Writing on Facebook, organizers asked everyone not to attend and said all events in connection with Pride were also canceled.

"We will follow the police's recommendations and take care of each other. Warm thoughts and love go to relatives, the injured and others affected," said leader of Oslo Pride, Inger Kristin Haugsevje, and leader of the Association for Gender and Sexuality Diversity, Inge Alexander Gjestvang, in a joint statement.

"We will soon be proud and visible again, but today we will hold and share the pride celebrations from home."

Norwegian Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Støre also expressed his condolences to the victims, calling the shooting "a cruel and deeply shocking attack on innocent people."

Støre later called for unity and said "even though we do not know if the queer environment was the goal, the queer environment is regardless the victim."

"This day, June 25th, we were to celebrate love, we were to fill the streets in the colors of the rainbow, we were to showcase our community and our freedom. Instead, we are filled with grief," he said. "Let there be no doubt. We are a community, we are a diverse and strong community, and we will never be threatened or give up our values."

He re-reiterated that the perpetrator belonged "to an Islamist environment" but emphasized that "if this is Islamic terror, as PST [the Norwegian Police Security Service] points out, then many Muslims will feel vulnerable today and, in the time ahead. And I know that many Muslims in our country are also scared and in despair. It is our common responsibility to make it clear that no one other than the person or the people behind the attack is responsible for it."

The White House said it was shocked by the killings. "We're all horrified by the mass shooting in Oslo today, targeting the LGBTQI+ community there. And our hearts obviously go out to all the families of the victims, the people of Norway, which is a tremendous ally," John Kirby, the NSC coordinator for strategic communications, told reporters aboard Air Force One as President Biden was flying to Europe.

He said the US has been in touch with the Norwegian government to offer condolences and offer any support they need after the shooting.

Egyptian court sentences 10 to death on terrorism charges (Reuters)

June 29, 2022

An Egyptian court sentenced 10 people to death and more than 50 others to life in prison on Tuesday after they were convicted of supporting or carrying out attacks against security forces and sabotage of state infrastructure.

The prosecution linked the attacks, which took place in Cairo between 2013 and 2015, to the now outlawed Muslim Brotherhood.

Rights group Amnesty International said the mass trial, which included more than 200 defendants, was grossly unfair and called for the sentences to be quashed.

Egypt mounted one of the biggest crackdowns in its modern history on the Brotherhood following the army's 2013 overthrow of Islamist President Mohamed Mursi.

The court had referred the defendants to Egypt's top religious authority, the Grand Mufti, to seek approval for a death sentence in January.

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Piracy

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Gender-Based Violence

No freedom for victims of sexual violence in conflict (Deutsche Welle)

By Tobore Ovuorie

June 16, 2022

Sexual violence is present wherever conflict erupts, according to the UN. Adolescent girls are particularly at risk. Survivors trudge on, though, amid a shocking increase in sexual crimes committed as weapons of war.

The United Nations estimates that in conflict zones, for every one rape that is reported, between 10 and 20 rapes are not. At just 14, a young Ethiopian girl whom we will call "Sunshine" recalls a horror that she can barely describe without breaking out in tears.

It occurred in November, when she was living with her aunt and sister in northern Ethiopia. The war with the Tigray People Liberation Front (TPLF) was raging, and fighters were in her village.

They raided her home. But it was what Sunshine experienced next that causes her to shake visibly even months later.

"One of them said 'I will take one of you, and I will kill one' then my sister fainted," she said while recounting the November 2021 ordeal to DW. Sunshine believes that the man who had raided their home was a fighter loyal to the Tigray People Liberation Front (TPLF) in Ethiopia.

Rape as a weapon

The TPLF are rebels alleged to be involved in crimes, including murder and rape, against other ethnic groups.

Sunshine's aunt begged for their lives to be spared. "He said 'no, I will kill you and I will take one of you'." She recalled the exact chilling words to DW. The 14-year-old chose to pay the utmost price in order that her sister and aunt live.

"So, I told him to leave them, and do whatever he wants to me."

Her tone was softer as she struggled to hold back her sobs.

"I was scared I'll be killed or raped. I didn't expect to come back. I feared I'd die."

He didn't kill her.

He raped her all through the night.

Upward trend

Sunshine is one of the 426 million children living in conflict zones globally who are vulnerable to sexual violence.

In its Weapon of War report, Save the Children estimated that no fewer than 72 million kids like Sunshine - that's 1 in 6 - live 50 km (31 miles) or closer to conflicts where armed groups or forces have perpetrated sexual violence against children.

"The number of children at risk of sexual violence committed by conflict actors is almost ten times higher today than in 1990," the NGO stated. Save the Children said the number of kids at risk fluctuates from year to year, but the upward trend is very clear.

"In the most recent years we also see that a bigger share of armed actors who commit sexual violence in conflict also perpetrate it against children," the report stated.

It indicated that Somalia and South Sudan are among the six countries with the highest share of children living in conflict zones with reports of sexual violence perpetrated by conflict actors against children.

Others in the global rating are Colombia, with 24% of all children in the country facing this risk, Iraq with 49% of all children at risk, Syria with 48% and Yemen at 83%.

Some 56% of Somali children in the country face this risk, as do 19% of South Sudanese kids. For children, their age and gender play a significant role in their vulnerability. Adolescent girls are particularly at high risk of sexual violence in conflict

settings. And the gruesome acts come with devastating consequences.

Since being raped, Sunshine often misses school for medical appointments - but also to avoid gossip and bullying.

"I prefer not to go to school; the people I used to play with then, now, when I greet them, they don't want to play with me," she revealed.

Sexual violence happens whenever conflict erupts, according to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

But no statistics will ever depict the true scale of the problem, because conflict affects the work of police and legal authorities.

As a result, rape and sexual violence often go unreported.

Adolescent girls are particularly at high risk of sexual violence in conflict settings

Fearing for the future

The UN estimates that in conflict zones, for every one rape that is reported, between 10 and 20 rapes are not. Perpetrators can be military officers, militants, civilians, or workers in displacement camps.

Esther Omam, executive director of Reach Out Cameroon told DW that conflict aggravates the phenomenon of sexual violence and births a huge uncertainty. "As serious as the word serious means, sexual violence is growing in so large proportions, we fear for the future," she said.

Omam added that perpetrators include the military, drug addicts and men who want to satisfy their sexual urges.

Horrific trauma

Worldwide, sexual violence is fundamentally rooted in unequal power dynamics while people of all genders and ages are victims.

Just a few streets away from Sunshine is an adult victim of the TPLF violence.

When four men came to her garden, Janet had no chance to run. Her name has been changed for her privacy.

Several women have been raped by soldiers, with many survivors hospitalized with rape injuries

"One put a gun to my ear, the other one put a gun to my ribs," Janet cried uncontrollably as she recounted her ordeal to DW.

"And they took me into my house."

Her experience seemed like a scene from a horror movie.

They picked me up and threw me down. One of them put his feet on my shoulder and burnt me. While one of them burnt me with a cigarette, another was forcing me to have sex with him."

The four men raped her for several hours. They left her with HIV and other infections. And a deep fear.

Ugly consequences

The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) said there can be no winners among countless casualties in armed conflict, not least the women and girls victimized by militants who have weaponized sexual violence as a tactic of war, torture and terrorism.

"Every new wave of warfare brings with it a rising tide of human tragedy, including new waves of war's oldest, most silenced, and least-condemned crime," Pramila Patten, sexual violence in conflict special representative, said on the UNFPA's site.

Conflict-related sexual violence exacts an unspeakable toll on survivors, who are most likely to be civilians and not combatants.

Ever since Janet was gang-raped by the Tigrayan fighters, she has walked on eggshells.

"If they come back and take control of the town again, I have to die - I am very scared," she told DW.

Findings reveal the culture of impunity surrounds the scourge because the perpetrators remain free.

When Janet asked the Tigrayan fighters why they were raping her, they told her that government forces had done the same in their towns to their mothers and sisters.

Back view of a survivor of conflict-related sexual violence.

Many conflict-related sexual violence go unpunished because perpetrators disappear immediately after they attack while the victims don't know who they are

War crime

The act of impunity extends beyond the borders of Ethiopia to other parts of Africa.

The Democratic Republic of Congo recorded the highest number of UN-verified incidents of conflict-related sexual violence last year, according to Pramila Patten's report.

Rape has been defined as a war crime since 1919. But it took almost 80 years for rape to be prosecuted for the first time.

Rwanda was the first country to prosecute rape as a mass crime after its genocide of 1994 - in which up to half a million women and children were raped, sexually mutilated or murdered.

Omam told DW many conflict-related acts of sexual violence go unpunished because perpetrators do escape, while the victims, at times, don't know who they are.

"And some who know will not say because of fear of stigma or discrimination within the communities. Or, for fear of further threats to life," she added.

Survivors are left with lasting physical and emotional scars, robbed not only of health, dignity and peace - but of justice.

Sunshine wants justice. To achieve this, she wants to become a police officer or soldier herself and get her own form of justice.

Perpetrators of conflict-related sexual violence are no respecters of age - they rape both children and adults

Trudging on

The UNFPA said sexual violence thwarts women's participation in social, political and economic life.

But Janet is doing her best now to build a future and has started a distance-learning course. She wants to set up a small business.

"I want to go to school because I didn't attend a school as a child. Now, education is good for my work; to get more knowledge and live a better life."

Other survivors of sexual violence too are trudging on and owning their voices, albeit at unquantifiable costs.

"The costs of conflict are great; the costs of conflict paid largely by women and girls are incalculable," the UNFPA said on its website.

Sexual violence in conflict: Overlooked, under-reported and in danger of being "normalized" (Relief Web)

June 19, 2022

As militants boasted about how they would divide the girls among themselves, Khetam*, a Syrian refugee in Iraq, feared for her life. "Two commanders had chosen me and my friend as their brides," she recalled to UNFPA. The so-called "marriage" would mean rape and control for as long as the militants desired. "When we objected that we were too young to wed, they beat us and tortured us for most of that night, until we had no choice but to relent."

Sexual violence in conflict settings remains widespread and systematic, a recent report by the United Nations Secretary-General found, fuelled by "rising inequality, increased militarization, reduced civic space and the illicit flow of small arms and light weapons, among other factors." Conflict-related sexual violence - which includes assault, rape, forced marriage, trafficking, sexual slavery, forced sterilization, forced abortion other forms of sexual coercion - is used to instill fear, pain, suffering and censorship in its targets. Survivors, as well as their families, endure long-term consequences, from post-

traumatic stress, unintended pregnancies, sexually transmitted infections and social stigma to the threat of retaliation should they seek legal advice or report the attacks.

As crises proliferate and conflicts drag on, more women and girls are telling UNFPA that violence against them is becoming "normalized" -a disturbing and growing collective acceptance of this crime, usually while both protection mechanisms and legal accountability for perpetrators crumble in the chaos of conflict.

Maya*, a Syrian refugee in Jordan, described how "many of my friends have experienced this [gender-based violence], some on a daily basis. They are continuously harassed, beaten, and forced to marry so young when they don't want to... it ends up harming and sometimes killing them."

Physical and psychological barriers to supporting survivors

Access to health care, including psychosocial and sexual and reproductive health services, is severely disrupted in conflict settings, while humanitarian delivery of essential services is fraught with challenges. From pervasive instability to destroyed roads and infrastructure and obstructed access, those most in need are most often the hardest to reach. Even when services are available, survivors may be afraid to seek them out due to shame or a fear of being ostracized by their communities, or further punished by their attackers.

In South Sudan, which is recording soaring rates of sexual violence as conflict rages on, just leaving home to seek basic necessities is rife with danger. For 14-year-old Achol*, fetching water was enough to put her life in jeopardy. "When I was at the tap, a strange man walked towards me. He grabbed me and stuffed a t-shirt in my mouth, dragging me to an abandoned building where he raped me and threatened to kill me." Her attacker has yet to be apprehended.

Entrenched gender inequality is as much a driver of sexual violence as it is a barrier to preventing it. The threat of violence often robs girls of their education, fear shuttering them in their homes to take on ever more onerous household and caregiving duties. Survivors can suffer debilitating injuries and be shunned by society and their families.

UNFPA Executive Director Dr. Natalia Kanem described the prevalence of and lack of accountability for sexual violence in conflict as largely "due to the persistence of blatantly discriminatory ideas, including men thinking they are entitled to the "spoils" of war and that women and girls are useable and disposable."

Challenges of reporting on a "silent crime"

For every survivor who is able to tell their story, there are thousands who will be forever silent - or silenced. Sexual violence is a vastly under-reported crime even in peacetime. In conflict settings, the barriers to reporting only multiply. Many citizens, journalists and humanitarians who promote accountability or do manage to report these crimes to the world are also persecuted for their work.

UNFPA is launching a campaign to amplify the voices of survivors and counter the risk of normalizing violence against women and girls, especially in crisis settings. The human rights of survivors must be at the heart of all responses to sexual violence, with sexual and reproductive health and information a non-negotiable part of that.

UNFPA's programmes in crisis contexts supported 2.3 million survivors of gender-based violence in 2021 and assisted some 1,000 health facilities in 38 countries to provide specialized care. Agency and partner staff were on the ground across the world as crises broke out and needs spiked, including for supplies of post-rape kits and emergency contraception.

But the grim reality on the ground for the most vulnerable stands in unforgiving contrast to the ambitions of organizations like UNFPA striving to assist them: Experts say the already shocking statistics on sexual violence are only scratching the surface of the as-yet unknown true figures.

Calling on the international community to mobilize immediately in the light of horrific reports of sexual violence coming out of the war in Ukraine, UN Special Representative Pramila Patten said, "An active battle-ground is never conducive to accurate "book-keeping" [...] if we wait for hard data and statistics, it will always be too late. We do not need hard data for a scaled-up humanitarian response."

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Commentary and Perspectives

Beyond Russia: The Real Threat to Human Rights is from China (Human Rights Watch)

By Kenneth Roth

June 20, 2022

Can international human rights and humanitarian law survive when the major powers ignore it? That is the question posed by Russian forces' widespread summary executions and indiscriminate bombardment of civilians in Ukraine.

In the case of Ukraine, at least, many governments seem determined to reinforce international standards. Forty-three countries so far have requested an International Criminal Court (ICC) investigation of the alleged perpetrators of these war crimes and possible crimes against humanity, which the ICC prosecutor has begun. The United Nations General Assembly and Human Rights Council have condemned the atrocities, and the council has opened a parallel inquiry. But we have not always seen such resolve in the global response to grave abuses by the most powerful nations.

The reaction to Russian atrocities in Ukraine stands in stark contrast to the lackluster response to the Chinese government's repression in Xinjiang. There, aided by the world's most intrusive surveillance system, Beijing has detained one million Uyghur and other Turkic Muslims to force them to abandon their religion, language, and culture. Human Rights Watch and others have concluded that these mass detentions and other systematic abuses amount to crimes against humanity. And that is just one aspect of the worst repression nationwide in China since the 1989 massacre of Tiananmen Square pro-democracy protesters.

There has been some international response to this repression. Groups of governments have repeatedly condemned the Chinese government's abuses in Xinjiang – most recently, in a joint statement by 47 governments from all regions of the world including Germany. And the representatives of 50 UN special procedures – that is, independent experts rather than collective UN bodies – have issued parallel condemnations.

But the main United Nations institutions have been understated at best. Neither the UN Human Rights Council nor the UN General Assembly has held a debate, adopted a resolution, or started an investigation on Xinjiang. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres's cautiously worded statements of concern about Xinjiang have fallen far short of the seriousness of the persecution.

The UN high commissioner for human rights, Michelle Bachelet, continues to withhold a long-promised report on Xinjiang that her staff has completed. Her spokesman said in December 2021 that it would be published within weeks. Instead, she agreed to visit China for what the Chinese government insisted would be a "friendly visit" and dialogue rather than the unfettered investigation in Xinjiang that she had rightly asked for.

The trip was a gift to Beijing. Bachelet held various quiet conversations with Chinese officials including Xi Jinping but exerted none of the public pressure that alone has a chance of forcing the Chinese government to ease its repression. She issued no forceful condemnation, praised other aspects of China's human rights record, adopted Beijing's false "counterterrorism" narrative, and despite contrary evidence, accepted without question Beijing's claim that the detention centers were now closed. She trumpeted a new dialogue with the Chinese government, but it has long been Beijing's strategy to substitute such quiet backroom conversation for any public criticism.

The US government has barred all imports from Xinjiang as presumptively tainted by Uyghur forced labor unless the importer can prove otherwise (which given the opacity of supply chains in Xinjiang is virtually impossible). But the European Union has yet to follow suit. The United States, Britain, Canada, and the European Union have imposed targeted sanctions regarding the repression in Xinjiang. But European Union leaders, with former German Chancellor Angela Merkel in the EU presidency, tried to push through an investment agreement with China without demanding an end to the forced labor. It took the European Parliament to quash that idea.

The problem isn't only China. The US government also has been reluctant to hold itself to international human rights standards. When the ICC seemed poised to investigate US torture in Afghanistan, the administration of Donald Trump outrageously imposed sanctions on its prosecutor at the time. The ostensible reason was that, while Afghanistan had joined the ICC treaty, the United States had not, even though the treaty confers jurisdiction over crimes such as torture committed by anyone on the territory of a member country.

President Joe Biden has since lifted those sanctions. In the case of Ukraine, which has granted the ICC jurisdiction over crimes on its territory, Biden has endorsed and said the US government would cooperate with the ICC investigation of potential war crimes by Russian forces, even though Russia has also not joined the ICC.

It remains to be seen how the US government will react to any potential future ICC investigation of US personnel in a country where the ICC also has territorial jurisdiction. Both Democratic and Republican members of Congress are now endorsing the ICC investigation in Ukraine, laying bare the hypocrisy of the past US position. The US shift was undoubtedly facilitated by the

ICC prosecutor's announcement that, as he continues his Afghanistan investigation, he intends to de-prioritize for the time being his inquiry into alleged US crimes.

More imminently, the US position will be tested by the ICC investigation of Israeli war crimes such as its illegal settlements in Palestine, given that Israel has never joined the court, although Palestine has.

Yet the good news is that, even without the major powers, a broad array of governments has repeatedly supported and even advanced international rights standards. The ICC is the product of a large coalition, even though the United States, Russia, and China never joined. These major powers were similarly absent as the rest of the world banned anti-personnel landmines and cluster munitions. Yet, today, the ICC enjoys international credibility, and the norms against landmines and cluster munitions, both indiscriminate weapons that endanger civilians, remain strong.

In short, it may be in the nature of major powers to seek to exercise their power unconstrained by the enforcement of international law, but strong global support for those standards, and the institutions to enforce them, can generate intense pressure to comply regardless of major-power proclivities. Yet we should not be complacent at the strong international response to Russian outrages in Ukraine. Russia is a significant military force - though apparently a less impressive one than most people thought before its invasion of Ukraine. But the Kremlin has relatively little economic influence. China is another matter.

The Chinese government is an economic powerhouse that has shown no reluctance to use its clout to oppose scrutiny of its conduct and to undermine the international human rights system. When the Australian government proposed an independent investigation into the origins of the Covid-19 pandemic, Beijing responded with punitive tariffs. It earlier had retaliated against Norway when the Oslo-based Nobel Committee awarded the Peace Prize to the imprisoned Chinese pro-democracy campaigner Liu Xiaobo, even though the Norwegian government has nothing to do with the decisions of the private Nobel Committee. And the Chinese government threatened to withhold Covid-19 vaccines from Ukraine until it removed its name from a joint statement criticizing Beijing's repression in Xinjiang - a blackmail tactic that UN diplomats told Human Rights Watch the Chinese delegation has used to scare other countries into silence as well.

Similarly, Chinese President Xi Jinping has used the trillion-dollar Belt and Road Initiative, ostensibly an infrastructure development program, to purchase support for his anti-rights positions at the United Nations. The lack of transparency for Belt and Road loans, like financing from other Chinese institutions, make them ideal vehicles for Beijing to buy the outcomes that it wants.

Beyond trying to silence critics of its repression and to undermine broader enforcement of human rights standards, the Chinese government is trying to weaken the standards themselves. In its view, human rights should never be enforced by pressure, just by "win, win" (for the abusers, not the victims) polite conversation.

If Beijing had its way, human rights would be reduced to a measurement of growth in gross domestic product. It would brush aside economic and social rights, which require examining how the worst-off segments of society are treated, as well as civil and political rights, which are needed to ensure that a government remains accountable to its people.

Russian atrocities in Ukraine are appalling, but given the world's reaction to them, they do not pose a threat to global standards. Indeed, they may even end up consolidating support for those standards. Rather, the real threat to rights comes from Beijing, which appears determined to undermine those standards altogether. So far, the world's response has been inadequate. The economic cost of standing up to the Chinese government is real, but it is a cost worth bearing, because the very foundation of the international human rights system built over the past 75 years is at stake.

High Stakes for Armenian Democracy in Rights Defender's Trial (Human Rights Watch)

By Anahit Chilingaryan

June 21, 2022

The case against Sashik Sultanyan is based on bogus charges of 'inciting ethnic hatred'. If the Yazidi human rights defender is convicted, it could have a chilling effect on the work of all rights defenders in Armenia.

Public engagement is a key tool human rights defenders everywhere use to try to influence governments to be more rights-friendly. Sometimes it is the only tool we have. This also means publicly criticising the authorities, and in a democracy, the officials are required to tolerate it.

But little did Sashik Sultanyan, a human rights defender in Armenia, know that a conversation he had two years ago with a journalist criticising the authorities for their rights record, would become the basis of a criminal prosecution against him.

The stakes are high in Sultanyan's trial, which I've been observing since hearings started in November. Sultanyan has led a

group working to protect the country's Yazidi minority community, of which he is a member. He's been under investigation since October 2020 on charges of inciting ethnic hatred, based on an article published in June 2020 that quoted him criticising alleged discrimination faced by Armenia's Yazidi community.

If convicted, he could face up to six years in prison.

But the damage would be even higher for Armenia's democracy, as Sultanyan's conviction would be likely to have a chilling effect on free speech and possibly on human rights activism throughout the country.

The article quoted Sultanyan alleging that Yazidis in Armenia cannot study their language or develop their culture and that they are underrepresented in local government. He also said that Armenians had seized Yazidi property, that authorities do not protect their rights, and that Yazidis live "in fear".

These views fall completely within the boundaries of legitimate speech protected under international law.

Regardless of whether Sultanyan's discrimination claims are accurate, the opinion he expressed in 2020 was legitimate speech. Meanwhile, the fact that the prosecutor dismissed out of hand the notion that there is any ethnic discrimination against Yazidis in Armenia does not inspire confidence that state officials diligently investigate discriminatory practices.

The authorities should have dropped the case against Sultanyan long ago, as experts from the Council of Europe and the United Nations have urged them to do

The investigation was prompted by a complaint filed by Narek Malyan, the leader of the VETO Movement, a radical right-wing group that has built a reputation for aggressive hostility against human rights defenders and the Open Society Foundations in Armenia in particular. The latter antagonism appears to be linked to intense hostility among far-right groups around the world against the supposedly nefarious actions of Hungarian-born philanthropist George Soros, who founded the Open Society Foundations (OSF).

The evidence that I heard the prosecutor present at the trial leaves little doubt that the incitement charges are a flimsy cover for an ulterior motive behind the prosecution, where the apparent aim of the complaint was to discredit rights defenders and in particular those that get funding from the OSF. The prosecution, it seems, is indulging this approach.

For example, the prosecutor played a recording from a 2020 news conference held by Narek Malyan, jointly with an ethnic Yazidi, who said that Sultanyan believed all was fine for Yazidis in Armenians until he received funding from the Open Society Foundations - Armenia in 2019. Yet in fact, Sultanyan has been advocating for Yazidi rights in and beyond Armenia since 2013, and in 2018 founded the Yezidi Center for Human Rights, a nongovernmental group.

During the trial, the prosecutor implied that national minorities, especially Yazidis, do not face discrimination in Armenia and that Sultanyan was biased and sought to hoodwink Yazidis into believing otherwise. As evidence, he played for the court phone conversations between Sultanyan and his colleagues and friends. In one, Sultanyan talks about a village where Yazidis live relatively prosperously; in another, a colleague says that there are some Yazidis who criticise Sultanyan's work. The prosecutor also used a public speech Sultanyan made about Yazidi rights in Armenia at an international human rights forum in September 2019.

Among the other evidence that the prosecutor presented was a piece of paper the investigation found in Sultanyan's documents, which had the word "discrimination" circled and listed examples of possible discrimination against Yazidis. It is hard to know what this piece of evidence was supposed to prove.

The fact is that Armenia has been struggling to adopt a comprehensive anti-discrimination law for almost a decade. Although discrimination is banned under Armenia's Constitution, there is no legislation that defines equality standards, ensures safeguards against discrimination in education, and provides for awareness-raising, adequate protection, monitoring, and procedural safeguards for people at risk of discrimination.

While the momentum for comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation was renewed in 2019, the process has stalled again. The pending anti-discrimination bill package includes both the anti-discrimination law and a Law on National Minorities, to ensure the rights of national and ethnic minorities in Armenia.

"I wanted to fight discrimination, and I thought the state would back me on this", Sultanyan told me before the hearing. "Who thought it would turn into this?"

It's not too late for the authorities to withdraw the bogus charges against Sultanyan. Instead of wasting resources on this case, they should act to protect lawful speech and protect people from discrimination. A good place to start would be speeding up the adoption of comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation, with adequate, effective protection for everyone.

Why More Police Funding Is No Route to Public Safety (Human Rights Watch)

By Brian Root

June 21, 2022

In the past six years, police killed roughly 1,100 people annually - or three people a day - in the United States. The consistency of this rate is remarkable. Variations in policy, shifts in the number of police at the department level, and societal trends, including fluctuating crime rates or pandemics, have not significantly changed the aggregate tally of deaths. More than 2,000 people have been killed by police since George Floyd's murder, with Black people killed at 2.9 times, Native Americans at 1.7 times, and Latinx people at 1.3 times the rate of white people.

The mass mobilization and protests that began in May 2020, ignited by the police killings of Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and a long line of others, were not simply a response to oppressive and unaccountable policing. Instead, studies have shown that many protesters saw a link between policing, the continuing effects of structural racism through all strata of society, general indifference to poverty, and high and growing racial and economic inequality. That is why a primary demand of protesters was for the authorities to reduce investment in police and use those funds to support communities in ways that could reduce inequality while simultaneously keeping people safe.

Yet, two years on, officials at every level of government throughout the country have largely made the political choice to do the opposite. They have disregarded protester demands, embraced the status quo, and in many places, increased police funding without making the investments that communities sought to address societal problems and violence.

DOUBLING DOWN ON FUNDING THE POLICE

Due to the COVID-19 economic crisis and the protests, about two dozen major cities reduced their FY21 police budgets, though an even larger number of cities increased police budgets that year. Now, in nearly every one of the cities that made reductions, officials are boosting police spending.

Los Angeles cut \$150 million from the police budget in 2020 but recently gave the department an 8.5% budget increase from 2021, driving the annual operating budget to nearly \$2 billion. New York City shuffled its budget in 2020, shifting nearly \$1 billion from going directly to police, but in 2021 the New York Police Department received a \$200 million increase to its \$5.3 billion operating budget, with Mayor Eric Adams promising further hiring this year. Chicago reduced police spending by \$59 million in 2021 but announced a nearly \$200 million increase in 2022, boosting the budget to \$1.9 billion. Even Austin, Texas, which initially made the most drastic cut to police spending in the country, reducing the budget by 33% in 2021, has now increased funding to record levels, with police receiving \$442 million or more than a third of the city's 2022 operating budget.

In some cases, those in charge have made investments in alternatives to law enforcement. In New York, Mayor Adams has proposed allocating \$55 million to expand a program intended to send social workers instead of police in response to mental health emergencies. In Oregon, voters passed a law in 2020 decriminalizing drug possession and embracing public health approaches to problematic drug use. However, spending on more policing far outweighs new spending on alternative approaches. For example, while the Biden administration's FY23 budget allocates \$500 million for community violence intervention programs, this is dwarfed by the over \$32 billion allocated to new spending on police. Biden has also urged cities to use federal COVID-19 relief funds on police officers, and cities are following directions.

WHY BOOST POLICE FUNDING?

Many officials claim the increase in police funding is a direct response to the rise in homicide the country has experienced during the pandemic. But evidence on the relationship between policing and violent crime is very mixed. An extremely small amount of officer time is spent investigating violent crime. Moreover, studies that examine the relationship between the number of officers and violence do not consider the individual and community harm that arises from relying on stopping, citing, arresting, and locking people up rather than addressing extreme inequalities and the root causes of violence.

What we do know is that increases in the number of officers correspond with an increase in police contacts and misdemeanor arrests. These contacts and arrests fall disproportionately on those struggling with poverty and on Black and brown people. They make it harder for people to support their families and communities, pay their rent or mortgage, attend school, and maintain employment.

The recent increase in gun violence is traumatizing communities across the country. But fully funded police departments throughout the United States did not prevent this violence. The increase has coincided with a period of generational societal upheaval caused by the pandemic when uncertainty and vulnerability fell almost entirely on those with less wealth. The pandemic has only made things more difficult and has had a devastating impact on the economic and social rights of low-income people who were already struggling. Additionally, an unprecedented and consistent surge in gun purchases has

occurred during this period.

Research indicates that crime and safety, systemic racism, and the growing burden of poverty and inequality are strongly linked in the United States. As the sociologist Patrick Sharkey puts it, "inequality creates the conditions for violence and violence amplifies inequality." The United States is the wealthiest country in the world, but its distribution of wealth is more unequal than any other country.

Nearly one in five children live below the official poverty line. Racial disparities exist in every aspect of society, from housing and homeownership to education to employment to health. The median wealth of Black households is only 13% that of white households. Over the past decade, housing costs rose at three times the rate of wages.

Government officials are choosing to throw more money at police to address societal problems rather than putting that funding toward addressing underlying issues such as poverty and inequality, mental health care and support, and substance use disorder. Studies show that investing in health care, housing, universal basic income, child care, universal pre-K, and public safety programs outside the criminal legal system infrastructure would reduce poverty and inequality, and research suggests, is likely to improve community safety. This choice indicates that those in power lack the will and courage to do what is necessary to realize basic human rights in the United States.

Rather than doubling down on a policing strategy that has failed to ensure community safety and often results in the abuse of human rights, the United States should invest in the social safety net at federal, state, and local levels as well as in community-based, non-carceral approaches to violence. Millions marched through the country, coalescing around a call to divest from police and support and build prosperous communities where basic needs and rights are met. To continue to prioritize funding for police while 12.5 million children live in poverty and inequality grows is a political and societal choice. But, as with any choice, there are other options. It only requires the determination to imagine something new.

Progress and Setbacks on LGBT Rights in Africa - An Overview of the Last Year (Human Rights Watch)

By Graeme Reid

June 22, 2022

June marks the anniversary of the 1969 Stonewall riots over the treatment of LGBT people by New York City police, which was commemorated a year later with a protest march. In countries where it is possible, pride marches and parades are now ubiquitous, including in South Africa, which held its first in 1990.

Pride month is a time to reflect on progress but also ongoing challenges in advancing the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people. Many countries in Africa have poor reputations when it comes to LGBT rights. The anthropologist Zethu Matebeni has parodied this uniformly gloomy view in a piece entitled How Not to Write About Queer South Africa. But the same volume also highlights the ways in which sexual and gender minorities are marginalised by "African political, religious and traditional leaders".

When it comes to the rights of sexual and gender minorities in Africa, the past year has been a mixed bag.

In the first half of 2021, instances of violence against LGBT people in Senegal were reported by rights groups there, while police in Kenya came under pressure to properly investigate the brutal murder of a non-binary lesbian in Karatina, north of Nairobi.

South Africa, notwithstanding strong legal protections, continues to battle violence directed against LGBT people. In 2021, at least 24 people were reportedly murdered in bias-motivated attacks. The Ministry of Justice is revising its policy and approach to combating systemic gender-based violence in the country.

Of the 69 countries that criminalize same-sex relations, 33 are in Africa. In most cases, these laws are remnants of colonial rule, and the vague wording of these prohibitions, such as "carnal knowledge against the order of nature" resonate with the decorum of that era. Although the examples are few, there has been some progress over the last year on the protection of LGBT rights in Africa.

In November, the Botswana Court of Appeal upheld a lower court decision to decriminalise consensual same-sex conduct. The court found that the Penal Code provisions outlawing "carnal knowledge of any person against the order of nature" were unconstitutional as they violate the right to privacy, the right to liberty, security of person, and equal protection under the law, and the right to freedom from discrimination. Judges on the Botswana high court had in 2019 said that these archaic laws belong "in the museum or the archives".

Angola's new penal code, revised from 1886, came into effect in January 2021 and no longer criminalises same-sex conduct. The law has a non-discrimination provision that includes "sexual orientation" as a protected ground.

All former Portuguese colonies in Africa have now decriminalised same-sex conduct. Indeed, Cape Verde is a member of the UN LGBTI Core Group, a network of states seeking to advance the rights of LGBTI people within the UN. In 2020 Gabon abandoned its brief experiment with criminalising same-sex conduct when its parliament reversed a 2019 law that had criminalised same-sex conduct for the first time.

But legal opposition and challenges to these archaic laws are increasing, if not always successfully.

In 2019, Kenya's high court upheld that country's sodomy laws, arguing that they were not discriminatory as the laws applied to everyone, regardless of sexual orientation. Activists have appealed the decision, but no court date has been set.

In Mauritius, three cases are challenging the constitutionality of a law that punishes consensual same-sex conduct with up to five years in prison. At the same time, Mauritius' Equal Opportunities Act 2008 protects against discrimination based on sexual orientation, including in employment, education, and accommodation.

While many countries with colonial-era sodomy laws do not actively enforce them, or do so only rarely, Cameroon actively enforces section 347 of its penal code, which punishes "sexual relations between persons of the same sex", with up to five years in prison. At least 27 people were arrested in Cameroon in the first quarter of 2021, and in a similar period this year, at least 11 victims of mob violence were themselves detained for alleged consensual same-sex conduct and gender non-conformity. In May 2021, two transgender women received prison sentences of five years each under the law that forbids same-sex relations.

In February 2021, Tunisian security forces targeted activists working on issues related to sexual orientation and gender identity at protests, through arbitrary arrest, physical assault, and threats.

Egypt continues to arrest, detain, and torture LGBT people, as noted in a joint statement delivered in March 2021 on behalf of 32 countries at the UN Human Rights Council condemning Egypt's human rights record. Last July, five men accused of homosexual conduct were arrested in Kano State, Nigeria by a religious police unit that enforces Sharia, or Islamic law.

In 2016 Ghana showed signs of tolerance when its ambassador to the UN, Sammie Pesky Eddico, affirmed at the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva that "Ghana's Constitution prohibits discrimination of all kinds" and he did not oppose the appointment of the independent expert on sexual orientation and gender identity. In Accra, Ghana's capital, some police were trained to interact sensitively with LGBT people and the human rights commission instituted a reporting mechanism that allowed LGBT people to report abuse and discrimination without revealing their identities.

But this informal truce was broken in 2021. In February, religious and political leaders forced an LGBT centre to close in Accra. Then in May, police arrested 21 people attending a human rights workshop in Ho city, Volta region. And in August, lawmakers proposed a bill (still under review) so extreme that simply saying you are gay or lesbian could land you in mandatory conversion therapy or prison for up to 10 years.

Same-sex conduct is not illegal in Rwanda, but authorities there rounded up and arbitrarily detained people regarded as socially undesirable, including over a dozen gay and transgender people, sex workers, street children, and others in the months before a planned June 2021 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting.

Freedoms of expression and association have been tested during the past year. Despite decriminalising same-sex relationships in 2015, Mozambique has still not allowed a prominent LGBT rights group, Lambda, to officially register as a non-governmental group. In neighbouring Eswatini, the high court asserted that LGBT people, like anyone else, had rights to freedom of association and expression but nevertheless upheld a decision to deny the registration request of Eswatini Sexual and Gender Minorities, a local LGBT rights group.

Freedom of expression was curtailed in Kenya when the Film Classification Board banned the documentary *I am Samue'*, on grounds that the film promoted same-sex marriage. The film follows a classic theme - the relationship between parents and their son, as he navigates a budding romance with another man in a rural setting. This ban came hot on the heels of the 2020 ban by the same board of the narrative film *Rafiki*, a love story about two young women whose fathers are political opponents. *Rafiki* was briefly unbanned and broadcast for a week in Kenya, to meet a requirement for it to be considered for an award at Cannes.

In recent years, as LGBT rights have advanced within the UN system, the African Group has acted with some uniformity in opposing these advances, including by leading the charge against the appointment of an independent expert on sexual orientation and gender identity. But this uniformity has given way to a more nuanced and varied approach. When opposition to the appointment of the independent expert reached fever pitch at the UN General Assembly in 2016, the South African representative, Ambassador Jerry Matjila delivered a passionate speech defending the expert's mandate and reflecting on the anti-apartheid struggle: "After years of struggle our people black and white, straight and non-straight came together to bury discrimination once and for all."

Cape Verde and Seychelles actively supported the mandate. In a sign that uniform opposition lagged, some African states abstained from voting at various points in the process, while others simply did not vote at all. South Africa also just recently joined the group of friends at the UN Human Rights Council supporting the renewal of the independent expert's mandate.

However, within the African regional human rights system, the African Union used the pretext of objecting to the observer status granted to the Coalition of African Lesbians to limit the autonomy of the African Commission, berating the body for acting contrary to African values by recognising the lesbian group.

Pride events had been organised in Uganda since 2012, but in 2016, Ugandan police raided an LGBTI pride event and assaulted participants, and was cancelled in 2017, under threat of arrest. And when activists attempted to revive the tradition in 2019, they were again met with threats of arrest and violence and at the time decided it would not be safe to hold future events. Despite being denied registration, Rock of Hope, the LGBT group in Eswatini, has organised Pride events since 2018 in the face of considerable opposition. In 2021, Rwandan activists organised sporting and social events to mark pride for the first time.

Others have turned to virtual events, such as the three-day event Pride Afrique, organised by a Nigerian storyteller, Kehinde Bademosi.

Leaders in Ghana, Uganda, Nigeria and Tanzania have in recent years initiated vocal attacks against LGBT people. One way of looking at this is to recognise a pattern of stoking moral panics to detract attention from pressing social and economic problems and to deflect political opposition. It is also true that it is a measure of the success of activists on the continent, who have increased visibility and raised awareness about LGBT issues. In this respect, the scale of opposition is also a testament to the resilience and tenacity of a growing social movement throughout Africa.

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Aiding and Abetting

The Great Orthodox Battle Amid the Russian Invasion (Visegrad/Insight)

By Christine Karelska

June 23, 2022

The history of the Ukrainian Church is rich and dates back to the times of Kyivan Rus and Prince Volodymyr the Great. They received Christianity from Constantinople in 988, a watershed event that spiritually united the Ukrainian nation. Through centuries, it has also fueled Russia's obsession to exert more control over Ukraine, rewrite history based on cynical lies and try to establish its religious dominance in its near abroad and far beyond it. In times of war, religion plays one of the most pivotal roles in uniting people and helping them believe in peace and good.

The Church can serve as a soft power instrument to justify war crimes, sow more hatred and cause more social divisions. The never-ending battle for "hearts and minds" not only between the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC) vs the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) but also between the whole Orthodox global community vs the Russian Orthodoxy seems to be reaching its peak amid the Russian invasion. Who will be the winner?

How is Putin instrumentalising religion as his tool during the invasion? Can the Church become a robust and reliable peace actor that can be conducive to the conflict resolution in Ukraine and the unity of the Ukrainian nation in the battle for sovereignty? Is there any future for the ROC, Patriarch Kirill and the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate (UOC MP)?

The Russian Orthodox Church - A Dangerous Player

The strong national aspirations of the Ukrainian Church and the religious diversity demonstrate that Ukraine is one of the most religious countries in Europe. Indeed, its Church is a potent soft power instrument for uniting people in challenging times. Social polls show that 63.5 per cent of Ukrainians trust the Church, even more than the authorities.

The Ukrainian religious landscape is unique and known for its ecumenical cooperation despite inter-church misunderstandings that occur from time to time. The unique structure, namely, the All-Ukrainian Council of Religious Churches and Associations of

Ukraine, unites various religious denominations (three Orthodox churches, the Greek-Catholics, the Roman Catholics, Protestants, Anglicans, Lutherans, Pentecostals, Baptists, Jews and Muslims). The organisation grants chairmanship every six months to each denomination that symbolises the true essence of the religious freedom guaranteed by the Constitution of Ukraine.

Now, in times of war, there is a more dangerous outside player than ever, encroaching on Ukraine's spirit - the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC), one of the most potent weapons in Putin's hybrid warfare toolbox, dubbed as the "supplier" of the Kremlin's ideology. It has always been a vital instrument of the Russian foreign policy in promoting ideas of the so-called "Russian World" and justifying Putin's aggression and imperialism. Dr Cyril Hovorun explains Putin's formula of all his wars: "Putin's regime supplies guns, the church supplies ideas."

After centuries of religious oppression, the Ukrainian Church became more united than ever after the illegal annexation of Crimea and the Russian hybrid war in Eastern Ukraine in 2014. The Revolution of Dignity was a catalyst for uniting various churches that acted as mediators. Ukraine's inspiration to have an independent national church came as a natural and logical process. But the Ukrainian state lacked a piece to complete its complicated puzzle on the path of breaking away from the Russian orbit of influence toward true European civilisation.

After unsuccessful attempts to get canonical independence, on 9 January 2019, a remarkable event occurred -- the Ecumenical Patriarchate Bartholomew, "first among equals," signed the Tomos (a decree of independence) in Istanbul. As a result, the newly-established Orthodox Church of Ukraine was granted its canonical independence from the Russian Church after seven centuries.

It united the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kyiv Patriarchate (UOC KP), Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (UAOC) and some parishes of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate (UOC MP). Metropolitan Epifaniy became Head of the new denomination, pointing out that -the Russian Orthodox Church is the last advance post of Vladimir Putin in Ukraine and that the appearance of the OCU undercuts the imperial goals of the leader in the Kremlin."

This canonical independence was considered an affront to the Kremlin's worldview that deems Ukraine as a failed state and Ukrainians as a second-class nation. Thus, the reaction of the ROC was predictable: it unilaterally severed ties with the Ecumenical Patriarch, Bartholomew I and the churches of Greece, Cyprus and Alexandria, which recognised the independence of the Ukrainian Church. It was just a mere act of retaliation that Patriarch Theodore II of Alexandria, who has ecclesiastical jurisdiction in Africa, recognised the independence of the Ukrainian Church.

The Tomos has undermined, to some extent, the ROC's influence in Ukraine before the invasion. It strengthened Ukraine's independence and united Ukrainians spiritually. At the same time, it led to the further radicalisation of the ROC, nourishing Kirill's obsession with accusing the West of dismantling Orthodox unity and his desire to establish Moscow's dominance in the Orthodox world. He was a long-time staunch ally of Putin's plan, who justified and fully abetted the Russian invasion since its very start. As for the ROC, this war is against sin, imminent threats from the liberal West, "gay parades," and "excess consumption." It is a crusade to defend the divine law and "tried-and-true" conservative values. Anyone opposed to the so-called "special military operation" automatically becomes a pagan enemy.

Putin's Religious Rationale for Invading Ukraine

Behind Putin's ostentatious piety, there is a clear goal to fill the ideological void after the collapse of the Soviet Union and create a new, purely Russian identity, "defending" its values and all Russians in the world.

2021 Putin's "notorious" essay on the "Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians" showcased the imperialistic ambitions of the Kremlin's dictator from many convoluted angles, particularly the spiritual one: "Most importantly, people both in the western and eastern Russian lands spoke the same language. Their faith was Orthodox. The unified church government remained in place until the middle of the 15th century. The secular authorities, making no secret of their political aims, have blatantly interfered in church life and brought things to a split, to the seizure of churches, the beating of priests and monks. Even extensive autonomy of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church while maintaining spiritual unity with the Moscow Patriarchate strongly displeases them. They must destroy this prominent and centuries-old symbol of our kinship at all costs."

On 21 February, an hour-long lecture by Putin on his personal beliefs on history endorsed the distorted religious subtext of this war as well: "In Kyiv, they are preparing reprisals against the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate. Ukraine is not just a neighbouring country for us. It is an inalienable part of our history, culture and spiritual space."

But it is the Russian invaders who continue to destroy the religious sites. Even the Svyatogorsk Lavra, a symbolic church for the ROC, was shelled and burned down, having claimed the lives of three priests. The Russian troops bombed Mariupol levelling everything in the city, including sacred sites. A Ukrainian priest, Father Pavlo Tomaszewski, managed to escape. He gave the following testimony "They bombed and shelled us without any break for four days — since our monastery had no cellar for hiding in, we could see tall apartment blocks exploding in front of us...By the end, we had lost contact with parishioners or the outside

world."

The Orthodox Wingman of Putin's Regime

Kirill is a big fan of boasting Russian Orthodoxy's might, its new identity intertwined with Putin's militarism. A symbol of this new might was introduced to the general public in 2020 - the Main Cathedral of the Russian Armed forces, rumoured to have cost more than 80 mln dollars.

Its mosaics depict all of Russia's wars and military interventions. Paradoxically, the idea behind creating such a shrine belongs not to Kirill but to Russia's defence minister, Sergei Shoigu, who hopes to add more mosaics regarding what is happening now. This likeness of the Church was another religious symbol of the upcoming invasion with nostalgic tones for its grandeur during the Great Patriotic War.

On 23 February, Defender of the Fatherland Day, a symbolic holiday for Putin, the Primate of Moscow and all of Russia, Kirill (Volodymyr Gundyayev) warmly congratulated the Kremlin's leader, pointing out his active role in "preserving national historical memory and affirming the principles of traditional morality in the lives of contemporaries."

Such a gentle hint at future "defence" of Russia's "historical" borders in the face of non-existent threats was thrown by one of the spiritual creators of the doctrine of the "Russian World," the embodiment of Putin's ethnic cleansing. After the unjustified invasion, he continued to echo standard Russian propaganda "grand" narratives in his sermons. On 28 February, he cynically prayed for peace in "Russian lands," including Russia, Ukraine and Belarus.

In his homily, delivered on 6 March before the start of Orthodox Lent, he accused the West of the atrocities in the Donbas region for the last eight years without breathing a word about the current war atrocities in Ukraine: "Today, our brothers in the Donbas, Orthodox people, are undoubtedly suffering, and we cannot but be with them, first of all in prayer. It is necessary to pray that the Lord would help them preserve the Orthodox faith, not succumbing to temptations and temptations."

He openly ignited Putin's religious purge in his sermon speeches at a metaphysical level. He deliberately avoided the word "war" but used euphemisms such as "military actions" or, more generally, "events". Moreover, he even gave a military icon to the Director of the Russian Guard of the Russian Federation, General Viktor Zolotov, to inspire young soldiers. One example of this blind veneration of the Russian state ideology espoused by the Kremlin was a symbol Z on Easter cakes to support Russian soldiers in their "noble mission."

However, Patriarch Kirill, Putin's spiritual advisor, insists that there is no invasion of Ukraine but a battle against "external and internal enemies," "Neo-Nazis" who are in the way of the historic "unity" between the Slavs of Russia, Ukraine, Belarus.

UOC-MP Versus UOC: Is Mutual Understanding Possible?

This war was a great challenge for the UOC-MP, which mirrored and cherished Russian propaganda in Ukraine before the invasion on a large-scale basis and did not speak out during eight years of the undeclared Russian war. Its interests were lobbied by the pro-Russian oligarch from Mariupol, Vadim Novinsky, who was ordained a deacon by Onufri. It is no surprise that now the position of the UOC-MP and its further steps are monitored under a microscope as it has been a vital propaganda instrument in the Kremlin's hands.

Since the start of the war, the Primate of the UOC-MP Onufri supported the Ukrainian soldiers. It appealed to Putin to stop the fratricidal war, comparing the invasion with the sin of Cain.

Before the Easter holidays, Onufri suggested holding a religious procession to "Azovstal" in Mariupol to contribute to the resolution of the tragic humanitarian crisis there. Still, it was not accepted by the Russian side.

It is worth mentioning that the influence of the UOC-MP is stronger than the UOC even after the Tomos. It has more parishes across Ukraine than the UOC, more than 12 000, and still plays a considerable role for most Orthodox Christians in Ukraine. However, this war has caused a mass exodus from the UOC-MP. Most of its parishes are joining the UOC rapidly, and most of the clergy, bishops, and lay people are appalled by Kirill's distorted religious backing of the invasion. Meanwhile, Rovenkivska Diocese in the Luhansk region, Crimea, and Sevastopol Diocese refused to cut their ties with the ROC, which will definitely strengthen Russian influence on the temporarily occupied territories and further impose ideas of the so-called "Russian World."

In temporarily-occupied parts of the Donbas region and Crimea, all Christian denominations - except those that fall under the MP jurisdiction - were brutally persecuted by the ROC.

Appeals from the dioceses of the UOC-MP to bishops not to commemorate Kirill in the Liturgy sound louder each day. However, top-ranking clerics hesitate to join this symbolic protest. Some continue to put their signatures on the petition to convene an inter-church court over Kirill. The procedure is complicated and lengthy but sends a clear-cut signal to the Primate of the Moscow

Church that his stance will not go unnoticed and he will face judgement. Some went further: the Volodymyr-Volyn eparchy called upon Metropolitan Onufry to convoke an All-Ukrainian council to petition Patriarch Kirill for autocephaly.

However, autocephaly for the UOC-MP is a distant prospect that can last centuries. The UOC is a living example of it. There is still a powerful pro-Russian lobby of the UOC-MP that supports the ROC. One vivid example is the dean of one of the Mariupol districts of the UOC-MP warmly greeting a puppet leader of the so-called DNR, Denis Pushilin and the Russian invaders.

Fr. Andrii Pinchuk strongly criticised Kirill's rhetoric, alluding to the historical precedent when phyletism was condemned in 1872 at the Council of Constantinople. He said, "We are convinced that the idea of "Russkyi mir" should be condemned, which is essentially a kind of ethnophiletism, which puts national and political interests above religious ones."

On 27 May, the Local Council of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church declared complete independence from the ROC. The UOC-MP did not cut its ties with its mother church, ROC, but ultimately rejected Patriarch Kirill's stance on the invasion of Ukraine and called to stop bloody atrocities without indicating the name of the aggressor country. Amendments were made in the Statute (as of writing, it is not officially published yet), but it is just the facade without the exact outcome.

Metropolitan Epiphanius of the UOC insists on further dialogue and creating a one and only Ukrainian Orthodox church to beat the aggressor. The support from civil society for such unity is more prominent than ever. This seems to be the only viable solution, but neither of the churches wants to give up its position and prefers to sit on the fence.

There is also the option to join a possible Ukrainian exarchate of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople if there is a will of the Ecumenical Patriarch to intervene. However, it can add fuel to the war and will be perceived by Moscow as further encroachment on its daughter church.

International Reaction and the Role of Pope Francis

Patriarch Kirill's abetment of the Kremlin's war machine and war crimes has united not only Ukrainians but also world Orthodoxy in the face of his claims and blatant violation of God's Commandments, particularly the sixth one "thou shalt not kill." Kirill's rhetoric shook and shocked Orthodoxy across the globe. The appeal from Human Rights Without Frontiers calls for action "to hold personally accountable and prosecute Vladimir Mikailovitch Goundiaiev, known as Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia, for inspiring, inciting, justifying, aiding and abetting war crimes (Art. 8 of the Rome Statute) and crimes against humanity (Art. 7) perpetrated and being perpetrated by the Russian armed forces in Ukraine."

Hundreds of Russian Orthodox clerics signed a letter calling for a halt to the war. "The life of every person is a priceless and unique gift of God, and therefore we wish for the return of all soldiers - both Russian and Ukrainian - to their homes and families safe and sound."

Pope Francis is the most influential figure in the Orthodox world who can influence the war's outcome. He can play a crucial role in the war, if not by stopping it, but by at least mitigating it with various diplomatic channels at his hand. But it is not as simple as it seems. His rhetoric was a bit ambiguous from the start. He did not directly rebuke Putin but put a pinch of the blame on NATO for "barking at the gates of Russia," leaving no other choice for Russia but war. However, during the video conference on 16 March, the Pope asked Kirill not to be "Putin's altar boy" as the language of politics is not the language of Jesus. The pontiff also appealed to Putin to lift the blockade of Ukraine's Black Sea ports - "heartfelt appeal not to use wheat, a basic foodstuff, as a weapon of war," pledging to find any diplomatic means to stop this bloodshed.

"Do Not Venerate Idols - Venerate Only God"

The religious subtext of the current war is vital and should not be ignored in trying to understand the rationale behind Putin's invasion. There are many reasons behind the war, and religion is one of them. Orthodox unity in the face of Russia's invasion is set to be tested more than ever. Various religious denominations across the globe will further support Ukraine in resolving the severe humanitarian crisis and helping Ukrainian refugees. It is a practical manifestation of genuine Orthodoxy as a tool of peace within itself, unlike the pernicious Russian Orthodoxy, pitting nations against each other.

The UOC voice will get stronger, and there is a window of opportunity to be recognised by other churches. But, the chasm between the ROC and the Western Church will be hard to overcome soon.

Putin has subsidised the ROC to restore its "greatness," and the church "repays" by ideologically supporting Putin's aggression. This Russian National Orthodoxy is aimed at crushing not only any dissent at home but advancing its ideas abroad and acting as an "alternative" to the liberal West's "decadent civilisation.";

Ukraine is just the initial phase in this grand "religious crusade." The ROC and Putin aim higher, seeking the restoration of the Russian Empire, the heir to "Byzantium's fallen Orthodox greatness."

The "crusade against the West and gays" weakened and will further diminish the position and credibility of Kirill as a Patriarch and the ROC in Orthodoxy. More churches abroad will move away from the ROC. After the EU tried to include Kirill in its sixth package of sanctions but failed due to Orban's objections, he became a persona-non-grata in the Orthodox world. Great Britain has already showcased it by imposing sanctions on him. There seems to be no other choice for the World Council of Churches but to oust the ROC from the Orthodox family.

The religious instigation of violence must be investigated. Kirill must face the Tribunal by a Council of Orthodox Patriarchs and be stripped of his Patriarchy, possibly anathematised, as soon as possible, just like Moscow Patriarch Nikon in 1666. A person who exploits religion as an excuse for war and serves the geopolitical goals of Putin in return for revenue has no moral right to be a Patriarch. The ROC has to be deputinised and demilitarised.

Biden's Meeting with the Saudi Crown Prince Risks Becoming a Gift to Autocrats (Human Rights Watch)

By Kenneth Roth

June 28, 2022

President Joe Biden is bringing the Saudi crown prince in from the cold. Mohammed bin Salman's human rights record remains abysmal, but Biden seems to have decided that - to lower fuel prices and strengthen the alliance against Russia's invasion of Ukraine - he must stop keeping the crown prince at arm's length.

But the decision to meet MBS, as he is often called, risks being profoundly counterproductive.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine is about more than the territorial integrity of a sovereign state. It also reflects an attack by Russia's autocratic president, Vladimir Putin, on the democratic aspirations of the Ukrainian people, which cast a harsh light on Putin's increasingly repressive rule.

That is, the Ukraine conflict represents not only a military challenge to Ukraine but also a political challenge to democracy. But while Russia today in Ukraine is confronting the geographic limits of its conventional military capacity, the global contest between autocracy and democracy is global. That is why Biden should have resisted pressure to meet with the autocratic crown prince.

If Biden reduces the war in Ukraine to a mere geopolitical struggle, the autocrats of the world will have cause to rejoice. They will argue that democracies proclaim their values but then sell them for a cheaper tank of gas.

The problem extends far beyond Putin, who doesn't bother to portray his repressive kleptocracy as a model for the world.

Rather, the more significant adversary in the contest between autocracy and democracy is the Chinese government, which touts its dictatorship as a supposedly superior governance model and seems to relish opportunities to portray the US government's commitment to democracy and human rights as hypocritically selective.

MBS is a brutal dictator. The US shouldn't rehabilitate his image.

The main reason for Biden's possible embrace of the crown prince is the Saudi promise to pump modest amounts of additional oil to partially ease the shortfall caused by sanctions imposed on Russia for its invasion. Energy prices have jumped around the world, and Biden wants to be seen taking steps to stem inflation.

Yet MBS remains a brutal dictator. He has harshly suppressed all dissent in the kingdom. A US intelligence assessment attributes the Saudi government's murder of the independent journalist Jamal Khashoggi to MBS's direct approval.

The modest advances for women's rights under his reign - for example, letting women drive - have been accompanied by the imprisonment and torture of women's rights activists. Improvement in the lives of women, as Mohammed bin Salman sees it, are to be secured by monarchical prerogative, not people's demand for their rights.

Moreover, since 2015 a Saudi- and United Arab Emirates-led coalition has repeatedly bombed Yemeni civilians. The Saudi government on June 2 agreed to a two-month extension of a two-month cease-fire in Yemen. But Riyadh has made no serious attempt to provide accountability for war crimes against Yemeni civilians, meaning that the killing of civilians could easily mount again if the fighting resumes.

Biden was right to maintain distance from such a tyrant. Nothing warrants now admitting him to the realm of respectable leaders.

Biden's efforts to build and maintain a global coalition in favor of Ukraine do not justify the move. Yes, lowering oil prices may help maintain Western unity on Russia - and may calm American consumers. But if that occurs at the expense of the democratic values also at stake, the move could easily backfire.

The Russian military's summary executions and indiscriminate bombardment of populated areas in Ukraine have been awful.

They need to be stopped, and the senior officials who direct them prosecuted.

But as the Biden administration has recognized, the Kremlin is not the main challenge to democracy today. Rather, the government with both the economic means and political inclination to promote autocratic rule as an alternative to democracy is China.

In contrast to Russia's brutal warmaking, China's support for autocracy relies more on diplomatic and economic pressure. It claims that democracies are too messy, short-sighted, and slow in contrast to the dictatorial impositions of the Chinese Communist Party.

Beijing uses threats of economic retaliation against governments who might condemn its brutal repression (for example, its detention of one million Uyghur and other Turkic Muslims to force them to abandon their religion, culture, and language) or its self-serving or ineffective policies (such as its early failures to contain the COVID-19 virus, or its current extreme "zero-COVID" policies, because Xi Jinping cannot admit error.)

Meanwhile, the Chinese government seeks every opportunity to spotlight inconsistencies in the US commitment to democracy. That is why it is so important for the U.S. to respond to Russia's military challenge in Ukraine in a way that embraces democratic values in principle and practice.

With Biden now having decided to proceed and meet MBS, he should elevate - not jettison - the democratic values at stake.

First, he should speak out forcefully and publicly about the ongoing human rights horrors of the Saudi crown prince's rule. A mere mention that Biden discussed "human rights" privately with the crown prince (as Biden did after his June 2021 meeting with Putin) will not suffice. The test is whether the Saudi people hear the details of what was discussed, since they have the greatest capacity to press for genuine reform. They should feel emboldened, not abandoned, by the meeting.

Second, Biden should resist further blackmail. It is too early to resume the sale of offensive weapons to the Saudi military, given that little stands in the way of renewed bombing of Yemeni civilians, and there has been no accountability for past war crimes.

Biden should also reject the Saudi demand for the U.S. government to intervene to stop civil lawsuits in US courts against Mohammed bin Salman for the Khashoggi murder. Given that the Saudi justice system has made no serious effort to prosecute those who ordered Khashoggi's brutal killing, civil suits are one of the few remaining forms of accountability. In addition, Biden should state that his administration will impose targeted sanctions on Saudi officials who continue to direct serious rights violations.

Finally, Biden should press forward with legislation that would pivot the United States toward a green energy transition and away from fossil fuels that empower petro-autocrats like MBS and Putin while accelerating climate collapse.

Only such a firm public embrace of human rights and democracy will hold a chance of upholding the democratic values that are also at the heart of the Ukraine war. Otherwise, Biden risks securing only short-term gains in providing military support to Ukraine while undermining the far more important global political contest for democracy with China.

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WORTH READING

Analysis of the United States' Liability for War Crime in Afghanistan

Sayed Qudrat Hashimy

June 28, 2022

There is no statistical report about the war crime committed in Afghanistan from 1978 to 2021. This paper analyzes the United States' liability for war crimes in Afghanistan. This issue has been in public for over 20 years but has gained relevance in 2021 due to their decision to withdraw troops from the country. The Article analyzes what the ICC deems a war crime per the Rome statute. It involves a jurisprudential overview of various decisions of the ICC to develop a working understanding of war crimes. Similarly, it inquiries into specific actions carried out by the United States Government

since the war in Afghanistan. Temporally this analysis is limited to the movement of the US since 2001 and will not account for actions before this date. This temporal limitation has been imposed owing to the widespread claim that the United States' formal involvement in the "War Against the Terror" began after the attack on 11 September 2001. Henceforth, the critical research question is whether the United States can be held responsible for carrying out war crimes in Afghanistan.

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