



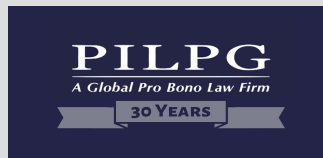
FREDERICK K. COX
INTERNATIONAL LAW CENTER

Founder/Advisor
Michael P. Scharf

Faculty Advisor
Jim Johnson

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Editor-in-Chief

Lucas Katz

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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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Democratic Republic of Congo Wants More from ICC (Human Rights Watch) By Maria Elena Vignoli
June 23, 2023

The Democratic Republic of Congo is requesting the International Criminal Court (ICC) to investigate the upsurge of violence and abuses in the embattled eastern province of North Kivu.

Last week, ICC prosecutor Karim Khan announced that the Congolese government formally requested his office to investigate serious crimes allegedly committed in North Kivu since January 1, 2022. As the prosecutor considers whether to move forward with investigating these crimes, this new referral highlights the need for the ICC's continued engagement in Congo, particularly given escalating violence not just in North Kivu but in other provinces as well.

Over the past year, Human Rights Watch has consistently documented widespread killings and rapes by the Rwanda-backed M23 rebels in North Kivu as well as abuses by other armed groups. A resident of a village attacked by the rebels said, "the M23 raped women, forced people to work for them, and beat people up." Mass graves containing the bodies believed to be of villagers and captured militia members allegedly executed by M23 fighters were uncovered in the village of Kishishe.

United Nations investigators have documented apparent war crimes by the M23 and other armed groups. Some of these groups continue to wreak havoc among civilians, particularly in the provinces of Ituri, North Kivu and South Kivu. Amid the violence, Congolese army units have backed armed groups implicated in serious crimes.

Persistent impunity feeds the ongoing violence, and many of the same actors implicated in past abuses are still committing atrocities.

The ICC has been investigating serious crimes in Congo since 2004 with mixed results. It needs to do more to close the country's impunity gap and address not only the responsibility of abusive rebel commanders but of senior political and military officials from Congo, Rwanda, and Uganda for their role in grave crimes in eastern Congo over the years.

But as a court of last resort, the ICC cannot do it all, and it should invest more in strengthening domestic accountability efforts. The prosecutor's recent visit to Congo and memorandum of understanding with the Congolese government are steps in that direction, though it remains unclear how this renewed engagement will look in practice.

The ICC should make the most of the multifaceted role it can play in Congo to bring justice to victims of serious crimes and communities affected by the spiraling violence.

Russia mutiny raises questions on Wagner overseas operations (France 24) June 26, 2023

After calling off his troops' advance toward Moscow, Wagner head Yevgeny Prigozhin is expected to go into exile in Belarus.

But now questions hover over the future of the group's operations in more far-flung places, where observers say it profits greatly from exploiting natural resources and propping up regimes sceptical of, or hostile towards, the West such as in Mali and Central African Republic.

Moscow has sent initial indications that business will continue as usual, with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov saying operations will continue in both African nations.

But Rob Lee, of the Foreign Policy Research Institute, wrote on Twitter, that the "greatest effects from this event may be felt" in the Middle East and Africa.

"Wagner has a large presence across Africa, which benefits and depends on the Russian government/military.

"Would the Kremlin allow the same dynamic to continue if Prigozhin and Wagner are based in Belarus?" he added.

It is a question no-one can answer with certainty.

"It's a mystery, and it depends on how (the Russian authorities) want to compartmentalise what's going on in Africa and what's going on everywhere else," Michael Shurkin, director of programmes for the Africa-focused consulting firm 14 North, told AFP.

"Russia might think that what they (Wagner) are doing in Africa is worth continuing because it serves Russians interests as well," he continued.

Codependent

What is likely, however, is that Prigozhin and Putin would have raised the subject before agreeing that the mercenary boss would go into exile rather than face charges over the mutiny.

Wagner depends heavily on the Russian defence ministry for deliveries of troops, equipment and weapons to its theatres of activity.

A Russian helicopter gunship above a Russian-Turkish convoy in northeastern Syria, December 2020 And Moscow needs Wagner to help keep a grip on the troubled areas where it operates -- and where Russia is keen to undermine Western influence.

In Syria, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR), Wagner's mercenaries -- from Russia, former Soviet republics and Syria itself -- acted as "special forces" on the ground alongside Moscow's regular army after it intervened in the country's civil war in 2015.

They are allegedly still present today, in smaller numbers, near oil wells and in the provinces of Hama and Latakia.

In Africa, Wagner fighters have also been identified in Libya, Mozambique and Sudan.

They are on the front lines in insurgency-hit Mali -- whose junta insists it employs only "Russian instructors" -- as well as in the Central African Republic, where a Wagner executive manages the security of President Faustin Archange Touadera.

The group brings back "gold and minerals from Sudan, the Central African Republic and Mali, which Putin needs to keep his economy on life support", said a European military source.

The European Union subsequently imposed fresh sanctions on Wagner, targeting several of its senior representatives in the African country.

On Friday, French President Emmanuel Macron accused Russia of being "a destabilising force in Africa through private militias who come to prey on and commit abuses on civilian populations".

'Uncertainty and hesitation'

Lavrov said on Monday in an interview with RT that Wagner members were working as "instructors" in Mali and the CAR at the request of the two governments.

"This work, of course, will continue," he said, adding that the revolt would not affect Russia's ties with "partners and friends".

Wagner's headquarters in Saint Petersburg meanwhile insisted the company was working "in normal mode".

"Visibly, in Bangui and Bamako, there's uncertainty and hesitation about what's happening," said Maxime Audinet, of the Strategic Research Institute at the Paris Military School (IRSEM), in reference to the authorities in the Central African Republic and Mali.

"The Prigozhin network has become the dominant element of Russia's presence in sub-Saharan Africa in recent years," Audinet said. "We can expect the fragile balance between Russian state and non-state actors on the continent to be shaken up."

It could take time for the dust to settle.

"Unless there's cooperation with the (Russian) defence ministry, I don't see how the group can continue to operate there," said Pauline Bax, deputy director of the Africa programme at the International Crisis Group.

But Putin "can't send Russian soldiers in Wagner's place. I can't see the group pulling out of the continent straight away."

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Sudan & South Sudan

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

As Sudan war rages, rival sides accused of looting, diverting aid (Al Jazeera) By Mat Nashed
June 16, 2023

On May 22, security officers abruptly showed up at a Doctors Without Borders (Medecins Sans Frontieres, or MSF) warehouse in Gedaref, a city under army control in eastern Sudan.

The officers said they needed to check the medical aid, which was supposed to be distributed to civilians caught up in a vicious war between the army and paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF). Then, they confiscated the supplies without further explanation.

“We had a shipment ready to go from Gedaref ... to a hospital in North Khartoum but it was all taken,” said Jean-Nicolas Armstrong Dangelser, MSF’s emergency coordinator in Sudan.

An estimated 25 million people – more than half of Sudan’s population – are in desperate need of aid due to an acute humanitarian crisis made worse by the fighting. But as the conflict enters its third month, both sides are accused of attempting to exploit aid deliveries to gain an upper hand on the battlefield.

The RSF and army are both stealing aid, restricting aid access and imposing rent-seeking impediments, according to 12 aid workers, Sudanese medics and experts who spoke to Al Jazeera.

“The army is not allowing many supplies into [RSF-]controlled areas and the opposite is also true. We are suffering because there is a conflict between the two,” said Yousif Ahmed, a medic whose name has been changed to protect him from reprisals.

“Both [RSF and the army] are stealing medical supplies and this is why we have shortages everywhere.”

Al Jazeera contacted army spokesperson Nabil Abdullah and RSF spokesperson Youssef Ezzat for comment, but neither had responded by the time of publication.

Keeping quiet

MSF’s supplies were confiscated by the Humanitarian Aid Commission (HAC), which was given expanded powers to crack down on aid groups by Sudan’s former authoritarian leader, Omar al-Bashir, in 2006. Today, they operate under the army’s de facto command.

The HAC seemed to be designed to treat Western aid organisations with suspicion, with the government in 2009 going so far as to expel 13 aid agencies for “threatening the security of Sudan”. But rights groups and aid workers said the real reason was al-Bashir’s perception that they had helped the International Criminal Court gather evidence that resulted in a warrant being issued against him for crimes against humanity. Bottom of Form Aid workers told Al Jazeera that they consider the HAC an outfit for military intelligence and that the commission continues to be a thorn in the side of major aid groups and the United Nations today.

The HAC remains tasked with granting visas to aid workers and issuing travel permits to those requesting to move within Sudan. It also monitors the delivery of aid and inspects all aid supplies that arrive at Port Sudan – a city under army control where most aid enters the country and which has acted as the administrative capital since the war erupted in mid-April.

For that reason, most aid workers spoke to Al Jazeera off the record for fear of losing the limited aid access they have been granted.

“We don’t see [HAC] as an impartial actor,” one country director for an international aid agency told Al Jazeera.

The same source said the HAC epitomises the de facto military authority’s suspicion towards international relief organisations. Three relief workers also said aid agencies are not as vocal about the army’s role in aid diversion out of fear of losing the already limited access they have in Sudan.

“There is a sense of treading softly so that you don’t step on the toes of people that you might need for visa renewals or permits or for whatever else is needed in order to deliver aid in Sudan,” one aid worker told Al Jazeera.

The head of the HAC, Najm al-din Musa, denied allegations that the commission was involved in aid diversion.

“These allegations you are hearing are wrong ... and they are just lies. I will tell you the truth. The commission doesn’t take any aid from any organisation,” he said.

Stealing medical supplies

Since the war, at least 61 offices and 57 warehouses belonging to aid groups have been looted, according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). Aid workers said they suspect the RSF was responsible for most incidents. MSF’s Armstrong Dangelser said that one of their warehouses in Khartoum was looted many times.

“They took many of our logistic items and medical supplies. Sometimes there were a few days of calm, and then they visited our warehouse again,” he told Al Jazeera.

“Confiscations of aid are happening on both sides,” he said.

Local medics also said the army stopped an MSF convoy in mid-May, which agency employees confirmed, and diverted the medical supplies to a military hospital in Khartoum. Another doctor, Alaa Nugud, appeared on the Arabic news broadcaster al-Hadath on May 26 and accused the army of confiscating half the medical supplies that the World Health Organization (WHO) had brought to Port Sudan.

He also said the army took the supplies to their military hospital in Khartoum.

Two days after his interview, the military arrested Nugud at his home. Al Jazeera spoke to him after he was released on June 8, but he declined to speak about why he was detained and whether he was mistreated.

Al Jazeera reached out to the WHO for comment regarding the doctor’s allegations, but the agency did not respond.

How I rescue people caught in Sudan’s war

Monitoring and transparency

OCHA told Al Jazeera it has created “a humanitarian information-sharing mechanism” to facilitate aid shipments. The mechanism is voluntary and designed for aid agencies to notify the belligerents of their shipment through an online form.

Guiomar Pau Sole, the OCHA spokesperson, acknowledged that the UN has received dozens of reports related to violence and intimidation against aid workers, as well as the confiscation and looting of relief supplies. But, she added, none of the 274 relief trucks that have gone through OCHA’s humanitarian-sharing mechanism have been confiscated.

Despite the claim, aid workers told Al Jazeera that most relief agencies do not use the UN’s system because they fear it creates a precedent for Sudanese authorities to demand more information about aid shipments than they previously did.

That risks leading to more permanent bureaucratic impediments in the future, relief workers said. Pau Sole did not specify what information the UN agency shares with the belligerents but said: “OCHA will not share information that will endanger or expose personnel or relief items. So far, no items [through our mechanism] have been looted.”

Sudanese doctors have set up their own system to track medical aid deliveries to Khartoum. The volunteer Doctors’ Committee, which includes all the doctors working at the few functioning hospitals in the capital, have a WhatsApp group to exchange and document what aid shipments have arrived at their facilities.

Two Sudanese doctors from the committee said a convoy carrying medical aid from the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) was stopped and looted by the RSF late last month.

UNICEF’s Deputy Representative Mary Louise Eagleton denied that any shipments from her agency were intercepted and said the agency cooperates with OCHA’s system.

“It’s possible someone slapped a UNICEF logo on a truck, or a truck that had previously transported UNICEF supplies still had a logo on it, although we take those off when done,” she told Al Jazeera.

Eagleton added that her staff closely monitors each vehicle, which is tracked from “point to point” after leaving Port Sudan, with proof provided by videos, photos and reports.

Asked whether UNICEF checked its deliveries with the Doctors’ Committee, Eagleton said: “We are in touch with the recipient of the health supplies whoever the partner is.”

The Sudan director of another international aid agency told Al Jazeera: “When something happens to the UN, they try to keep it under wraps because they don’t want to harm their Conflict in Darfur: El-Geneina is the ‘worst place in the world’

Consolidating aid

On June 5, the army announced that it had created the Supreme Committee for Crisis Management to facilitate the aid response.

Kholood Khair, a Sudanese expert and the founding director of the think tank, Confluence Advisory, believes that the committee was created to capture aid and restrict relief.

“The army is losing control of Khartoum where everything is centralised. This feels like the last gasp by the de facto regime to try and maintain control of aid,” she told Al Jazeera. “But what the army controls in aid pales in comparison to what the RSF controls in terms of arms and money.”

Khair was referring to the huge cash flows the RSF generates from lucrative gold mines in Sudan, as well as its ability to buy and receive arms illicitly for its ground assault – an advantage it has over the army relying on fighter planes to fight the war.

In May, the army attempted to pressure relief organisations to allow armed escorts to accompany their shipments from Port Sudan, three aid sources with close knowledge of relief operations told Al Jazeera.

They said that most international NGOs and UN agencies have hired local truck companies to transport aid since they lack enough cargo vehicles.

But one Western aid worker said truck drivers are often forced to leave with armed escorts, which is considered a red line for relief agencies, according to an internal memo seen by Al Jazeera.

He speculated that truck drivers may be using a part of the money they receive from aid agencies to pay off the escorts and that aid groups and UN agencies prefer to ignore the issue.

All aid agencies that spoke to Al Jazeera acknowledged that armed escorts are a way for belligerents to enrich themselves and that they make humanitarian workers themselves a target. They also denied using them.

However, the Western aid worker insisted that some agencies have used them, despite the negative connotations.

“[Armed escorts] is an absolute last resort measure [for aid agencies] and it puts all our principles at risk,” he said.

The same source said the RSF is beginning to set up a parallel administrative system. In South Darfur, it has begun requesting aid groups to acquire separate travel permits, which must be issued by the RSF.

“Things are definitely not going in the direction that we would like to see things go in terms of reducing impediments,” the Western aid worker said.

The RSF is also accused of attempting to coerce aid workers into doing propaganda videos that aim to portray the group as a benevolent force. On June 9, the paramilitary stopped an MSF convoy and restricted them from delivering aid unless they said on camera – under duress – that the RSF was helping to facilitate relief.

MSF released a statement on Twitter following the incident: “On Tuesday, an MSF convoy was stopped upon departure from our warehouse and checked by RSF forces. The RSF requested we make a statement on camera regarding RSF procedures ... we were obliged to do this for our convoy to be able to continue its journey.”

Fighting in Sudan has led to a new wave of violence in Darfur

Supporting activists?

Aid workers and experts say the humanitarian response would be more effective if it supported Sudan’s resistance committees, the neighbourhood groups that spearheaded pro-democracy protests over the last five years.

Since the war, these committees have used their informal networks to provide life-saving aid to civilians throughout Sudan. Despite their vital role, relief workers told Al Jazeera the broader aid community is reluctant to deal with resistance committees since they see them as political – rather than neutral – actors.

“It would be a significant missed opportunity ... if such actors were not engaged as part of the broader response moving forward,” said Anthony Neal, coordinator of the Sudan INGO Forum. Khair said she was “flabbergasted as to why there wasn’t

an immediate shift [at the start of the war] to the aid methodology by relying more on [informal networks] already providing provisions and not committing to an overreliance on the state”.

The Norwegian Refugee Council is one of the few aid groups in Sudan that has partnered with neighbourhood activists running four makeshift clinics in Wad Madani, a city southeast of the capital, Khartoum. The initiative required the HAC’s approval, yet the NRC said that the activists consented to the arrangement.

Anette Hoffmann, a senior analyst covering Sudan at the Clingendael Institute, an independent think tank in The Hague, warned that initiatives to support resistance committees should be done discreetly to avoid putting members in danger.

“The safest arrangement would be if resistance committees are not at the forefront in which their names ... can be traced in some bureaucracy, which then makes it so easy to target them,” Hoffmann told Al Jazeera.

“Supporting their network members outside of the country – these intermediaries – would be ideal,” she added.

Aid workers who spoke to Al Jazeera agreed that finding innovative ways to bypass the de-facto authorities – and protect activists – is imperative to ensure the aid response does more good than harm.

But they all expressed concern that the broader aid community could compromise on their humanitarian principles to maintain their operations in the country.

“Many people are still very fearful of HAC,” said the country director. “Some people are saying let’s engage with resistance committees. Most others think that if that creates a remote risk of being expelled from the country, then they’re not going to do it.”

Fears of ethnic cleansing mount in Sudan’s West Darfur (Al Jazeera) By Mat Nashed

June 17, 2023

The abduction and execution of a regional governor in Sudan has raised fears that the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) is aiding a campaign of ethnic cleansing, survivors and experts have said.

Khamis Abakar, the governor of West Darfur, was killed hours after he criticised the RSF and allied Arab fighters of “genocide“, in an interview on June 14 with a Saudi news channel. His body was found in el-Geneina, the capital of West Darfur.

“Civilians are being killed randomly and in large numbers,” he told Al Hadath TV, urging the international community to intervene to protect people in el-Geneina. “We haven’t seen the army leave its base to defend people.”

The RSF denied any responsibility and blamed the killing on outlaws fighting a “tribal conflict”. The Sudan Conflict Observatory, an independent monitor funded by the United States, said the RSF was responsible for what it called an extrajudicial killing.

“The entire city is under the RSF and the [Arab] militias cooperate with them. Today, all of el-Geneina is destroyed,” Abakar told Al Hadath. “There is no protection for us whether from the central government or from the regional government.”

Abakar was from the non-Arab, Masalit tribe. According to witness and rights groups, Arab militias and the RSF – a group mostly composed of Arab recruits – have targeted Masalit displacement camps, killed people attempting to escape to neighbouring Chad, kidnapped and raped women and executed influential figures in the community, such as tribal leaders and human rights lawyers and monitors.

Witnesses have spoken of corpses lying on the streets for days and at least 1,100 people have reportedly died so far.

Conflict in Darfur: El-Geneina is the 'worst place in the world'

Months of simmering tensions between Sudan’s army chief, Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, and the RSF commander, Mohamed Hamdan “Hemedti” Dagalo, descended into war on April 15. Ten days later, they took their armed struggle to West Darfur.

However, the army quickly retreated and left a power vacuum that RSF fighters and Arab militias exploited.

“We express our deep concern over these crimes and violations committed by militias against civilians and we demand international protection for the state of West Darfur,” said the Roots Organisation for Human Rights and Monitoring Violations, a local civil society group from West Darfur.

“The army is silent”

More than 115,000 refugees have escaped from West Darfur to Chad despite the perilous journey, according to the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR).

Human rights monitors in el-Geneina told Al Jazeera that Arab militias and RSF fighters were guarding all exit points from the city and demanding bribes from families trying to flee.

Ahmad Hagar said on Friday that he paid the equivalent of \$500 to militias so that he could escape on May 28 with his wife and five children. He blamed the Sudanese army for failing to intervene to defend the Masalit.

“Arab militias cooperate with the RSF and the army is silent,” he told Al Jazeera.

Army spokesperson Nabil Abdullah did not respond to queries on why troops were not intervening to protect civilians in el-Geneina.

The threat of targeted killings has prompted influential figures such as the Masalit tribal chief, Sultan Sa’at, to flee with his loved ones. They left shortly after Arab fighters raided his brother’s home and killed him, according to Nahid Hamid, the sultan’s wife and a human rights lawyer.

“After his older brother was killed in his home, the sultan and his entire family fled. His children, his brothers and sisters and everybody,” she told Al Jazeera.

Hamid said she was in Khartoum when the civil war erupted. Now in Egypt, she said the murder of her brother-in-law is the result of lawlessness in the region.

“There is no security,” she added.

Conflict in Darfur: El-Geneina is the 'worst place in the world'

Global indifference?

Several international and local civil society groups on Friday published an open letter asking regional and international institutions, as well as influential countries such as the US, to “publicly denounce the RSF’s role for committing atrocities in West Darfur”.

The letter came two days after a comment by Sudan’s UN envoy Volker Perthes sparked outrage. He said that targeted attacks against civilians based on ethnicity in West Darfur were “allegedly committed by Arab militias and some men in RSF uniform”. The RSF and its lobbyists used similar language to deny their involvement in the sit-in on June 3, 2019, in which 120 pro-democracy protesters were killed. Despite dozens of witness testimonies and hundreds of videos that implicated RSF fighters in the attack, the group blamed imposters that dressed in RSF uniforms.

When Al Jazeera asked Florence Marchal, the spokesperson for the UN mission in Sudan (UNITAMS), why Perthes used the wording that he did, she said, “We are super cautious. We cannot name [the perpetrator] if we are not able to verify.”

The US Department of State was more direct in its statement, which said that Washington “condemns in the strongest terms the ongoing human rights violations and abuses and horrific violence in Sudan, especially reports of widespread sexual violence and killings based on ethnicity in West Darfur by the Rapid Support Forces and allied militias.” Pursuing justice

Careful monitoring and evidence gathering is essential in order to give survivors from West Darfur a chance to pursue justice, according to Emma DiNapoli, an expert on international law who focuses on Sudan.

DiNapoli said on Friday that the International Criminal Court (ICC) could be an avenue to hold perpetrators to account since the court already has jurisdiction over Darfur thanks to a UN Security Council Resolution passed in March 2005.

Based on that resolution, the ICC indicted Sudan’s former ruler Omar al-Bashir – and other members from his regime – for war crimes and crimes against humanity in 2009. Al-Bashir was later indicted for genocide.

With Darfur now embroiled in another civil war, the ICC could in theory open up new cases.

“There is clearly a case [to prosecute perpetrators] for crimes against humanity [in West Darfur] and I would say the same is true for war crimes,” DiNapoli told Al Jazeera.

“Crimes against humanity include deportation by forcible transfer and persecution on ethnic grounds and don’t need to occur

in an armed conflict. But they need to be proven to be part of a broader systematic attack directed against the civilian population," she added.

Activists in Sudan have already been advocating for the ICC to look into the killing of Abakar.

One human rights monitor, who asked that his organisation and name stay anonymous for fear of reprisal, told Al Jazeera on Friday that any new investigation could act as a deterrent against future human rights violations.

"I know these people in Darfur," he said. "If you even mention the ICC, then perpetrators begin shaking in fear."

Sudan Warring Generals Agree New Truce After Fighting Intensifies (Barron's) June 17, 2023

Sudan's warring generals agreed a new 72-hour ceasefire from Sunday, US and Saudi mediators said, after fighting intensified with deadly air strikes in Khartoum and an exodus of wounded from Darfur over the border into Chad.

Air strikes killed 17 civilians, including five children, in the capital Saturday, a citizens' group said, as medics in Chad reported hundreds of wounded from Darfur seeking treatment.

Multiple truces have been agreed and broken during the two-month war, including after the United States slapped sanctions on both generals after a previous attempt collapsed at the end of May.

A 24-hour ceasefire from June 10 to June 11 provided Khartoum residents with a brief respite from the air strikes and artillery exchanges that have ravaged whole neighbourhoods of the capital but the fighting resumed within 10 minutes of the ceasefire ending.

"The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and United States of America announce the agreement of representatives of the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) on a ceasefire throughout Sudan for a period of 72 hours," a Saudi foreign ministry statement said late Saturday.

The ceasefire is due to take effect at 6 am (0400 GMT), the mediators said.

"The two sides agreed that during the ceasefire period they would refrain from movements and attacks, the use of warplanes or drones, artillery bombardment, reinforcement of positions, resupply of forces, or refrain from attempting to achieve military gains," the mediators said.

"They also agreed to allow freedom of movement and the delivery of humanitarian aid throughout Sudan."

The SAF, commanded by Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, has since April 15 been battling the paramilitary RSF, headed by his former deputy Mohamed Hamdan Daglo, after the two fell out in a power struggle.

A record 25 million people -- more than half Sudan's population -- are in need of aid, the United Nations says.

Witnesses say air strikes have intensified in the capital over the past few days.

On Saturday, warplanes struck several residential districts of Khartoum, killing "17 civilians, including five children," according to a citizens' support committee. AFP was not immediately able to independently confirm the committee's figures.

Residents had earlier reported air strikes around the city's southern Yarmouk district -- home to a weapons manufacturing and arms depot complex where the RSF claimed "full control" in early June.

In a video published Friday on the army's Facebook page, deputy army chief Yasser Atta warned civilians to keep away from houses where the RSF are located because the army "will attack them at any time".

Since battles began, the death toll across the country has topped 2,000, the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project said.

Hundreds of kilometres (miles) west of Khartoum, up to 1,100 have been killed in the West Darfur state capital El Geneina alone, according to the US State Department.

Medics in Chad said Saturday they were overwhelmed by the hundreds of wounded fleeing Sudan's Darfur region, which has become an increasing focus of global concern.

The dead have included West Darfur Governor Khamis Abdullah Abakar, killed after he criticised the paramilitaries in a

Wednesday television interview. The RSF denied responsibility.

"We are overwhelmed in the operating theatre. We urgently need more beds and more staff," said Seybou Diarra, a physician and project coordinator in Adre, Chad, for the Doctors Without Borders (MSF) charity.

"As violence rages in West Darfur, wounded people are coming in waves" to the hospital in Adre, just over the border about 20 kilometres (12 miles) west of El Geneina, the MSF statement said.

More than 600 patients, most with gunshot wounds, arrived at the facility over a three-day period -- more than half of them on Friday, it said.

Claire Nicolet, MSF's head of emergency programmes, cited "reports of intensifying and large-scale attacks this week".

According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), at least 149,000 people have fled from Darfur into Chad.

They are among the roughly 2.2 million people uprooted nationwide by the fighting which has forced more than 528,000 to seek refuge in neighbouring countries, IOM said.

On Thursday, the State Department attributed the atrocities in Darfur "primarily" to the RSF and said the violence and alleged rights violations are an "ominous reminder" of the region's previous genocide.

A years-long war in Darfur began in 2003 with a rebel uprising that prompted then-strongman Omar al-Bashir to unleash the Janjaweed militia, whose actions led to international charges of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity.

The RSF have their origins in the Janjaweed.

Sudanese official urges investigation into violence in Darfur, saying it's a return to past genocide (Associated Press) By Samy Magdy

June 20, 2023

The governor of Darfur on Tuesday called for an international investigation into violence against residents of the region, which has experienced some of the worst fighting in Sudan's ongoing conflict, saying it's a return to past genocide.

Mini Arko Minawi urged the U.N. Security Council to allow the International Criminal Court to probe "crimes and assassinations" that took place in the western region over the past two months.

Sudan descended into chaos after fighting erupted in mid-April between the military, led by Gen. Abdel-Fattah Burhan, and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces, commanded by Gen. Mohammed Hamdan Dagalo.

The conflict, which capped months of tensions between rival generals, has killed more than 3,000 people and wounded over 6,000 others, according to Health Minister Haitham Mohammed Ibrahim. It has forced more than 2.2 million people to flee their homes to safer areas inside Sudan and to neighboring nations.

The fighting has centered on the capital, Khartoum, but spread elsewhere in the African country, including Darfur. The violence in Darfur, a sprawling region consisting of five provinces, has recently taken an ethnic dimension, with the RSF and Arab militias reportedly targeting non-Arab tribes in the region, according to U.N. officials.

The U.N. envoy in Sudan, Volker Perthes, said earlier this month that such attacks, which include targeted killings, rapes and other atrocities, could amount to crimes against humanity.

Minawi said "excessive force" has been used against residents in many areas in the region, including Genena, the capital of West Darfur province, and the town of Kutum in North Darfur province.

"What is happening in Darfur now is no less than what had happened in 2003," he said in a video posted Monday on his social media accounts, referring to the region's genocidal war in the early 2000s.

He spoke of residents killed, women raped and the looting and burning of properties, and assassinations of the region's political and community leaders, including the governor of West Darfur, Khamis Abdalla Abkar.

Akbar, a member of the Masalit ethnic group, was abducted and killed Wednesday hours after he accused the RSF and allied Arab militias in a televised interview of attacking Genena. Activists and rights defenders have blamed his slaying on the RSF, a charge the paramilitary force denied. Dar Masalit sultanate, which represents the Masalit ethnic community in Darfur, also called for an "immediate international intervention" to protect civilians in Darfur.

In a detailed report issued Monday on the violence in Genena, the sultanate accused the RSF and Arab militias of launching a “series of systematic and bloody attacks” aimed at “ethnically cleansing, and of committing genocide against African civilians.”

It said more than 5,000 people were killed and at least 8,000 others wounded in two months in the city.

Darfur suffered the genocidal war when ethnic Africans rebelled, accusing the Arab-dominated government in Khartoum of discrimination.

Former dictator Omar al-Bashir’s government was accused of retaliating by arming local nomadic Arab tribes, known as Janjaweed, who targeted civilians. The Janjaweed, who later evolved into the RSF, were accused of widespread killings, rapes and other atrocities in Darfur over the past two decades.

In the current conflict, the RSF and allied Arab militias have repeatedly attacked the city, especially areas inhabited by the Masalit community, according to residents and activists. Many towns, villages and displacement camps were looted and burned down.

Activists also reported that dozens of women were raped inside their homes and while trying to flee the fighting in Darfur. Almost all rape cases were blamed on the RSF, which didn’t respond to repeated requests for comment.

“This spiraling violence bears terrifying similarity with the war crimes and crimes against humanity perpetrated in Darfur since 2003. Even those seeking safety are not being spared,” said Tigere Chagutah, Amnesty International’s regional director for East and Southern Africa.

Darfur governor calls for international probe in Sudan violence (Al Jazeera) June 20, 2023

The governor of Darfur has called for an international investigation into violence against residents of the region that has seen some of the worst fighting in Sudan’s ongoing war.

Mini Arko Minawi on Tuesday urged the United Nations Security Council to allow the International Criminal Court (ICC) to probe “crimes and assassinations” that have taken place in the western region over the past two months.

War in Sudan broke out in mid-April after two generals, army chief Abdel Fattah al-Burhan and paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) commander Mohamed Hamdan “Hemedti” Dagalo, started fighting over control of the country.

The conflict, which capped months of tensions between rival generals, has now killed more than 3,000 people and wounded more than 6,000 others, according to Health Minister Haitham Mohammed Ibrahim.

The UN has said more than 2.2 million people have been forced to flee their homes to safer areas inside Sudan while at least 500,000 have fled to other countries.

The fighting began in the capital, Khartoum, but quickly spread elsewhere in the African country, especially to Darfur.

The violence in Darfur has increasingly taken an ethnic dimension, according to local activists, observers and UN officials.

RSF forces and their allied Arab militias are reportedly massacring non-Arab Masalit tribes, who were also subject to ethnic violence two decades ago that left more than 300,000 dead.

The UN envoy in Sudan, Volker Perthes, warned earlier this month that attacks by the RSF and allied Arab militias could amount to crimes against humanity. Minawi, Darfur’s governor, said “excessive force” has been used against residents in many areas in the region, especially el-Geneina, the capital city of West Darfur province, where local reports – which cannot be confirmed due to a communication blackout – indicated that more than 5,000 may have been killed.

“What is happening in Darfur now is no less than what had happened in 2003,” he said in a video posted Monday on his social media accounts, referencing the previous war, which garnered international attention and eventually a joint African Union-UN mission to maintain the piece.

Minawi spoke of residents killed, women raped and properties looted and burned, as well as “assassinations” of the region’s political and community leaders, including the governor of West Darfur.

Khamis Abakar, the West Darfur governor, was abducted by RSF soldiers last week shortly after accusing the militia and its Arab fighters of genocide. He was found dead within hours.

Assassinations appear poised to continue as Al Sadiq Muhammad Ahmed, the commissioner of the Sudan Humanitarian Aid

Commission (HAC) was killed in el-Geneina.

Rights group Amnesty International on Monday said it is “alarmed” by reports of ethnically motivated killings, sexual violence, widespread burning of homes and mass displacement of non-Arab residents of West Darfur by RSF and its allies, and said civilians are at grave risk.

Doctors Without Borders (Médecins Sans Frontières, or MSF) on the same day called on armed groups in and around el-Geneina to spare civilians and provide them passage to escape the area, pointing out that thousands have fled to neighbouring Chad.

Saudi Arabia and the United States, who have been mediating between the generals, last week negotiated another temporary ceasefire that began early Sunday and is slated to end early Wednesday.

But several civil society groups in Sudan said the RSF and its allied militias continued their campaign of violence in Darfur in violation of the ceasefire.

Meanwhile, the UN said Monday that international donors had pledged nearly \$1.5bn in aid for the humanitarian crisis in Sudan, which is considerably lower than the \$2.57bn the aid programme requires.

Cut phone lines and looted hospitals: What's slowing aid in Sudan (CBC News) By Jennifer Yoon
June 21, 2023

Sitting in his Montreal living room, Yasser Essa scrolls through his call log, trying each member of his family in Darfur, Sudan. Sometimes, he gets an automatic message, saying the number he's calling is out of coverage. Other times, the call doesn't even go through.

Essa doesn't know if his parents, sisters, friends or even his wife are still alive. He had been trying to bring them to Canada before the conflict erupted.

He hasn't talked to his loved ones for a month now. He's been trying every day to reach them.

"I don't know where they are, what is happening to them. And all that I'm hearing from the place they are living is just the place is surrounded and under siege," Essa said.

Before conflict broke out in Sudan more than two months ago, Essa said he would talk to his loved ones regularly. Now he just gets trickles of information from social media, he said, each drop more horrifying than the last.

A ceasefire began this week between Sudan's army and its rival paramilitary group Rapid Support Forces (RSF). It's a delicate truce, though; several have been brokered — and broken — throughout the conflict.

Smoke rises above buildings as people flee with some belongings in Khartoum, Sudan, on June 10. A new ceasefire has taken effect in the conflict-stricken country, but there are concerns it won't hold. (AFP via Getty Images)

The power struggle between the two sides has turned the capital, Khartoum, into a war zone plagued by looting, led to outbursts of fighting in other regions, and triggered a sharp escalation of violence in Darfur in western Sudan.

More than half of Sudan's 49 million people now need humanitarian assistance, the United Nations said, with more than 500,000 people fleeing into neighbouring countries. Nearly 1.7 million have been internally displaced.

In Darfur, some worry history may be repeating itself. The region was at the centre of allegations of genocide and war crimes in the mid 2000s.

Alice Wairimu Nderitu, the UN special adviser on the prevention of genocide, says there are indications some violence being reported now could again amount to war crimes.

"We have accounts of door-to-door killings, of people being forcibly displaced, and really indiscriminate violence — not just of fighters, but a lot of citizens and civilians are dying as well," said Jean-Nicolas Armstrong Dangelser, an emergency co-ordinator with Doctors Without Borders who has been working in the country for six weeks.

Darfur has been almost entirely cut off from the rest of the country and the rest of the world, Dangelser said. There have been long periods of time when his organization couldn't reach its teams in south or north Darfur.

This teaching hospital in El Geneina, the capital of West Darfur, is one of several medical facilities that were looted in Sudan.

Doctors Without Borders says the hospital is out of service at the moment. (Doctors Without Borders) There are dire needs in Khartoum, too, he said. But like in Darfur, aid workers can't access certain areas because of the ongoing violence.

"Everything is missing at the moment," said Dangelser, naming medicine, food and water as some basic necessities not making their way in.

Adding to that difficulty is the level of violence humanitarian workers themselves are facing, he said. Doctors Without Borders said its hospitals, clinics and staff have been attacked and looted. Some warehouses were occupied and medicine spoiled.

"The scale that we are seeing in Sudan since the beginning of the conflict is just completely out of anything that I've seen so far," Dangelser said.

One of the organization's guards was killed by shelling in his home, he said. He fears more of his colleagues are going to die as the conflict escalates.

Doctors Without Borders is trying to scale up its operations on the ground, but workers say it is hard to get aid where it's needed in time.

"We're struggling to get staff there. We're struggling to get supplies there.... We're also supporting informal networks of doctors who set up clinics within their home communities," said Barbara Deck, an ICU nurse and project co-ordinator with the organization.

Deck was in Port Sudan earlier this month, meant to travel on to a hospital in the Khartoum area. But she ultimately couldn't get the authorization to go.

"It was only a few days later that we heard of a mass casualty incident, where 118 people turned up to the emergency department, severely ill," said Deck.

Doctors Without Borders says it has received more than 1,000 patients to its Khartoum emergency room in the last five weeks. Over 30 per cent of those had suffered gunshot wounds, said Deck. And the organization said some patients were children under the age of five.

"It's hard to put into words. I mean, it's incredibly frustrating," said Deck. This week, international donors pledged more than \$1.5 billion US in aid for the humanitarian crisis. Canada announced Monday it is sending an additional \$40 million.

As for Essa, who is still waiting to hear from his family, he says help needs to come quickly — and the international community needs to prioritize helping end the conflict.

"Whatever humanitarian call of action they advocate for couldn't be useful if those people ... are dead."

Sudan: Alarm over new 'war crimes' in Sudan's Darfur region amid ongoing conflict (The New Arab) June 28, 2023

Residents in Sudan's Darfur region have spoken of fears of "war crimes" and "genocide" in the region amid the ongoing conflict in the country.

Sudan's war has brought painful memories back to the troubled Darfur region where armed groups are accused of ethnically targeting civilians, sparking fears of a new "genocide".

"They burned every house in the neighbourhood and killed my brother in front of me," recounted one survivor, Inaam, who fled the western region for neighbouring Chad.

Her harrowing escape took her through streets "littered with bodies", said the human rights defender who, like others interviewed by AFP, used a pseudonym for fear of retaliation against relatives.

Such testimonies have sparked alarm about a repeat of the bloody history of Darfur, where former strongman Omar al-Bashir in 2003 unleashed Arab tribal militia in a scorched-earth campaign to quash a non-Arab rebellion against perceived inequalities.

The unrest killed at least 300,000 people and displaced 2.5 million, according to the UN, and sparked international charges of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes against Bashir and others.

The paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) later emerged from the notorious Janjaweed militia which spearheaded Bashir's deadly onslaught.

Against that background, Darfuris watched with terror when the RSF went to war in mid-April with the Sudanese army and fighting quickly spread from the capital Khartoum back to their home region.

Inaam said that, nine days after hostilities erupted, the RSF and allied Arab militias descended on her hometown of El Geneina, capital of West Darfur state.

After they torched her neighbourhood, she fled on "detours to avoid RSF and Arab tribal fighters" and managed to cross the border to Chad about 30 kilometres (18 miles) away.

Another refugee, who asked to be identified only as Mohammed, also recounted passing through terrifying checkpoints.

At every stop, "Arab militia fighters asked us our names and our tribe," he told AFP. Depending on the answers, he said, some "were executed". The RSF and their allies, Mohammed charged, "are specifically targeting Massalit," a non-Arab ethnic minority whom he said "the army has supported" in the current round of fighting.

"An old conflict is re-awakening in El Geneina."

'Ominous reminder'

Sudan's war has killed nearly 2,800 people nationwide and uprooted roughly 2.8 million as battles rage between the forces of army chief Abdel Fattah al-Burhan and his former deputy, RSF commander Mohamed Hamdan Daglo.

Much of the worst fighting has hit Darfur in unrest that Washington has labelled an "ominous reminder" of the past "genocide".

The Massalit are one of the major non-Arab ethnic groups in Darfur, which is also home to Arab tribes such as the Rizeigat, the pastoralist camel-herding people from which Daglo hails. Volker Perthes, head of the United Nations mission to Sudan, warned in mid-June that "there is an emerging pattern of large-scale targeted attacks against civilians based on their ethnic identities, allegedly committed by Arab militias and some armed men" in RSF uniform.

"These reports are deeply worrying and, if verified, could amount to crimes against humanity." On Tuesday, the United States, Norway and Britain said targeted ethnic violence and other abuses in Darfur are "mostly attributed" to RSF and allied militias.

Power blackouts and severed phone and internet access have severely hampered reporting from the region the size of France that is home to about a quarter of Sudan's 48 million people.

The UN has also said that "RSF and allied militias are reportedly surrounding the cities" of El Fasher in North Darfur and Nyala in South Darfur.

Amnesty International warned of "terrifying similarity with the war crimes and crimes against humanity" perpetrated in Darfur since 2003. Snipers on rooftops

According to the United States State Department, up to 1,100 people have been killed in El Geneina alone, but the Massalit tribal leadership says the real toll is even higher.

They charged in a statement that more than 5,000 people were killed, 8,000 injured and hundreds of thousands displaced by June 12.

People have suffered "the worst crimes against humanity, murder, ethnic cleansing and looting", they said, reporting that "snipers have spread out on rooftops" and police "have joined RSF ranks".

Mohammed said families quickly learnt that "only the women could go out to fetch water, because the snipers would target every man".

Army soldiers meanwhile "have not left their bases since the war began," he said, echoing the situation in much of Khartoum.

A tribal leader told AFP that "the RSF and the Arabs have killed, looted and burned" everything in their path.

In El Geneina, "the house of the Massalit sultan" has been under "constant attack," he said. Tribal leaders and activists have been killed in their homes, according to the West Darfur lawyers' union.

In mid-June, the sultan's brother Tarek Bahr El-Din was killed, as was West Darfur Governor Khamis Abdullah Abakar, who had hours earlier accused the RSF of "genocide" on Saudi television.

The RSF denied killing Abakar and blamed forces it said were acting "against the background of an old tribal conflict".

RSF general Abdel Rahman Gumma Barak Allah accused the army of having armed minority groups, including "1,000 Aringa men and 1,500 Massalit" and charged they had attacked police in El Geneina.

'Out of hell'

The fighting has deepened a long-running humanitarian crisis, say aid groups, after clinics were raided and food warehouses ransacked in Darfur.

"The conflict has not only endangered lives through direct violence but has also severely hindered access to health care," Doctors Without Borders (MSF) told AFP.

Another refugee, teacher Ibrahim Issa, told AFP he had made it "out of the hell" of El Geneina, where the fighting had brought back dark memories "of 2003 and 2004, when you were killed for your ethnicity". Mohammed said the conflict between the army and RSF "has turned into a civil war and a genocide".

MSF medics in Chad reported treating refugees with bullet wounds who were targeted "as they tried to leave the city".

The group also reported sexual violence including the rape of a 15-year-old girl by "six armed men in a bus" while she was fleeing to Chad with her 18-year-old sister.

Alice Nderitu, the UN Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, also warned of the threat of "renewed campaigns of rape, murder and ethnic cleansing". Search for justice

The latest Darfur violence has again raised the question of whether those responsible will one day face justice.

"In principle, many of the crimes documented to date in Darfur likely constitute at least crimes against humanity, if not war crimes," human rights lawyer Emma DiNapoli told AFP.

But proving them will depend on what evidence activists can gather while dodging bullets and arson attacks.

"Activists on the ground should be documenting evidence to the highest standard possible, particularly taking the details of eyewitnesses to violations and documenting evidence of command and control or perpetrator information," DiNapoli said.

Since the UN Security Council referred the situation in Darfur to the International Criminal Court with no end date, the court "in theory" has "jurisdiction over crimes committed in the present day," she added.

But Sudan's past does not offer much hope. Khartoum never handed over any suspects wanted by the ICC, and some have escaped prison since the new war broke out.

Four suspects including Bashir remain at large. One, who voluntarily surrendered elsewhere in Africa, is on trial in The Hague.

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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

International court prosecutor to probe crimes in eastern Congo following government request (Associated Press) By Mike Corder

June 15, 2023

The chief prosecutor of the International Criminal Court said Thursday he is opening a preliminary probe in Congo after the African nation asked him to investigate alleged crimes in its North Kivu province since January last year.

The request marks the second time Congolese authorities have sought an investigation by the global war crimes court. Congo, a member state of the court, first requested a probe in 2004 into crimes since 2002. That led to three convictions of rebel leaders involved in the long-running armed conflict in the mineral rich nation.

Prosecutor Karim Khan said that Congo's new request — known at the court as a referral — asks prosecutors to “investigate particular armed forces and groups”.

Conflict has been simmering for decades in eastern Congo, where more than 120 armed groups are fighting. Most are vying for land and control of mines with valuable minerals, while some groups are trying to protect their communities.

Just last month, authorities said at least 17 people were killed by fighters with the Allied Democratic Forces — believed to be linked with the Islamic State group.

Fighting spiked in late 2021 when M23, a rebel group linked to neighboring Rwanda which was largely dormant for nearly a decade, resurfaced and started capturing territory.

M23 rose to prominence 10 years ago when its fighters seized Goma, eastern Congo's largest city on the border with Rwanda. It derives its name from a March 23, 2009, peace deal, which it accuses the Congo government of not implementing.

The protracted conflict has had a devastating effect on the civilian population. Some 5.5 million people are internally displaced in eastern Congo, according to the United Nations.

Khan said his preliminary assessment would look at all crimes in the region “irrespective of affiliation or nationality.”

He said his first step will be to assess whether the request by Congo can be merged with the earlier investigations and cases.

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WEST AFRICA

Côte d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast)

Official Website of the International Criminal Court
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Lake Chad Region — Chad, Nigeria, Niger, and Cameroon

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Mali

Analysis: Mali faces spectre of anarchy after demanding UN's departure (Reuters) By Edward Mcallister and David Lewis
June 19, 2023

Mali's unexpected demand for the departure of U.N. peacekeepers may herald a sudden end to a decade-long mission that has struggled to protect civilians and its own troops, raising fears the country could slide deeper into chaos amid an Islamist insurgency and the possible revival of a separatist uprising.

The U.N. mission, known as MINUSMA, has been hobbled by restrictions on its air and ground operations since Mali's ruling junta joined forces with Russian military contractor Wagner Group in 2021. That has limited its effectiveness against an Islamist insurgency that took root a decade ago and has since spread across West Africa.

Despite the restrictions, MINUSMA's 13,000-strong force has held the line in northern cities including Gao and Timbuktu that are surrounded by militants. It patrols camps for displaced people, which come under frequent attack, and provides medical evacuations for Mali's under-equipped army.

And it has also helped to placate Tuareg-led rebels in northern Mali, who halted their separatist uprising with the 2015 Algiers Accord.

It is unclear how quickly U.N. troops could leave following Mali's request on Friday. But, if and when they do, Bamako will be alone with about 1,000 Wagner soldiers to battle the militants linked to Islamic State and al Qaeda, who have killed thousands of civilians and soldiers and control large swathes of Mali's desert north and centre.

"If you leave, you have anarchy and civil war, especially against civilians and the weak. If you stay, you are almost discredited," said Ahmedou Ould-Abdallah, a former Mauritanian foreign minister who served as a top U.N. official in West Africa and now runs a regional think-tank.

A spokesman for the Coordination of Azawad Movements (CMA), the Tuareg-led northern rebel alliance, said a UN withdrawal would be premature because the peace deal had not been fully implemented and would threaten stability across the Sahel. He said, however, the CMA had not yet reached an official position.

Relations between the U.N. and Mali's junta, which consolidated power in two coups in 2020 and 2021, have frayed. Bamako wanted MINUSMA to become a more active fighting force to counter the Islamist threat, which the U.N. said was not part of its mission. U.N. officials, meanwhile, pushed for greater freedoms to protect civilians and investigate alleged rights abuses by militants, the army and, more recently, Wagner.

Ties reached breaking point last month when U.N. investigators released a report accusing the army and "armed white men" of massacring 500 people in the town of Moura in March 2022. Mali, Russia and Wagner deny wrongdoing in Moura or targeting civilians anywhere in Mali.

The U.N. has repeatedly said that the constraints imposed by the junta have stopped it from fulfilling its mission. Mali frequently denied or delayed permission for MINUSMA to move in combat zones, it said, impairing its ability to defend civilians under attack or swiftly probe abuses.

Mali's government and army did not respond to requests for comment.

Frustrated by the restrictions, Western and African diplomats called for change this year. However, following a review of the mission in January, U.N. Secretary General Antonio Guterres last week rejected a proposal for a surge of up to 3,600 more troops, which Mali's African neighbours had pushed for, as well as an alternative proposal that would have shrunk MINUSMA to a political mission in Bamako.

Instead, he proposed extending the mandate for the force with only a few tweaks, including closing some small northern bases.

On June 14, the Malian government issued a statement rejecting all the proposals. Then on Friday, Malian Foreign Minister Abdoulaye Diop told a U.N. security council meeting that there had been "a crisis of confidence between Malian authorities and MINUSMA" and the force should leave "right away".

The 15-member U.N. Security Council was scheduled to renew MINUSMA's mandate before it expires on June 30. Reuters could not immediately determine whether the council - where Russia holds a veto - will now vote for a renewal, or how long it would take to conclude a withdrawal of the mission if there was no extension.

On Friday, in response to Mali's announcement, MINUSMA's head El-Ghassim Wane told reporters that peacekeepers can only operate with consent from the host country: without that, the mission is "impossible," he said.

MINUSMA spokesperson Fatoumata Sinkoun Kaba declined to comment on the logistics of any withdrawal and said the mission would follow Security Council mandates.

RESTRICTIONS

MINUSMA launched in 2013 after the separatist rebels and al Qaeda-linked insurgents occupied northern Mali. French

troops forced the militants to retreat but they bounced back. More than 170 peacekeepers have died in fighting, making MINUSMA the U.N.'s deadliest combat mission.

Violence has spread into neighbouring Burkina Faso and Niger, creating one of the world's fastest-growing humanitarian crises.

Mali's junta promised stability when it snatched power; it took an anti-French stance and deepened ties with Russia. By the end of 2021, Wagner had deployed.

Within weeks, Mali imposed the flight restrictions. Reuters was unable to determine whether the move was linked to Wagner's presence. It mirrors past U.N. flight restrictions in Central African Republic, where Wagner also operates.

Bamako and the Kremlin say Russian troops, not Wagner mercenaries, are present in Mali but only to train the army and supply equipment.

Mali's army spokesman, Colonel Souleymane Dembelé, told Reuters this year that restrictions on MINUSMA were retaliation for a no-fly zone imposed by French forces last year. Paris denies this.

By mid-2022, restrictions prevented the U.N. from operating unscheduled flights over 70,000 square kilometres of Mali, according to an internal U.N. report from the middle of last year, reviewed by Reuters. Nearly 500 U.N. flight requests - one in four - have been denied this year, according to Security Council figures.

"MINUSMA is another peacekeeping lame duck. The mission couldn't fulfil the expectations of the population," said Ulf Laessing, head of the Sahel programme at the Konrad Adenauer foundation.

Frustrated, countries including the United Kingdom, Germany and Sweden, which provided some of the best-trained soldiers, announced troop withdrawals amounting to more than 20 percent of the mission. France, which had a separate task force in Mali, withdrew its remaining 2,400 troops in 2022, including the air support it gave the U.N.

The majority of MINUSMA's remaining soldiers are supplied by African nations.

Three of four units of MINUSMA's elite mobile task force are not operational, the Security Council said in March. In July, Egypt suspended its MINUSMA activities because of attacks on its troops. For nearly a year, its 1,072 soldiers have been in barracks.

A document prepared in April by the U.N. Department of Peace Operations listed several units that MINUSMA lacked - from armed helicopters and airfield support to infantry and intelligence.

HEART AND MINDS

MINUSMA still plays a significant role in Mali. Its \$1 billion budget has created thousands of jobs and provided local support by erecting streets lights or police stations in a country whose economy has been crippled by coup-related sanctions imposed by its neighbours.

It helped organise a constitutional referendum on Sunday meant to pave the way to presidential elections next year. Crucially, it has coordinated peace talks between rival armed groups in the north following the 2015 Algiers Accord, which marked the official end of a four-year armed uprising that seized large parts of northern Mali, the U.N. and security officials said.

A senior U.N. official, who asked not to be identified because of the sensitivity of the situation, said Tuareg leaders had indicated that the withdrawal of the UN mission could lead to the collapse of that dialogue - with repercussions felt across the region.

Ould Mohamed Ramdane, spokesperson for CMA rebel alliance, said that in addition to its role in talks, MINUSMA had brought "calm and security" to areas where it was deployed and had dispensed a lot of humanitarian aid in northern Mali.

"We all think that its withdrawal will have a major impact on the northern localities but also on stability throughout the Sahel," Ramdane said.

"The threat of resumption of violence with the former separatists is looming again," said Yvan Guichaoua, senior lecturer at the Brussels school of international studies, referring to the fallout from MINUSMA's expected departure. In addition to the loss of its security forces, the withdrawal of U.N. investigative teams would increase the risk of impunity for human rights abuses, he said.

Attacks on civilians surged in the year after Wagner arrived. At least 750 were killed during joint operations carried out by Wagner and Mali's military during that period, according to data from the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project, a U.S.-based research group. Sixty civilians died in military operations in the year before Wagner came.

Restrictions in MINUSMA's movements have meant the mission has become more and more focused in recent years on protecting itself. A U.S. official, who asked not to be identified because of the sensitivity of the situation, said 90% of troop operations are focused on securing its own bases and defending peacekeepers.

The U.N.'s Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations, Jean-Pierre Lacroix, disputed that figure in a post on Twitter on Monday, saying it had "no basis".

"Protecting peacekeepers and protecting civilians are not either/or. Most often they go hand in hand," he said.

Still, MINUSMA has struggled to counter a tide of anti-U.N. posts online, losing the battle for public opinion in Mali. In a recent survey of nearly 2,300 Malians conducted by German political foundation Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 72% blamed MINUSMA for not protecting civilians.

Over 90% said they had confidence in Russia to support Mali in the fight against Islamists.

Wagner Group To Remain In Mali, CAR – Russian Foreign Minister (Heritage Times) By
Enyichukwu Enemanna
June 26, 2023

Russia's Foreign Minister, Sergei Lavrov has said despite rebellion by the group's leader Yevgeny Prigozhin in Moscow, members of Wagner will continue to operate in Mali and Central African Republic (CAR).

The country's head of diplomacy while giving this assurance on Monday, added that the organization's mutiny against Russian military on Saturday in Russia, will not affect relations between Moscow and its allies.

Wagner members are working in Mali and the Central African Republic "as instructors. This work will of course continue", said Lavrov in an interview.

Lavrov said that Europe and France "having abandoned the CAR and Mali", these countries had turned to Russia and Wagner to provide military instructors and "ensure the security of their leaders".

The West and its allies have alleged that Wagner is an instrument of Russian influence, designed to advance Moscow's interests and compete with those of the Europeans.

The armed group is also accused of committing atrocities wherever it is deployed, and of extorting natural resources, an allegation Russia has repeatedly denied.

Lavrov says Prigozhin's rebellion and his men deployed in Ukraine would change nothing in Russia's relations with its allies.

"There have been many calls (from foreign partners) to President (Vladimir) Putin to express words of support," he said.

"With partners and friends, no. As for other (countries), frankly, I don't care. Relations with the collective West are destroyed, so one episode more or less...", the diplomat felt.

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Liberia

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EAST AFRICA

Uganda

Official Website of the International Criminal Court ICC Public Documents - Situation in Uganda

At least 37 killed in attack on school in Uganda, officials say (The Washington Post) By Kelsey Ables, Victoria Bisset, and Aaron Gregg
June 17, 2023

Suspected militants killed at least 37 people and abducted six others in an attack on a school in western Uganda, authorities said Saturday.

The raid in Mpondwe, near the border with the Democratic Republic of Congo, took place late Friday, according to Defense Ministry spokesman Felix Kulayigye, who said five rebels set fire to the school's campus and looted its food stocks.

When military forces arrived on the scene at Lhubiriha Secondary School, "the school was found burning with dead bodies of students lying in the compound," Kulayigye, a brigadier general, said in a statement.

The local mayor, Selevest Mapoze, gave an even more grim account to the Associated Press, saying 41 people, including 38 students, had been killed. Some of the victims suffered fatal burns in a dormitory that the attackers set on fire, Mapoze said, and others were shot or hacked to death with machetes.

According to Kulayigye, the suspected attackers were rebels from the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), an extremist group that has ties to the Islamic State and operates in Uganda and across the border in Congo. He said Ugandan forces were "pursuing the enemy to rescue those abducted and destroy" the group.

The U.S. mission in Uganda said Saturday that it was "deeply saddened to learn of the heinous attack" and offered condolences to the victims' families. In a statement, the United Nations Children's Fund condemned the violence it said took place on "the same day gazetted to commemorate the Day of the African Child."

On Twitter, Bobi Wine, a rapper-turned-opposition leader, said he hopes "investigations can begin in earnest so that the perpetrators of this crime face justice."

The attackers spent two nights in the area in western Uganda before the assault, Maj. Gen. Dick Olum, commander of the Ugandan forces operating in Congo, told local residents at the site, the Daily Monitor newspaper reported.

After the raid, the rebels forced the abducted students to help them carry the looted food toward Congo's Virunga National Park, according to Kulayigye. Law enforcement joined the military "in hot pursuit" as the rebels fled in the direction of the park, police said.

The attack was the latest atrocity blamed on rebel groups operating out of Congo's eastern region, with violence sometimes spilling over the border with Uganda.

The Kivu Security Tracker, a conflict-mapping project run by New York University and Human Rights Watch, recorded 3,850 individuals killed in 730 attacks attributed to the ADF in Congo's eastern region since 2017. In March, the ADF killed at least 36 people in a raid on a village in Congo's North Kivu province, the AP reported.

On Monday, 114 asylum seekers — 70 of whom were children — crossed the border from Congo to Uganda, fleeing what Uganda's Red Cross Society said were suspected ADF attacks in Congo's Kasindi, about six miles from Mpondwe. They later returned home after Congolese forces assured them it was safe to do so.

It was unclear Saturday why the school was targeted, but Olum told reporters that the ADF could be lashing out under pressure. After a spate of suicide bombings in 2021, Uganda's military launched joint air and artillery strikes against ADF camps in Congo, in cooperation with Congolese forces. That mission, dubbed Operation Shujaa, was extended last year.

"They are under huge pressure, and so this is what they have to do: show the world that they are still there, and show the world that they can still do havoc, which they did," Olum said Saturday.

The attackers used tactics employed by the ADF in previous campaigns, he said.

"What happens is every time we put the ADF under a huge pressure ... they try to pull us back to our area, to see if they can divide and divert our forces," Olum said. "They come in very small numbers — five, ten — and do such mayhem; kill, maim, rob. And in so doing, they think they'll divert us."

The ADF, which was founded by Ugandan exiles in Congo in 1995 with the aim of toppling Uganda's government, has a history of attacks throughout the region, including at least one targeting an educational institution. In 1998, the group raided a college in western Uganda, killing 80 students and abducting 100 others, according to the Daily Monitor.

Since then, the United States, United Nations and Ugandan and Congolese governments have all accused the group of waging violent attacks, including against civilians, military forces and U.N. peacekeepers inside Congo.

The group established ties with the Islamic State group in 2018, according to the U.S. State Department, which designated the ADF as a foreign terrorist organization in 2021 and has offered a reward of up to \$5 million for information on its leader, Seka Musa Baluku.

In 2020, U.N. investigators said that the widespread and systematic nature of the ADF's attacks against civilian populations may amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity.

But even as Ugandan and Congolese forces have stepped up their anti-ADF campaign, the group appears to have "expanded its areas of operations, capacity, and lethality since 2021," according to a 2022 report from the Congressional Research Service.

Uganda arrests 20 'collaborators' over horrific school massacre (France 24) June 19, 2023

"Twenty arrests have been made of suspected collaborators, suspected ADF collaborators," police spokesman Fred Enanga told a press conference, referring to the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) based in the DRC.

He said in a separate statement that those arrested included the head teacher and the director of the Lhubiriha Secondary School in Mpondwe, western Uganda, that came under attack late on Friday.

Enanga said the death toll was now 42, including 37 students. The oldest among the victims so far identified was a 95-year-old woman and the youngest a 12-year-old girl.

Another six people were injured and remain in hospital, he said, while adding that there were conflicting reports on the number abducted by the assailants, ranging between five and seven.

"An attack on innocent children is barbaric, is inhumane and of course constitutes crimes against humanity," Enanga said.

The youngsters were hacked with machetes, shot and burned to death in their dormitories in horrific killings that have drawn global condemnation.

"As a country, we continue to stand by each other in the fight against terrorism. No matter how heinous the attack or how brutal or inhumane the methods used, the ADF will not be able to succeed in demolishing the solidarity of Ugandans in the fight against terrorism and extremism," Enanga added.

Grief-stricken Ugandans were on Monday burying more victims, while other families were still desperately hunting for news of their loved ones or facing an agonising wait for DNA tests on some of the students who were burnt beyond recognition.

The authorities have said 15 people from the community, including five girls, were still missing.

Joseph Masika, a guardian of one of the missing students, recounted heart-wrenching visits to mortuaries and hospitals.

"We are not sure our children are among those abducted or burnt beyond recognition. We are distressed, maybe the government will give us an answer soon and we are praying," the 48-year-old businessman told AFP.

"It's a painful situation no parent would want to go through, but we are keeping hope that they are alive wherever they are."

'Cowardly, terrorist action' Ugandan authorities are pursuing the assailants who fled back towards the porous DRC border

with their abductees.

"Their action -- the desperate, cowardly, terrorist action -- will not save them," President Yoweri Museveni said Sunday in his first statement on the attack, vowing to hunt the militants "into extinction."

Joe Walusimbi, the Resident District Commissioner of Kesese, the area where the school was located, said most of the identified victims were buried on Sunday but that there were more funerals on Monday.

"We are almost complete with the burial of the dead already identified and waiting for the DNA tests of those students who were burnt beyond recognition," he told AFP.

It was the deadliest attack in Uganda since twin bombings in Kampala in 2010 killed 76 people in a strike claimed by the Somalia-based Al-Shabaab group.

The ADF, an armed group historically linked to predominantly Muslim Ugandan rebels opposed to Museveni, has been blamed for thousands of civilian deaths in the DRC since the 1990s.

The IS describes the ADF as its regional affiliate, the Islamic State Central Africa Province (ISCAP). In March 2021, the United States placed the ADF on its list of "terrorist groups" affiliated with IS.

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Kenya

Official Website of the International Criminal Court ICC Public Documents - Situation in the Republic of Kenya

Ruto dismisses claims of Kenya harboring RSF's Hemedti (The Star) By Sharon Mwendu
June 24, 2023

President William Ruto has dismissed the allegations that the Rapid Support Forces leader Gen Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, also known as Hemedti, is in Kenya.

He was reacting to Sudan's rejection of his appointment as the head of a quartet to facilitate peace under the regional bloc, Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD).

"The main accusation against Kenya is that we have Hemedti in one of our hospitals in Nairobi which is not true. It is a whole false narrative," he said.

Ruto spoke on Friday during an interview with France 24 on the sidelines of the Summit for a New Global Financing Pact.

Sudan's Army General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan opposed Ruto's chairmanship, stating that Kenya is not neutral and continues to harbor leaders of the RSF rebels.

Kenya was elected as Chair of the IGAD quartet to resolve issues in Sudan on June 12, 2023, in Djibouti; other countries in the quartet include Sudan, South Sudan, and Ethiopia.

Sudan also rejected the IGAD mediation schedule, which would have seen Ruto arrange for a face-to-face meeting, for the first time, between the two warring generals.

During Friday's interview, Ruto said the war in Sudan was unacceptable, adding there were already signs of genocide.

"In fact, there are already signs and vestiges of genocide. What is going on in Sudan is unacceptable, military power is being used by both sides to destroy the country and to kill civilians. The war is senseless, the war is not legitimate in any way," he said.

The President affirmed that IGAD was committed to dealing with the ongoing conflict.

This will include plans to get engage with the military, bring civilians on board for the talks.

Ruto revealed that he had earlier on held meeting with Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed and President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi of Egypt on the same.

"Our interest is to stop the war, stabilise Sudan and make sure that we deal with the humanitarian crisis that is currently ongoing," he said.

Kenya to investigate alleged UK army crimes: report (Mehr News Agency) June 26, 2023

Kenyan authorities have launched an investigation into the operations of the British Army Training Unit Kenya (BATUK), which has a long-standing negative reputation in the East African country

The move by the National Assembly Defense, Intelligence and Foreign Relations Committee follows complaints by residents, including over the murder of a woman, Agnes Wanjiru, in Nanyuki in 2012, and a fire that razed the Lolldaiga Hills Ranch in 2021, both of which have been blamed on British soldiers.

Anthony Theuri Wambui, deputy speaker of the Laikipia County Assembly, told RT that he supports the government's decision.

"When Agnes Wanjiru was killed by the British army, even after the media visited this area and the case was filed, family members are still seeking justice," he said.

Wanjiru, 21, was fatally stabbed and dumped in a septic tank at a hotel in Nanyuki in March 2012, allegedly by UK forces, after she had spent a night partying with soldiers. Her mutilated body was found nearly three months later.

Kairu Kamunge, spokesperson for Wanjiru's family, insisted that justice has still not been served, adding that "if it was a British person who got killed, a lot more would have been done."

"The UK government does not treat Kenyans as equals in any way. Actually, it has been mistreating us," he argued.

Kamunge further alleged that the British military continues to use dangerous chemicals during training exercises.

According to local media, Kenyan environmentalists and pastoralist communities have claimed that white phosphorus has been used during military drills, posing a danger to humans, livestock, and wildlife. BATUK has denied the allegations, claiming that the chemical is only used in controlled environments during training.

Local residents told RT that the British army "only brought challenges" to Kenyans. "We know exactly how harmful the chemicals they have been using are. It has affected our children and livestock too. This is not fair at all," one resident said, according to RT report.

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Rwanda (International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda)

Official Website of the ICTR

ICC To Probe New DR Congo War Crimes Allegations (Barron's) June 15, 2023

The International Criminal Court said Thursday it will examine allegations of war crimes by armed groups in the Democratic Republic of Congo's volatile east ,after Kinshasa made a new formal referral to the tribunal.

Kinshasa has accused the M23 rebel group of attacks in the DRC's mineral-rich North Kivu province, and says Rwanda is backing the Tutsi-led militia. Kigali denies any involvement in the violence.

The DRC referred the situation to the Hague-based ICC in 2004, but has now made a second referral asking that it launch an investigation into the latest alleged crimes, ICC prosecutor Karim Khan said.

"I intend to conduct a preliminary examination promptly," Khan said in a statement.

The British prosecutor added that this would initially assess "whether the scope of the two situations referred by the DRC Government are sufficiently linked to constitute a single situation".

The ICC, founded in 2002 to prosecute war crimes suspects, carries out preliminary examinations into alleged atrocities before deciding whether or not to proceed to a full investigation.

It has already convicted three former militia leaders over conflicts in the DRC including rebel leader Bosco "Terminator" Ntaganda, jailed for 30 years for mass murder, rape and abduction.

The Tutsi-led M23 has captured swathes of territory in North Kivu province since taking up arms in late 2021 after years of dormancy, with over one million people displaced by the fighting.

The DRC accuses Rwanda of backing the M23. Despite denials from Kigali, independent United Nations experts and several western nations, including the United States, agree with Kinshasa.

Armed groups have plagued much of eastern Congo for three decades, a legacy of regional wars that flared in the 1990s and 2000s.

Rwanda: Genocide - Paris Court Okays Inquiry Into French Troops' Complicity in Bisesero Massacres (All Africa) By Michel Nkurunziza

June 21, 2023

The Paris Court of Appeal has recommended that an investigation be conducted into the inaction of the French army over its alleged complicity in the Bisesero massacres during the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi, AFP reported on Wednesday, June 21.

An estimated 50,000 people were killed in the Bisesero area of Western province, a region that was then deemed a haven of Tutsi resistance.

Genocide survivors in the hills of Bisesero earlier accused French troops of deliberately abandoning them to the Interahamwe militia who murdered hundreds of people in the area within days. French prosecutors opened a criminal investigation into possible complicity in crimes against humanity in December 2005 after complaints filed by survivors and human rights groups.

In September 2022, French judges dropped a case against French troops that were accused of being complicit in massacres when they were deployed to the region during 1994 genocide.

Now, however, the investigating chamber of the Paris Court of Appeal overturned the judge's ruling for a procedural reason and sent the Bisesero case back to the investigating judges of the crimes against humanity division of the Paris court.

Bisesero is part of the south-western part of Rwanda most Tutsi families were completely wiped out during the 1994 Genocide. A French military operation dubbed Operation Turquoise was deployed there during the massacres. An estimated 50,000 people were killed in the Bisesero area.

Bisesero Genocide Memorial in Karongi District is among four memorials which the government of Rwanda has proposed to be included on UNESCO's World Heritage Sites.

In January 2023, Rwanda engaged the Mémorial de la Shoah - an Israeli foundation based in France - to help preserve the memorials of the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi including that of Bisesero.

Rwandan genocide suspect drops bail quest, now seeking political asylum in South Africa (IOL)

By Mwangi Githahu

June 22, 2023

The Rwandan genocide suspect accused of ordering the brutal deaths of 2000 people during the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, has abandoned his bail application and is banking on being granted political asylum in South Africa.

Kayishema's lawyer, Juan Smuts, told the Cape Town Magistrate's Court his client had instructed him to suspend the bail application, which the State was set to oppose and to change tack.

Smuts said Kayishema fled Rwanda in 1994 out of fear for his life and before he arrived in South Africa in 2001 “or thereabouts”, he had attempted, and failed, to secure refuge in a number of other African countries.

Smuts did not indicate whether his client intended to bring a bail application at a later stage.

However, National Prosecuting Authority advocate Nathan Adriaanse said whatever the case, the State would oppose any bail application, and the asylum application had no bearing on the court case.

He also said the State had come across new evidence, which would lead to new charges being added to the 54 Kayishema already faced.

Adriaanse said the State would apply for a centralisation certificate, as some of the offences that had emerged were committed outside the Western Cape. The certificate would allow for all the cases preferred against Kayishema to be prosecuted in the Western Cape.

Of the 54 charges against Kayishema, 35 were contraventions of the Immigration Act, 10 charges are to do with infringements of the Refugee Act, and nine were related to fraud.

The magistrate postponed the matter to August 18 for further investigation. Kayishema is to remain in custody.

UN again accuses Rwanda of backing M23 as Kigali protests DRC's FDLR support (The East African) By Jonathan Kamoga

June 24, 2023

The United Nations has again accused Rwanda of offering support to the M23 rebel group that is fighting the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) government.

A new UN Group of Experts report on the DRC, claims that Rwanda is supporting the M23 through troop reinforcement, equipment and command, and names at least five active top commanders of the Rwanda Defence Forces as coordinators.

The June 13, 2023 report to the president of the UN Security Council warns that the deteriorating relations between Kinshasa and Kigali pose a security threat in the region.

In March this year, DRC claimed that Rwanda had sent reinforcements in the form of troops and equipment to the M23 in DRC.

While Kigali denies this, including in response to information requests from the UN experts who authored this report, both the European Union and the US have called on Rwanda to stop aiding the UN-sanctioned rebel group.

According to the report, episodes of intense violence have affected the three provinces of the eastern DRC — South Kivu, North Kivu and Ituri — brought about by clashes between M23 and the Congolese Army (FARDC), with both sides accusing each other of violating successive ceasefire agreements.

“Despite bilateral, regional, and international efforts to de-escalate the crisis related to the 'Mouvement du 23 mars' (M23), the sanctioned armed group continued to significantly expand its territory and increase attacks,” the report says.

Kigali, while dismissing the UN report as based on “questionable evidence and unreliable sources” was quick to acknowledge a part of it that “confirms the serious threat represented by the Kinshasa-backed genocidal militia FLDR, and their newly increased capacity to threaten Rwanda’s security.”

The Government Communications Office noted how the details the financial support, weapons and political cover provided to the FDLR by the Government of the DR Congo and confirms that, “along with other illegal armed forces, the FDLR is fighting alongside the Congolese armed forces (FARDC), which has on multiple occasions in the past year violated Rwandan territory.”

Rwanda’s responses to accusations against the Rwanda Defence Force do not appear in the report. The sources used by the UNGoE include the DRC Government, former combatants, anti-Rwanda Congolese civil society campaigners, and current members of illegal armed groups including elements of the so-called “Wazalendo”, a coalition of illegal armed groups allied to FARDC.

In addition, the UNGoE report ignores ongoing regional peace efforts, in which the United Nations is playing a supporting role and fails to mention the well-documented efforts by the DRC to frustrate the Nairobi and Luanda processes, including the work of the EAC Regional Force deployed in Eastern DRC.

Also ignored are the multiple violations against Rwanda's territorial integrity, and the DRC's pursuit of the path of an all-out war.

"The report deliberately minimises the threat of ethnic cleansing of Congolese Tutsi communities, and shockingly blames the targeted communities for causing their own suffering."

"This contradicts reports by the UN and other organizations and mirrors the rhetoric of genocide deniers and ideologues. It also contradicts the testimonies of thousands of Congolese refugees who over the last two decades have been forced to flee to countries in the region, including Rwanda," the Spokesperson said.

Rwanda also accuses DRC of hiring mercenaries. President Paul Kagame early this year said Congo's situation was getting worse after the recruitment of mercenaries in preparation for war, although President Tshisekedi dismissed the allegations as baseless.

Instead, the government said they have experts. "If we get Sukhoi aircraft (Russian fighter planes), we need the technical personnel to maintain them. If we do not have that manpower, what do we do?" said DR Congo Government Spokesman Patrick Muyaya.

But the UN report cited the presence of Romanians, Bulgarians, Georgians, and Belorussians.

The presence of Caucasian, armed men in Goma, a few kilometres from the frontline, sparked rumours that Russian mercenaries were already in town.

Private military forces "The period under review was characterised by the militarisation of Goma town and the Sake area, as well as by the presence of multiple uniformed actors – FARDC supported by armed groups, Monusco peacekeepers, the EAC Regional Force and private military companies deployed to, among other aims, stop the territorial conquest by M23 and ease the military pressure on Goma town."

"... The planning and support of private military companies to those FARDC operations, including from companies Agemira RDC and Congo Protection, has regularly been denounced by M23, which has claimed that the Government of the DR Congo worked with mercenaries," says the UN report.

After several attempts for talks and a ceasefire, the late last year M23 agreed to withdraw from areas it was occupying to facilitate the talks.

The UN also accuses the M23 of attempts to win allies in South Kivu, in particular the armed group Twirwaneho, to open a front in South Kivu.

The variety of M23 military equipment, some produced recently, provided insight into the significant firepower of the armed group which attested to violations of the arms embargo in DRC.

"The Group of Experts obtained further evidence of direct interventions by the Rwanda Defence Force (RDF) on DRC territory, either to reinforce M23 combatants or to conduct military operations against the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda (FDLR) and local armed groups. The Group identified several RDF commanders and officials coordinating RDF operations in the DR Congo," the UN said.

The UN also alleges that M23, who have recently acquired new uniforms and advanced weaponry, could have received them from the RDF.

These include various types of assault rifles, heavy and light machine guns, various types of rocket-propelled grenade launchers, rockets, grenade launchers and grenades, recoilless guns, mortar shells, and boxes of ammunition, all either recovered or documented in areas that both the RDF and M23 operate.

Some of this military equipment, the report says, was produced recently and thus could not belong to the older M23 stockpiles. The experts said they obtained further evidence – including documentary and photographic evidence and aerial footage – of military operations by soldiers in RDF uniform in Rutshuru, Masisi, and Nyiragongo territories between November 2022 and March 2023.

Deployed RDF troops, the UN says, included members of the 201st and 301st brigades, 59 as well as members of the RDF Special Forces, commanded by a captain, who were deployed for specific operations from May 2022 onward.

On the ground, operations by RDF, including those by RDF special and reserve forces, were coordinated by a brigadier-general.

A major-general who commanded several RDF operations in the Democratic Republic of the Congo territory in 2022, was recalled to Kigali and replaced.

The North Kivu operations were designed and coordinated by a general who is a presidential defence and security adviser.

Quoting sources, including two RDF intelligence personnel, the UN said that the objective of the RDF military actions on DRC territory, labelled “North Kivu operations” was to reinforce M23 by providing troops and material and to use them to secure control over mine sites, gain political influence in the DRC and decimate the FDLR.

Over time, Rwanda has blamed DRC for siding with FDLR to exterminate Congolese Tutsi and threatening Kigali’s territorial integrity.

Local armed groups and FDLR created the “Congolese Patriotic Resistants” network, which fought M23 alongside FARDC coordinated by senior FARDC officers, who supported the armed groups with logistics, military equipment, and financing.

The hostilities triggered by the territorial expansion of M23 continued, stoking xenophobia and hate speech and accentuating ethnic rifts between the warring sides.

Hateful and belligerent rhetoric, intended to vilify Rwandophone populations perceived to support M23, continued to be propagated by political figures, civil society actors, local populists, activists, and members of the Congolese diaspora and was widely amplified on social media.

Ex-Rwandan military policeman found guilty of genocide by Paris court (The Guardian) June 28, 2023

A Paris court has found a former Rwandan military policeman guilty of genocide and crimes against humanity during the 1994 slaughter in his home country and sentenced him to life in prison.

The court found Philippe Hategemimana, 66, guilty of nearly all the charges against him.

He fled to France after the genocide, obtaining refugee status and then French nationality under the name Philippe Manier.

The trial of Hategemimana, which began last month, was the fifth such trial in France of an alleged participant in the massacres.

More than 800,000 people were killed between April and July 1994, according to UN figures, most of them from the Tutsi minority.

Hategemimana was charged with involvement in the murder of dozens of Tutsis and also setting up roadblocks to stop Tutsis who would then be killed in and around the southern provincial capital of Nyanza, where he worked as a senior police official.

Plaintiffs accused Hategemimana of “using the powers and military force conferred to him through his rank in order to ... take part in the genocide”.

He was also accused of being involved in the murders of a nun and the mayor of the town of Ntyazo, who opposed the killings; of having a role in the killing of 300 Tutsi refugees on a hill called Nyamugari: and in an attack in which about 1,000 civilians died.

He fled France for Cameroon in late 2017 after the press reported that the Collective of Civil Parties for Rwanda, one of the plaintiffs in this week’s trial, had filed a complaint against him. He was arrested in the capital, Yaoundé, in 2018 and extradited to France. He denied the charges.

France, one of the top destinations for fugitives from the massacres, has tried and convicted a former spy chief, two ex-mayors, a former hotel chauffeur and an ex-top official in similar trials since 2014. But it has generally refused requests to extradite suspects to Rwanda, prompting the president, Paul Kagame, to accuse Paris of denying Rwanda jurisdiction.

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Turkey

Russia, Turkey agree on Putin visit to Turkey 'soon,' Interfax reports (Reuters) June 16, 2023

President Vladimir Putin and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan have agreed that the Russian leader will visit Turkey "soon", Interfax cited a Kremlin aide as saying on Friday.

The visit would be Putin's first to a NATO country since he ordered tens of thousands of troops into Ukraine on Feb. 24, 2022. Putin has only rarely travelled outside Russia since the beginning of full-scale hostilities.

"There is an invitation from the president of Turkey. Putin and Erdogan agreed that the visit will be in the near future, but we have not yet talked about a specific day, specific dates," Interfax cited Kremlin foreign policy adviser Yury Ushakov as saying.

Erdogan, re-elected last month for another five-year term, has sought to maintain strong ties with both Moscow and Kyiv since the start of the conflict in Ukraine.

Turkey has refused to join its Western allies in imposing economic sanctions on Russia, but has also supplied arms to Ukraine and called for its sovereignty to be respected.

Ankara has also helped to broker prisoner exchanges and, along with the United Nations, negotiated a deal in July 2022 to allow for the safe export of grain from Ukrainian ports via the Black Sea.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov later hailed what he called the "unprecedented cooperation" between Moscow and Ankara, praising Erdogan's "balanced position" on the Ukraine conflict.

"And so we must do everything to ensure that Turkey is a good neighbour for us," he added, in comments reported by the TASS news agency.

The International Criminal Court (ICC) issued an arrest warrant for Putin in March over alleged war crimes in Ukraine, meaning he may run the risk of being arrested if he travels abroad. However, Ankara is not a party to the Rome Statute, which created the ICC, and so Putin would run no such risk by visiting Turkey.

Syrian Kurdish leader says Turkey does not want transparent trials of ISIS members (Medya News) June 17, 2023

Turkey does not want the transparent trial of Islamic State (ISIS) members by the Kurdish-led Autonomous Administration in North and East Syria (AANES) in the eyes of the world, Salih Muslim, the leader of the main party in the autonomous region, told ANF on Saturday.

Muslim emphasised that the ongoing intensified attacks by Turkey against Kurdish forces in North and East Syria after the elections were part of a long-standing plan to crack down on the Kurds dating back to 2014.

Highlighting the significance of the autonomous administration's pursuit of justice against ISIS members, the Democratic Union Party (PYD) leader argued that such trials would expose Turkey's collaboration with the fundamentalist group and its crimes during the Syrian civil war. This, in turn, has led Turkey to intensify its attacks in a show of aggression.

Muslim also attributed the escalation of Turkish assaults to the recent declaration by the AANES, which outlined steps toward a resolution in Syria. However, Muslim asserted that Turkey neither seeks a solution for Syria nor wants the involvement of the Kurds in any such process.

Reflecting on their pre-election predictions, Muslim noted, "The fair removal of a dictator or despot through legitimate means has never been achieved in history." He further stated their anticipation of intensified attacks following the elections. Muslim underlined their determination to resist alongside the people, relying on their strength and organisation. "We will resist; we have no other choice," he affirmed.

Muslim stressed that Turkey deliberately chose the timing of its actions, considering the upcoming quadrilateral summit between Iran, Russia, Syria, and Turkey scheduled for 21 June in Astana. He argued that the intensified airstrikes serve as a demonstration of power before the summit. Despite the loss of a Russian soldier and several Syrian troops in the recent Turkish airstrikes, Muslim highlighted Russia, Iran and Syria for maintaining their silence. He explained that Russia is currently dependent on Turkey due to Western embargoes resulting from the conflict in Ukraine. Muslim expressed doubt that Russia would take any action against Turkey, as there are numerous agreements between the two countries.

Regarding the Syrian government, he stated, "It will not act against the will of Russia and Iran."

When asked about the possibility of a ground operation in the region, Muslim stated that anything could be expected from the Turkish government. However, he added, "Considering that we are prepared, a ground operation seems challenging for them." Muslim highlighted that the decision on whether a potential ground operation would be permitted would be determined at the Astana summit, but he emphasised that they do not rely on such possibilities. He stated firmly, "A possible ground operation would lead to Turkey's downfall. Our forces are also prepared." Muslim stressed that all despotic and dictatorial regimes in the region are working against the AANES. He urged international democratic forces to support them if they desire the expansion of democracy in the Middle East. "Because that is the only hope," he concluded.

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Russia

Russian investigator says over 30 Ukrainian 'nationalists' jailed for war crimes (Reuters) June 21, 2023

By Lidia Kelly and Andrew Osborn

Russia's top investigator said on Wednesday that more than 30 Ukrainians had been given long jail terms in Russian-held Ukraine for committing what he described as serious crimes such as killing civilians.

Alexander Bastrykin, head of the Investigative Committee, Russia's equivalent of the U.S. FBI, said courts operating on territory in parts of the Luhansk and Donetsk regions controlled by Russian forces had been working hard to jail people who had fought on the Ukrainian side against Russian forces.

"After the liberation of Mariupol and other settlements, many Ukrainian nationalists surrendered. In the course of further work, we began to establish their involvement in crimes against peace and human security, including the killing of civilians," Bastrykin told Russia's TASS news agency.

He said 90 criminal cases had been sent to courts.

"Based on the evidence gathered, courts have already convicted more than 30 defendants, sentencing them to long terms of imprisonment and some to life imprisonment," he said.

President Vladimir Putin said in April last year that Russia had taken control of Mariupol as part of what he calls its special military operation after a siege that Ukraine said had killed tens of thousands of civilians and left the port city a wasteland.

Reuters could not independently verify the alleged war crimes referred to by Bastrykin. Ukrainian state prosecutors, who accuse Russian forces of committing numerous crimes in what they and the West call a brutal war of conquest, did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Ukraine's parliamentary commissioner for human rights did not immediately reply either.

Bastrykin said in July last year that Moscow had charged 92 members of Ukraine's armed forces with crimes against humanity and proposed an international tribunal backed by countries including Bolivia, Iran and Syria.

Russian media on Tuesday reported that a former deputy commander of a Ukrainian militia unit had been sentenced by a

Russian court to 16 years in a penal colony for taking part in what Moscow considered an illegal armed group and for receiving terrorist training.

Russia is itself under pressure for alleged war crimes. The International Criminal Court (ICC) issued an arrest warrant in March against Putin, accusing him of the war crime of illegally deporting hundreds of children from Ukraine. The Kremlin has rejected the allegation as false.

UN says Russian forces have tortured and executed civilians in Ukraine (The Guardian) By Patrick Wintour
June 27, 2023

Russian forces have carried out widespread and systematic torture of civilians detained in connection with their attack on Ukraine, summarily executing more than 70 of them, the UN human rights office said on Tuesday.

It interviewed hundreds of victims and witnesses for a report detailing more than 900 cases of civilians, including children and elderly people, being arbitrarily detained in the conflict, most of them by Russia. The vast majority of those interviewed said they were tortured and in some cases subjected to sexual violence during detention by Russian forces, the head of the UN human rights office in Ukraine said.

The 36-page report came as Beth Van Schaack, the US ambassador-at-large for Global Criminal Justice, said Yevgeny Prigozhin, the leader of the Wagner mercenary group, had implicated Vladimir Putin in war crimes by admitting the original invasion had not been justified by any provocative actions by Ukraine.

She added she did not think Putin would dare travel to South Africa for the Brics summit in August if he feared there was a 10% chance that an independent-minded South African judge ordered his arrest. "He is reckless with the Russian state's resources, but not with his own skin," she said. The international criminal court (ICC) has issued a warrant for Putin's arrest over his role in the deportation of Ukrainian children to Russia. South Africa was obliged to enforce the warrant, she said.

The UN report will be handed to the Ukrainian prosecutor general and to the ICC as it assembles evidence against individual Russians accused of war crimes during the invasion of Ukraine.

The report covers a 15-month period from the start of the Russian invasion to May 2023. It also documents 75 cases of arbitrary detention by Ukrainian security forces, saying a significant proportion of these also amounted to enforced disappearances. It documented 864 individual cases of arbitrary detention by Russia – 763 men, 94 women and seven boys – many of which also amounted to enforced disappearances.

The head of the UN human rights office in Ukraine, Matilda Bogner, said: "Torture was used to force victims to confess to helping Ukrainian armed forces, compel them to cooperate with the occupying authorities or intimidate those with pro-Ukrainian views." More than half of those detained by Ukrainian forces also reported being tortured or mistreated, usually while being interrogated or immediately after arrest, said Bogner.

Ukraine gave UN investigators "unimpeded confidential access" to detainees at official detention centres, with the exception of a group of 87 Russian sailors, she said.

"The Russian Federation did not grant us such access, despite our requests," Bogner said. The UN has previously found that Russia summarily executed Ukrainian prisoners, but this is the first time it has said civilians were also executed. It documents 77 cases of civilians being executed, and the report finds others have been kept in deplorable conditions.

While Ukraine has launched criminal investigations against Russian forces over the detention of civilians, resulting in 23 convictions, the UN rights office said it was not aware of any investigations against Ukraine's own forces for such violations.

Bogner said Ukrainian laws on detention for national security reasons "appear to go beyond what is permissible under international law, even during a public emergency, and have facilitated arbitrary detention". She said the office had documented 75 cases of arbitrary detention by Ukrainian security forces, "mostly of people suspected of conflict-related offences".

Van Schaack in a briefing said tens of thousands of individual allegations of war crimes were being examined by trained investigators inside and outside Ukraine.

She said Prigozhin's remarks challenging the basis of the war last week contradicted the official Russian justification for

the war. She said his remarks were likely to be taken into consideration and would probably be quite impactful in any prosecution of Putin over the crime of aggression.

"It is notable he said quite openly that this war is based on false pretences and that Ukraine and Nato had no intention of attacking Russia and this is very much a war of Russia's own making," Van Schaack said.

In May the US finally came out in support of a special tribunal to try the crime of aggression, but said it should be a Ukrainian-based court with international support. Ukraine had argued for an international court established by the UN general assembly, something the US opposes on legal and political grounds.

Van Schaack said Putin would be hard to prosecute so long as he remained head of state and within Russia. But "his world is shrinking fast" and many other world leaders who did not think they would appear in court eventually did, she added.

Russia-Ukraine war latest: Pizza restaurant death toll rises; Putin was stopped from 'wiping out' Wagner boss (SkyNews) June 28, 2023

At least nine people have been killed and many injured after a pizza restaurant was hit by Russian missiles in Kramatorsk, eastern Ukraine. Meanwhile, Vladimir Putin had to be talked out of "wiping out" Wagner boss Yevgeny Prigozhin during Saturday's rebellion, Belarus's president says.

Two sisters, both 14, among dead after pizza restaurant missile attack

Two sisters, both aged 14, were killed in a Russian missile strike on a pizza restaurant in the eastern city of Kramatorsk yesterday, the city's department of education has said.

Yuliya and Anna Aksenchenko were among nine people who died in the attack, which also left at least 60 people injured.

"It is with sadness and unbearable pain that we report the death of two Aksenchenko sisters, Yuliya and Anna, students of Kramatorsk Primary School No. 24," it said in a statement.

"This year they graduated from the eighth grade, and on September 4 they should have celebrated their 15th anniversary, a Russian rocket stopped the beating of the hearts of two angels."

The city's mayor earlier confirmed the body of a boy had also been recovered from the rubble this morning.

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Iraq

Grotian Moment: The International War Crimes Trial Blog

Belgium, Netherlands join investigation on crimes against Yazidis in Syria, Iraq (MEDYA News) June 28, 2023

Belgium and the Netherlands have signed on to an EU-based joint investigation team (JIT) that focuses on crimes committed against the Yazidi community in Iraq and Syria.

The JIT, backed by the EU's judicial coordination body Eurojust, was initially formed between Sweden and France in 2021 to investigate actions by foreign terrorist fighters in the region, most of them under the Islamic State (ISIS). It aims to identify and prosecute the perpetrators of crimes against humanity and war crimes.

The team helped identify a Swedish citizen with a European arrest warrant against him for crimes against humanity in Syria, and the identification of a Yazidi victim led to charges of genocide being added to an ongoing case against a jihadist couple who hold French citizenship.

Further cooperation led to Belgian authorities aiding cases in France by providing witness and victim testimony.

In the Netherlands, a Dutch citizen was identified as having been involved in various crimes following an investigation by the team. The woman will face charges of terrorism and slavery.

The Eurojust aims to streamline the procedures and resolve conflicts of jurisdiction, as well as facilitate the sharing of experience and know-how in the prosecution of international crimes.

Yazidis faced extensive attacks by ISIS that have been recognised as genocide in several countries, during the jihadist group's occupation of various parts of Syria and Iraq until their defeat by Kurdish-led forces in 2019. Notably, the August 2014 attack on their ancestral lands Sinjar in Iraq led to the death of thousands of Yazidi men and the enslavement of Yazidi women within days.

Nadia Murad, a survivor of enslavement that followed the 2014 ISIS attacks in Kocho, Iraq, was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2018 based on her work to raise awareness for the plight of Yazidi women and children.

Currently, there are some 13,000 ISIS members, who are neither Iraqi nor Syrian nationals, held in northeast Syrian prison camps under the control of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF).

Both military and civilian authorities in the region have been calling on western countries to repatriate their citizens and put them on trial, however, the few cases that have started years after the territorial defeat of the jihadist group have been on former fighters who had already returned to their country of citizenship.

Out of the thousands of ISIS members and their families, 17 women and children were repatriated to Australia last year, according to an Al Jazeera report. Eight others had been repatriated in 2019.

The Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES) recently announced a decision to put the foreign ISIS fighters under its supervision on trial in the local People's Courts, which had previously only prosecuted local citizens.

Last year, a US delegation visited the area to discuss options, and US Central Command General Michael Kurilla said the camps represented "a real threat to the region" as ISIS considered them grounds for recruitment.

"There is no military solution to the threat posed by the al-Hol camp. I am certain of that. The most durable solution is for countries of origin to repatriate, rehabilitate, and reintegrate their citizens," Kurilla said.

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Syria

Russian airstrikes on Syria's Idlib could amount to war crimes: human rights monitor (The New Arab) June 26, 2023

Deadly Russian airstrikes that targeted civilian areas in northwest Syria over the weekend could amount to war crimes, the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor has said in a statement.

At least 13 people, including nine civilians, were killed in a series of Russian airstrikes in rebel-held Idlib province in northwestern Syria. It was one of the bloodiest days in the region in months and happened despite a ceasefire being in place.

Sources close to the Syrian regime said the airstrikes were in response to rebel drone strikes which targeted regime-held areas in recent days.

However, the Euro-Med monitor said that the Russian attack did not respect the principles of international humanitarian law, saying no military necessity can justify the heavy loss of civilian life, even if a military unit was the target of the airstrike.

It said the attack was disproportionate and did not distinguish between civilians and alleged militants.

Euro-Med added that the latest airstrikes were part of a major military escalation in the region which it has been monitoring for a week and has led to the deaths of several civilians, including women and children.

"The Russian and Syrian [regime] forces continue to target civilians without fear of accountability, because the international community has not shown a firm response to confront the horrific human rights violations throughout the 12 years of ongoing conflict in Syria," said Anas Jerjawi, the CEO of Euro-Med.

"The double standards in international reactions to the violations of Russian forces in Syria and their similar violations in Ukraine have shown that humanity can be fragmented for decision-makers in Western countries, and that political interests and national and ethnic backgrounds may govern reactions to human tragedies," he added, according to the statement.

Jerjawi said a flare up in fighting will exacerbate the humanitarian crisis in northwest Syria and add pressure on NGOs already suffering from severe funding shortages where around 1.8 million people are internally displaced.

Swathes of northwestern Syria, in particular the Idlib and Aleppo governorates, were heavily hit in the 6 February earthquake which struck southeastern Turkey, burying thousands under the rubble and destroying entire towns and villages.

The catastrophe added onto an already miserable situation in the region, where millions of people live in makeshift IDP camps and where infrastructure including hospitals and schools has deliberately been targeted in previous Russian and regime strikes.

Russia intervened in the Syrian conflict in 2015 to back the Assad regime and has since provided it with critical military, intelligence and financial support, enabling it to regain control of most of the country.

Netherlands and Belgium join international probe into crimes against Yazidis in Syria and Iraq (AP News) By Mike Corder

June 26, 2023

The Netherlands and Belgium have joined an international investigation into atrocities committed against the Yazidi minority in Syria and Iraq, the European Union's judicial cooperation agency said Monday.

The Joint Investigation Team was established by France and Sweden in October 2021 and supported by The Hague-based Eurojust to identify and prosecute foreign extremists who targeted Yazidis during the armed conflict in Syria and Iraq.

Eurojust said the teamwork already has borne fruit, including in France, where a Yazidi victim of a French jihadist couple was identified. That led to charges of genocide and crimes against humanity being added to an existing case.

The joint investigation team is part of a broader international effort to mete out justice for atrocities targeting Yazidis, a minority considered heretics by the Islamic State militant group.

A United Nations probe concluded in 2021 that crimes committed against Yazidis by Islamic State extremists amounted to genocide.

IS attacked the heartland of the Yazidi community at the foot of Sinjar Mountain in August 2014. During the weeklong assault, IS killed hundreds of Yazidis and abducted 6,417, more than half of them women and girls. Most of the captured adult men were likely eventually killed. Women and girls were considered commodities for rape and servitude.

Prosecutions of returning foreign militants for crimes against Yazidis already are underway in Europe.

A German woman was convicted last week of keeping a Yazidi woman as a slave during her time with the Islamic State group in Iraq and Syria, and sentenced to nine years and three months in prison.

The state court in the western city of Koblenz convicted the 37-year-old woman of crimes against humanity,

membership in a foreign terrorist organization and being an accessory to genocide, German news agency dpa reported. Authorities have identified her only as Nadine K. in line with German privacy rules.

In February, Dutch authorities announced that they were prosecuting a woman who traveled from the Netherlands to join IS on a charge of slavery as a crime against humanity. The woman allegedly used a Yazidi woman as a slave in Syria in 2015. The case marked the first Dutch trial of an alleged IS member for crimes against a Yazidi victim.

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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)

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Israel and Palestine

'Current Israeli government the worst ever for women': Women's rights groups decry SIGI report (Ynet News) June 22, 2023

Despite being established over three months ago, the Ministerial Committee for the Advancement of the Status of Women has failed to convene. Startlingly, Israel ranks dead last among OECD countries in terms of gender equality, as highlighted in the Social Institute and Gender Index report. Projections from the Van Leer Institute suggest little improvement in Israel's gender inequality in the foreseeable future.

Israel, alongside Japan, receives a concerning rating in the report for its pronounced gender equality gaps, particularly in the realms of family-based discrimination and curtailment of civil liberties. Israel's score of 40.9 in family discrimination starkly contrasts with the OECD average of 14.2. Despite escalating incidents of violence and femicides, reaching a devastating count of 17 victims, the ministerial committee responsible for advancing women's rights remains inactive and has failed to convene.

"We are already seeing the consequences on the ground," warns Tal Hochman, director of government relations at the women's lobby. "When the cabinet is not convened to promote women's status, there is a deterioration in women's rights in Israel. This is just one part of many actions that the government has not taken since its establishment, which proves that women's rights and gender equality are not among its priorities."

According to Hochman, "The role of the cabinet is to include all government ministries in handling the promotion of

gender equality and to make sure that there is a reference to the advancement of women in government decisions. When that doesn't happen, the damage is evident on the ground. It starts with the government's dealing with the problem of violence against women, which it has exacerbated compared to previous years. Although the legislation passed the Knesset, the government does not implement Amendment 18 to MK Aida Touma Sliman's domestic violence law, which states that a judge can order treatment for violent men," she said.

"This continues in the employment market and in wage gaps - the last amendment that was passed and entered into force in June 2022 lacks explicit instructions and obligations that should apply to large employers. And not only are they not trying to promote women's rights, they are trying to set us back.

The representation of women in senior positions in government ministries is at an unprecedented low, and it doesn't seem that this bothers Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu at all," she said.

" We call on him to order the convening of the Cabinet as soon as possible. Along with the professional importance, there is an important statement here for every woman in Israel who wants to know that her Prime Minister also sees her and her rights."

Beyond the drastic drop in the number of female ministers in the government, the situation in the Knesset itself is also alarming: only 29 members of the Knesset are women, compared to 91 male members. In the local authorities, the situation is even worse, with 241 male heads of local authorities compared to only 15 female heads. In management positions in the public sector, 62% are men compared to 38% women. Although there has been a significant improvement in the past decade, with the proportion of women in these positions increasing from 7% to 38%, there is still a long way to go.

"The current Israeli government is undoubtedly the worst government for women, as it seems more focused on political agendas than addressing the pressing issues affecting women's lives," expressed Moran Zer Katzenstein, the founder of Building an Alternative, a women's rights organization. "We have waited for seven months for them to take action, but they seem more interested in pushing controversial laws rather than addressing the increasing violence against women.

"The Ministry of Welfare has even warned about the shortage of shelter beds. It is disheartening to see that despite recent reports ranking Israel as the top country in gender inequality among OECD nations, the government is prioritizing the disbandment of committees and the appointment of conservative judges over promoting gender equality."

Hagit Pe'er, Chairman of Israel's largest women's rights organization Na'amat, further emphasized, "The government's disregard for women's issues, gender equality, and the alarming rates of violence against women is evident in their failure to prioritize these matters. The absence of any meetings held by the ministerial committee for gender equality is a testament to their lack of concern.

The statistics are undeniable - female representation in the government has declined, with very few female CEOs in government ministries. Moreover, Israel's position as the country with the highest discrimination against women, according to OECD data, is deeply concerning. It is evident that we are regressing rapidly, and urgent action is needed to reverse this troubling trend."

Yesterday, former Minister for Social Equality, Yesh Atid's Meirav Cohen, urgently requested the Chairman of the Ministerial Committee for Gender Equality, MK Gila Gamliel, and the Minister for the Advancement of the Status of Women, May Golan, to convene the committee.

Cohen emphasized that "the challenges faced by women in Israel encompass various aspects of life, ranging from gender equality in the workplace and closing wage gaps, to addressing cases of domestic violence and sexual harassment. It is of grave importance to broaden cooperation among all ministries and highlight the need for a committee that formulates comprehensive plans and policies to address these issues, as they directly impact the daily lives of every woman."

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ASIA

Afghanistan

Afghanistan: Taliban ‘may be responsible for gender apartheid’ says rights expert (UN News) June 19, 2023

Volker Türk, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, expressed similar concerns on the opening day of the Council’s summer session, adding that the de facto authorities had “dismantled the most fundamental principles of human rights, particularly for women and girls”.

In a joint report presented to the Council by the Special Rapporteur for Afghanistan and the Working Group on discrimination against women and girls, the experts, Richard Bennett and Dorothy Estrada-Tanck, said that their plight was among the worst in the world.

Their report calls on the de facto authorities to respect and restore women’s and girls’ human rights. It also urges the international community and the UN to pay greater attention to widespread discrimination against women and girls in Afghanistan.

“We also draw to the Council’s attention our deep concern that these serious deprivations of women’s and girls’ fundamental human rights and the harsh enforcement by the de facto authorities of their restrictive measures may constitute the crime against humanity of gender persecution,” said Mr. Bennett.

“Grave, systematic and institutionalized discrimination against women and girls is at the heart of Taliban ideology and rule, which also gives rise to concerns that they may be responsible for gender apartheid.”

Echoing those concerns, UN Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights, Nada Al-Nashif insisted that despite repeated assertions to the contrary by the de-facto authorities, “over the past 22 months, every aspect of women’s and girls’ lives has been restricted. They are discriminated against in every way.”

Mr. Bennett, who visited Kabul and Mazar-e-Sharif in Afghanistan to fulfil his Special Rapporteur mandate, confirmed that he was unable to report improvements in the human rights situation “certainly not for women and girls whose predicament has only worsened, nor for others in the population who are marginalized, associated with the former Islamic Republic, or who resist or even disagree with the Taliban’s ideology”.

Offering searing insight about the mindset of women and girls in Afghanistan, Shaharзад Akbar, Executive Director of Afghan NGO Rawadari, told the Council that they talk about “being buried alive, breathing but not being able to do much else without facing restrictions and punishments, their lives held still while the lives of the men around them, their male children, their brothers, their husbands, move forward.”

Ms. Akbar also highlighted the gulf between Taliban rule and other neighbouring Muslim countries where women are allowed to seek education, pursue their dreams, travel to space, and participate in politics.

But not in Afghanistan, where the “Taliban have turned Afghanistan to a mass graveyard of Afghan women and girls’ ambitions, dreams and potential”.

Why the International Criminal Court is unlikely to prosecute alleged Australian war crimes in Afghanistan (The Conversation) By Donald Rothwell

June 21, 2023

For the first time, Australians have been referred to the International Criminal Court (ICC) for investigation into alleged Afghan war crimes.

That Senator Jacqui Lambie has instigated this process is even more extraordinary as it's the first time any Australian MP has taken that step.

Lambie's ICC referral focuses on the legal responsibility of Australian Defence Force (ADF) commanders who knew, or should have known, about alleged war crimes committed by their forces in Afghanistan.

This move by Lambie may not lead to any formal action by the ICC, but it does shine a spotlight on how Australia is responding to these claims.

The court will no doubt acknowledge receipt of Lambie's referral, but it is doubtful whether it would commence an active investigation given the ongoing work of the Office of the Special Investigator established in 2021, with Mark Weinberg as the lead investigator.

In a Senate Estimates hearing in May, Chris Moraitis, the office's director-general, said up to 40 alleged acts are currently being investigated by his office and the Australian Federal Police.

In March, the first charge was brought against a former Australian soldier, Oliver Schulz. He was accused of the war crime of murder under the Commonwealth Criminal Code.

No further details have been released as to current and former defence personnel who are under investigation. But the Office of the Special Investigator's mandate is to consider all ADF conduct in Afghanistan from 2005-16, which will include senior officers and commanders.

The office is also not limited to the allegations investigated and reported on in the 2020 Brereton Report. It has its own mandate and can conduct its own investigations.

The ICC was only ever intended as a court of last resort in these matters. That means it will only investigate and prosecute people for alleged war crimes when a country is unwilling or unable to do so itself.

This may arise if the state is incapable of pursuing prosecutions because of disorder or unrest, or because of the collapse of a national judicial system. None of these situations currently exist in Australia.

The ICC is also incredibly busy with its ongoing investigation into war crimes allegations in Ukraine, which are occurring in real time on a near-daily basis. This is on top of its other work. To date, the ICC prosecutor has received some 12,000 requests to investigate alleged war crimes committed worldwide over the past 20 years.

The legal landscape for war crimes prosecutions has radically changed in recent decades due to the creation of the ICC.

The court has jurisdiction with respect to war crimes committed by the nationals of state parties, such as Australia. Its jurisdiction extends to "grave breaches" of the laws of war, which sets a high threshold for the most serious and egregious acts.

Presently, the ICC prosecutor is already investigating alleged crimes against humanity and war crimes committed by various sides in the Afghan conflict including Australian, UK and Taliban forces and the Islamic State - dating back to the early 2000s. The US is not a member of the court and does not respect its jurisdiction.

With regard to Australian soldiers, Lambie's concern is that the Office of the Special Investigator is focused on troops and officers, not ADF commanders. International criminal law and the ICC recognise "command responsibility", which is the legal responsibility of commanders when their forces commit war crimes. However, commanders must have directed such conduct or had reasonable knowledge that such conduct was being committed.

Australia has been an enthusiastic supporter of the ICC, but its recognition of ICC jurisdiction was contingent on a formal declaration in 2002 made by the Howard government which provided, in part, that no person will be surrendered to the court by Australia until it has had the full opportunity to investigate or prosecute any alleged crimes.

Additionally, Australia would only surrender a person to the ICC for prosecution following the Commonwealth

attorney-general issuing a certificate.

The government response to the Brereton Report – with its establishment of the Office of the Special Investigator – means it is taking the lead in prosecuting war crimes allegations. As such, an Australian soldier or commander would only be handed over to the ICC in the most exceptional of cases.

Over the past seven years, we have gotten a much clearer picture of the alleged actions of Australian soldiers in Afghanistan. Much was revealed in investigative reports by the Nine newspapers, which was highlighted during former SAS corporal Ben Roberts-Smith's recent defamation case.

The legal system will likely soon be dealing with a wave of war crimes charges arising from the Brereton Report and the work of the Office of the Special Investigator and Australian Federal Police.

Australia has no recent history of war crimes trials involving Australian soldiers. However, following the second world war, Australia was involved in the International Military Tribunal for the Far East in Tokyo, which was established to prosecute Japanese war crimes suspects. Japanese soldiers were also prosecuted between 1945 and 1951 in Australian military courts.

More recently, Ivan Polyukhovich, a former Nazi soldier who became an Australian citizen in 1958, was put on trial in Australia for alleged war crimes committed in Ukraine between 1942-43. He was ultimately acquitted by the South Australian Supreme Court in 1993.

Australia may now be on the brink of its first modern war crimes trial, though, with the prosecution of Oliver Schulz.

The Australian legal system is about to be severely tested. As difficult as these legal processes may well be for the nation, the public will have a legitimate expectation these allegations are scrutinised in court. Lambie's actions have reinforced that expectation.

Since the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan, more than 1,000 civilians were killed in attacks, UN says (AP News) By By Rahim Faiez

June 27, 2023

The United Nations said Tuesday it has documented a significant level of civilians killed and wounded in attacks in Afghanistan since the Taliban takeover – despite a stark reduction in casualties compared to previous years of war and insurgency.

According to a new report by the U.N. mission in Afghanistan, or UNAMA, since the takeover in mid-August 2021 and until the end of May, there were 3,774 civilian casualties, including 1,095 people killed in violence in the country.

That compares with 8,820 civilian casualties – including 3,035 killed – in just 2020, according to an earlier U.N. report.

The Taliban seized the country in August 2021 while U.S. and NATO troops were in the final weeks of their withdrawal from Afghanistan after two decades of war.

According to the U.N. report, three-quarters of the attacks since the Taliban seized power were with improvised explosive devices in “populated areas, including places of worship, schools and markets,” the report said. Among those killed were 92 women and 287 children.

A press statement from the U.N. that followed Tuesday's report said the figures indicate a significant increase in civilian harm resulting from IED attacks on places of worship – mostly belonging to the minority Shiite Muslims – compared to the three-year period prior to the Taliban takeover.

The statement also said that at least 95 people were killed in attacks on schools, educational facilities and other places that targeted the predominantly Shiite Hazara community.

The statement said that the majority of the IED attacks were carried out by the region's affiliate of the Islamic State group – known as the Islamic State in Khorasan Province – a Sunni militant group and a main Taliban rival.

“These attacks on civilians and civilian objects are reprehensible and must stop,” said Fiona Frazer, chief of UNAMA's Human Rights Service. She urged the Taliban – the de facto authorities in Afghanistan – to “uphold their obligation to protect the right to life” of the Afghan people.

However, the U.N. report said a “significant number” of the deaths resulted from attacks that were never claimed or that the U.N. mission could not attribute to any group. It did not provide the number for those fatalities.

The report also expressed concern about “the lethality of suicide attacks” since the Taliban takeover, with fewer attacks causing more civilian casualties.

It noted that the attacks were carried out amid a nationwide financial and economic crisis. With the sharp drop in donor funding since the takeover, victims are struggling to get access to “medical, financial and psychosocial support” under the current Taliban-led government, the report said.

Frazer said that even though Afghan “victims of armed conflict and violence struggled to access essential medical, financial and psychosocial support” prior to the takeover, this has become more difficult after the Taliban took power.

“Help for the victims of violence is now even harder to come by because of the drop in donor funding for vital services,” she added.

The U.N. report also demanded an immediate halt to attacks and said it holds the Taliban government responsible for the safety of Afghans.

The Taliban said their administration took over when Afghanistan was “on the verge of collapse” and that they “managed to rescue the country and government from a crisis” by making sound decisions and through proper management.

In a response, the Taliban-led foreign ministry said that the situation has gradually improved since August 2021. “Security has been ensured across the country,” the statement said, adding that the Taliban consider the security of places of worship and holy shrines, including Shiite sites, a priority.

Despite initial promises in 2021 of a more moderate administration, the Taliban enforced harsh rules after seizing the country. They banned girls’ education after the sixth grade and barred Afghan women from public life and most work, including for nongovernmental organizations and the U.N.

The measures harked back to the previous Taliban rule of Afghanistan in the late 1990s, when they also imposed their strict interpretation of Islamic law, or Sharia. The edicts prompted an international outcry against the already ostracized Taliban, whose administration has not been officially recognized by the U.N. and the international community.

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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**

Report on Responsibility to Protect Spotlights Development as Prevention, Special Adviser Says, Stressing Millions of Lives Depend on Giving Principle Meaning (UN Meetings Coverage and Press Releases) June 26, 2023

Following its annual debate on the responsibility to protect and the prevention of genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity, the General Assembly adopted two resolutions today, one on the residual functions of the Cambodia courts that prosecuted former leaders of the Khmer Rouge regime, and the other on the importance of supporting mental health concerns.

The representative of Germany, speaking for Cambodia and the Principal Donors Group, which was formed to support the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia, introduced the draft resolution “Extraordinary Chambers in

the Courts of Cambodia — residual functions” (document A/77/L.76). He noted that, 20 years ago, at the Cambodian Government’s request, the United Nations helped establish the Extraordinary Chambers to prosecute the crimes of the Khmer Rouge’s senior leaders. That initiative has made a critical contribution to accountability by holding a number of the accused responsible for atrocities.

By the text — adopted without a vote — the General Assembly encouraged the Secretary-General and the Government of Cambodia to take all measures necessary to fully implement the Addendum to the Agreement between the United Nations and the Government of Cambodia concerning the prosecution under Cambodian law of crimes committed during the period of Democratic Kampuchea on the Transitional Arrangements and the Completion of Work of the Extraordinary Chambers.

The representative of Cambodia noted that, since the Extraordinary Chambers completed its work in 2022, “the wounds deep down in our hearts are healing, even though scars will remain.” Throughout the Court’s process in the last 17 years, 240,000 individuals attended the hearings, with its residual functions designed to preserve its legacy.

The representative of Mexico introduced the draft resolution “Mental health and psychosocial support”, which aims to make explicit the importance of ensuring access to mental health services and psychosocial support in an inclusive manner (document A/77/L.77). “To recognize the importance of mental health is to recognize the dignity and integral well-being to which we are all entitled, without exception,” he said.

By the resolution’s terms — also adopted without a vote — the Assembly urged Member States to promote and improve mental health services as an essential component of universal health coverage by, inter alia, integrating a human rights perspective to adopt, update and strengthen all existing laws and policies relating to mental health, with a view to eliminating all forms of discrimination, stigma, stereotypes, prejudice, violence or abuse within that context.

However, speaking in explanation of position, a dozen representatives argued over not just the inclusion of certain terms, but the exclusion of issues crucial to countries experiencing unilateral measures. Highlighting the lack of goodwill in negotiations, the representative Nicaragua pointed out that 28 countries urged such language, adding that there was no reason for that paragraph to be left out. In addition, Egypt’s delegate expressed regret that numerous delegations sought to weaken all aspects of the text pertaining to sustainable development.

The General Assembly also commenced its annual general debate on the responsibility to protect and the prevention of genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity.

George Okoth-Obbo, Special Adviser of the Secretary-General on the Responsibility to Protect, introduced the “Report on the responsibility to protect and the prevention of genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity” (document A/77/910-S/2023/409). He stressed that the debate is particularly evocative as countless civilians continue to be caught in situations of conflict and subject to genocide and war crimes. The responsibility to protect thus remains as imperative today as when the world resounded “never again” at the 2005 World Summit.

The report underlines that development can build the conditions for sustainable peace, he continued. In underdevelopment, however, poverty, societal inequalities, human rights abuses and conflict can be drivers of atrocity crimes. Recalling that this annual debate is a “reminder to us not to drift from our commitment, our duty, our responsibility to protect”, he stressed: “The lives of millions depend on that responsibility being given meaning.”

In the ensuing debate, speakers deliberated on whether the responsibility to protect is a principle or a notion, with many emphasizing that it is an inherent obligation of sovereign States under international law, while others pointed to the lack of consensus on its definition and scope.

France’s representative, also speaking for Mexico, stressed that the prevention of mass atrocities must remain a top United Nations priority. Urging the five Security Council permanent members to commit themselves not to use the veto in situations of mass atrocities, she stressed that there is “no responsibility is higher than that of protecting our populations”.

In a similar vein, the representative of Latvia, also speaking for Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Lithuania, Norway and Sweden, called on the Special Adviser on Genocide Prevention and the Special Adviser on the Responsibility to Protect to share recommendations. “Practical examples will help increase our understanding on how to more effectively translate the responsibility to protect principle into concrete action,” he said.

Greece’s delegate noted that the responsibility generates conditions conducive to peace, inclusion and prosperity, while aiming to address the root causes of poverty, inequality and conflict. However, the international community should add “extra atrocity-prevention layers” and early warning systems to its development programmes. Recognizing the Council’s role when populations become atrocity crimes victims, he called for strengthening the triple nexus

approach.

However, a number of delegates rejected assertions that the responsibility to protect remains more of an undefined notion, often used to interfere in the internal affairs of sovereign States.

The representative of Venezuela, speaking for the Group of Friends in Defense of the Charter of the United Nations, said that, while the notion of the responsibility to protect may have had truly altruistic intentions, that time has shown its catastrophic consequences when it is selectively invoked. The definition and scope of this notion, which is highly politicized and has also raised serious and legitimate concerns for a significant number of States, remains pending.

Cuba's delegate stressed that it is a mistake to speak of the responsibility to protect as a principle since it is not a foundation or axiom of international law — only a notion, whose scope and rules of implementation are still far from being defined. In an international system as undemocratic as the one that prevails today, the main concern lies in determining who decides when there is a need to protect, and who, and under what criteria.

The representative of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea affirmed that the responsibility to protect its people from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity falls entirely under the sovereignty of each State. Observing that some countries, under the pretext of the responsibility to protect, continue to misuse it selectively for their political purposes, he stressed that respect for the sovereignty, territorial integrity and the non-interference in internal affairs are the cornerstones of international relations.

The representatives of India, Pakistan and China spoke in exercise of the right of reply.

The General Assembly will reconvene at a later date to conclude its debate on the responsibility to protect.

Responsibility to Protect

GEORGE OKOTH-OBBO, Special Adviser of the Secretary-General on the Responsibility to Protect, introducing the "Report on the responsibility to protect and the prevention of genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity" (document A/77/910-S/2023/409), noted that the annual debate is particularly evocative this year as countless civilians continue to be caught in situations of conflict, violence and human rights violations which may amount to genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing. "The daily toll of targeted and intentional mass murder, forced displacement and other untold suffering continues to hang heavily over our common humanity," he stated. The responsibility to protect thus remains as imperative today as when the world resounded "never again" at the 2005 World Summit.

Reiterating that the keystone is prevention, he stressed that the full intersection between the responsibility to protect and development has not been illuminated as comprehensively and thoroughly as have the root causes of other particular typologies. Because some of the most forbidding atrocity crimes are rooted in developmental fractures, it is important to dedicate attention to this subject. The report underlines that development can build the conditions for sustainable peace, equitable growth and accountable governance and thereby cement the prospects for realizing the fundamental purposes and objectives of the responsibility to protect. In underdevelopment, on the other hand, poverty and societal inequalities, food insecurity and institutional and accountability failures, as well as abuses of human rights and conflict, can be drivers and multipliers of atrocity crimes.

The report calls on States to comprehensively commit political will as a whole-of-Government enterprise to the intersection between the responsibility to protect and sustainable development, he continued. It also calls for development policies, strategies and programmes be leveraged across the spectrum of atrocity risk assessment, early warning and preparedness. The United Nations will continue to deliberate on the role of development in the prevention of genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. Because the subject is one on which every State has both historical and real time experience, it will be important to hear the perspectives, experiences, challenges, good practices and indeed even concerns of States on these questions and propositions, he said.

He reminded the General Assembly of the plight of the Sustainable Development Goals, with only about 12 per cent on target to be met. Thus, the question as to how the 2023 Sustainable Development Goals Summit in September will review the state of the goals and their implementation. As well, it will be important to consider how efforts could be intentionalized in order to help diminish the risks, triggers or multipliers which may be rooted in development problematics. Recalling that this annual debate is a "reminder to us not to drift from our commitment, our duty, our responsibility to protect", he stressed that it is a reminder which should ring even more keenly in this year which marks the seventy-fifth anniversaries of, respectively, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. "The lives of millions depend on that responsibility being given meaning," he emphasized.

IVAN ŠIMONOVIĆ (Croatia), speaking for the Group of Friends of the Responsibility to Protect, said this is the fourteenth year that the Assembly is gathering to discuss how to implement the responsibility to protect and the sixth time as a formal debate. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development provides a framework for global cooperation to achieve a better and more sustainable future and can significantly contribute to atrocity prevention efforts. Addressing failures of development and governance and building more resilient societies are critical elements of States' efforts to prevent atrocity crimes. Effective prevention of atrocities can only be achieved if the United Nations system responds holistically by using all the tools and mechanisms at its disposal. This includes effective sharing of relevant information by all parts of the Organization, which is then acted upon. Greater cross-departmental collaboration, including partnerships between the United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect and other United Nations bodies, will boost the Organization's collective capacity to prevent or halt atrocity crimes.

More than 108 million people have been displaced by persecution, violence and atrocities, he continued. This figure also demonstrates why the responsibility to protect doctrine needs to be at the heart of the international community's shared mission to advance peace and security, human rights and development. He reaffirmed the Group's full support to the United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect. The expertise of civil society actors should substantively inform discussions among policy- and decision-makers, including the United Nations offices. He also emphasized the Group's renewed call on all Security Council members to respond to and address the risk or commission of mass atrocities, highlighting the ACT Code of Conduct and the France-Mexico initiative on the use of veto in case of mass atrocities.

SILVIO GONZATO, Deputy Head of Delegation of the European Union, in its capacity as observer, reiterated the bloc's support in the operationalization and implementation of the responsibility to protect. "There can be no peace without sustainable development, no development without peace and neither without accountable Governance and full and equal enjoyment of human rights," he emphasized. Through its tools and policies — including the European Union's Atrocity Prevention Toolkit, Early Warning System and Horizon Scanning, among others — the European Union identifies and addresses early warning signs in its external action, he reported, adding that its bilateral Human Rights Dialogues mitigate atrocity risks. Moreover, the civilian Common Security and Defence Policy missions support the security sector reform in Iraq and the Central African Republic, while also monitoring the situation in the South Caucasus.

Underscoring the importance of the humanitarian-development-peace nexus, he spotlighted the bloc's conflict analysis as a powerful tool in breaking silos and ensuring the sensitivity of its development programmes to conflict and atrocities risks. Pointing to the European Union's support of the early warning and prevention mechanism within the United Nations system, he reiterated its readiness to enhance the implementation of the youth and women, peace and security agendas. "The prevention of atrocities is never negotiable," he stressed, adding that preventing violent conflict is key to saving populations from war. "But, if and when prevention fails, we must respond," he pointed out, underscoring the importance of the Security Council's action to this end and urging Member States to join the Coherence and Transparency Code of Conduct and the France-Mexico initiative on the use of veto in cases of mass atrocities. Further, he called on the Secretary-General to include reports on analysis of trends regarding the risks of genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity — among others — and their prevention in his future report on the responsibility to protect.

JOAQUÍN PÉREZ AYESTARÁN (Venezuela), speaking for the Group of Friends in Defense of the Charter of the United Nations, emphasized the central role of States as guarantors of the safety, security and well-being of their respective populations. The Group of Friends considers the Charter of the United Nations to be a milestone and a true act of faith in the best of humanity. He called upon countries to uphold the international system with the United Nations at its core. Against this background, he voiced serious concerns at growing threats to the Charter, including attempts to advance non-consensual and controversial notions, such as the responsibility to protect. He also spotlighted growing unilateralism and attempts to ignore or replace the purposes and principles enshrined in the Charter with a new set of so-called "rules" that remain unknown and threaten to undermine multilateralism.

While the notion of the responsibility to protect may have had truly altruistic intentions, he emphasized that time has shown its catastrophic consequences when it is selectively invoked, particularly in countries with vast natural resources. The definition and scope of this notion, which is highly politicized and has also raised serious and legitimate concerns for a significant number of States, remains pending. More than 20 years after the adoption of the World Summit outcome document, many questions still remain unanswered, he noted, adding that, if the true intention is to protect the population, the international community can start by both promoting solidarity in the fight against poverty, hunger and inequality. It is the lack of answers that demonstrates that the responsibility to protect is riddled with double standards that serve agendas of a dubious nature promoted by certain Governments which seek to sustain domination through neo-colonial practices, including the weaponization of human rights, the economy and the

international financial system.

DIARRA DIME-LABILLE (France), aligning herself with the European Union and also speaking for Mexico, stressed that the responsibility to protect “is not a question of political will, but an inherent obligation of sovereign States under international law”. The prevention of mass atrocities must remain a top priority of the United Nations, and prevention and response must be supported by an effective multilateral system. Thus, the veto’s use cannot be used to paralyse the Security Council. It is in this spirit that the France-Mexico initiative was launched in 2015 to voluntarily and collectively suspend the veto’s use in the Council in the event of mass atrocities. This initiative is now supported by 106 States and tackles the heart of inaction. She called on the five Council permanent members to commit themselves not to use the veto in situations of mass atrocities, when crimes of genocide, crimes against humanity and large-scale war crimes are being committed.

“It is high time to raise our voices in the difficult times we are experiencing, when multilateralism and international law are being tested,” she said. In order to strengthen accountability mechanisms and exchange best practices, she reiterated a call to support and cooperate with the International Criminal Court, as well as with fact-finding missions and commissions of inquiry. She also reiterated support for the ongoing process for a convention to prevent and punish crimes against humanity. Recognizing the efforts made to operationalize the concept of the responsibility to protect, she said that today’s debate highlights the need to raise awareness of sustainable development strategies to support social resilience and ensure that they do not exacerbate the risks of atrocities. Underlining the message of the meeting that there can be no sustainable development without peace and no peace without sustainable development, she emphasized that there is “no responsibility is higher than that of protecting our populations”.

ANDREJS PILDEGOVIČS (Latvia), also speaking for Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Lithuania, Norway and Sweden, underscored the importance of the Special Adviser’s presence in New York to advance the principle’s implementation. Reaffirming his commitment to this end, he spotlighted Member States’ responsibility of preventing and responding to genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and ethnic cleansing. In this context, he called on the Special Adviser on Genocide Prevention and the Special Adviser on Responsibility to Protect and their joint office to develop and share recommendation on atrocity-prevention and advice on the principle’s implementation, while also developing and sharing regular updates about the root causes and warning signs of new atrocity crimes.

“Practical examples will help increase our understanding on how to more effectively translate the responsibility to protect principle into concrete action,” he stressed, highlighting the important role of regional organizations in this regard. Recognizing that regional cooperation can contribute to effective early warning, rapid response and stabilization to prevent new atrocities, he said Member States must work hand in hand with regional bodies. Moreover, he outlined the need for a forward-looking assessment of the principle and its implementation on national, regional and global levels.

GERARDO PENALVER PORTAL (Cuba), aligning himself with the Group of Friends in Defense of the Charter of the United Nations, stressed that it is a mistake to speak of the responsibility to protect as a principle since it does not constitute a foundation or axiom of international law. It is only a notion, whose scope, rules of implementation and evaluation mechanisms are still far from being defined and agreed upon by the Member States. It is also unwise to give mandates to other bodies such as the Human Rights Council. In an international system as undemocratic as the one that prevails today, the main concern lies in determining who decides when there is a need to protect, and who, and under what criteria, determines the forms of action. In many cases, attempts to implement the responsibility to protect provide one more tool to facilitate interference in internal affairs, regime change agendas and subversion in third countries, usually small and developing ones, he pointed out.

MARITZA CHAN VALVERDE (Costa Rica), noting her appreciation of the emphasis on the role development in preventing crimes against humanity, said that the report addresses the root causes that can create situations that foster mass atrocities. Inclusion of all members of society is crucial to foster development and prevent conflicts. When individuals feel valued and represented in a society, they have a sense of ownership and that creates trust between groups. Sustainable development means equal access to education and health for all people in a society. It helps foster a sense of shared responsibility for development goals. Environmental sustainability is also important for conflict prevention to ensure sustainable resources for all. Transparent governance and responsible institutions help build trusts in communities and avert conflicts that could lead to mass atrocities. The proliferation of ammunition in communities must also be addressed to prevent conflict and mass atrocities, she said.

EVANGELOS SEKERIS (Greece), associating himself with the European Union, said that sustainable development generates conditions conducive to peace, inclusion and prosperity, while aiming to address the root causes of poverty, inequality and conflict. However, the international community should add “extra atrocity-prevention layers” and early warning systems to its development programmes, he noted, underscoring the needs for conflict prevention and stabilization activities, including building trust between local security forces and communities. He further expressed

support to the development of economic opportunities and basic social services at the community level through re-establishment of State institutions and services in fragile areas. While prevention remains key to eliminating atrocity crimes, in cases when Member States do not succeed to prevent them, accountability should be the only alternative. Recognizing the Security Council's role in cases, when populations become atrocity crimes victims, he called for strengthening the triple nexus approach.

FIONA WEBSTER (Australia) underscored that, where States are unable or unwilling to protect their populations, the risk of atrocity crimes being perpetrated increases. That is why the principle and its three pillars remain integral to the United Nations peace and security architecture. "The fate of at-risk populations is not pre-ordained," she stressed, adding: "It never was. It never is." She underlined the need for the Secretary-General's report to assess and address atrocity risks in specific country situations. Encouraging the Special Adviser on Genocide Prevention and the Special Adviser on Responsibility to Protect to conduct and share early warning and atrocity risk assessments of crises on the ground, she noted that atrocities do not happen without warning; they escalate over time. She urged States to address the growing levels of hostility and violence towards women and girls, and to collectively act now to stop the criminalization and abuse of LGBTQIA+ people in many parts of the world.

MOHAMMAD GHORBANPOUR (Iran), aligning himself with the Group of Friends in Defense of the Charter of the United Nations, said that the international community, notably the United Nations, is still far from a consensual understanding of the responsibility to protect as a notion. The controversies around this notion are not rooted in the protection of civilians and the prevention of the atrocity crimes, but rather on its definition, implementation and scope of application. The most serious and legitimate concern for the international community regards the scenarios for the preparation of different kinds of interventions in the internal affairs of sovereign States, under the disguise of the responsibility to protect, as well as the introduction of country-specific resolutions with the same aims. The failure to effectively prevent atrocity crimes can be attributed more to Council failures rather than the lack of a relevant normative framework, he emphasized.

MHER MARGARYAN (Armenia), recalling the disruption of the Lachin Corridor since 12 December 2022, which left 120,000 people cut off from the outside world, said the ongoing blockade endangers civilian population. He pointed out that, six months ago, Armenia appealed for an inter-agency mission to assess Nagorno-Karabakh's humanitarian situation and requested the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) fact-finding mission to help preserve the region's cultural heritage. Underscoring the international community's shared responsibility to prevent and protect populations from atrocity crimes, he added: "Impunity for violations of the international norms and principles has emboldened Azerbaijan to resort to new provocations and military escalation." He also reported that Azerbaijan's armed forces continue to violate ceasefire and target civilians — who carry out agricultural work — and border communities. In this regard, he expressed support for a universally accepted treaty on preventing and punishing crimes against humanity.

KIM SONG (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) affirmed that the responsibility to protect its people from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity falls entirely under the sovereignty of each State. However, despite the absence of intergovernmental agreement on that concept, some countries continue to misuse and apply it selectively for their political purposes. He voiced concern that some Western countries unilaterally pursue political, economic and military interventions to undermine the social system of other sovereign States under the pretext of the responsibility to protect. Such unlawful interference drives great upheavals such as armed conflicts, terrorism, genocide and mass destruction, which are long-standing in the Middle East and some African countries. He stressed that those upheavals are not attributable to a State's inadequate ability to protect its people, but to flagrant infringement upon their sovereignty. Respect for the sovereignty, territorial integrity and the non-interference in internal affairs are the cornerstone of international relations, he stated.

NEVILLE MELVIN GERTZE (Namibia) said much needs to be done to operationalize responsibility to protect and ensure its consistent application. Legitimate concerns remain, with discrepancies in the doctrine's interpretation continuing to hamper discussions, specifically within the context of the third pillar. Thus, its interpretation remains a serious concern. He called for these concerns to be addressed through dialogue, assessing lessons learned, engagement and practice. While underscoring respect for fundamental human rights and the principles of international law, he said there is no pretext for the use of force against States. Therefore, safeguards must be put in place to protect against the vulnerability to surreptitiously interfere in the internal affairs of sovereign nations. He reiterated the call for a reformed Council that reflects the realities of this century and can effectively implement its mandate of maintaining international peace and security, including through the prevention of atrocities and regulating the collective use of force.

VASSILY A. NEBENZIA (Russian Federation) said that the responsibility to protect is a concept developed by Western think-tanks to rebrand the "well-known humanitarian intervention" and to legitimize interference in the internal

affairs of States “under a new venire”. Pointing to the attempts to whitewash the reputation of the principle by tying it to subjects popular at the United Nations, he added: “The events in Libya in 2011 have clearly demonstrated that responsibility to protect is not a charity, and the States that apply it are certainly not Mother Theresa.” He recalled the role of the International Court of Justice in Libya, saying that “the critical mass of lies” was used to describe the North Atlantic Treaty Organization’s (NATO) actions as responsibility to protect. Noting that this principle is a tool for imposing “someone else’s will”, he said that under the pretext of adhering to it, States will have Western approaches and solutions dictated upon them. To this end, he called on developing countries not to agree to attempts of artificially linking this principle to development assistance.

KRZYSZTOF MARIA SZCZERSKI (Poland) said that sustainable, inclusive development is the world’s most productive form of conflict and atrocity prevention. Only comprehensive implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, with universal respect for human rights, allows for prevention of genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity, as well as lasting post-conflict reconstruction. Taking into account the complex interrelationship of risk and vulnerability in conflict settings, he voiced grave concern over the situation in Ukraine where the Russian Federation army is targeting civilians and civilian infrastructure. He also expressed horror over accounts of sexual violence used deliberately by Russian soldiers, and of children being abducted and forcibly displaced from the territory of Ukraine to the temporarily occupied territories. He again called upon the international community to act in order to protect the civilian population, stop the atrocities committed by the Russian Federation in Ukraine and bring the perpetrators to justice.

SINA ALAVI (Liechtenstein), aligning himself with the Group of Friends of the Responsibility to Protect, said this doctrine is evolving politically and legally. It has been invoked by the Assembly, the Council and the Human Rights Council in more than 200 resolutions. Yet, the gap between the international community’s expressed commitment to protect civilians and its actions has grown significantly. With its chosen war of aggression, a permanent Council member has distorted the responsibility to protect principle. The Russian Federation has destroyed critical infrastructure, targeted civilians and abducted children in Ukraine, he noted, recalling that the International Criminal Court issued arrest warrants for the war crime of unlawful deportation. The Secretary-General’s report stressed that accountability is crucial to prevent atrocities. “Ensuring accountability for the most serious crimes under international law today is a critical component of our responsibility to protect civilians tomorrow,” he said, adding that accountability must be ensured for the crimes committed in Ukraine.

CARLA MARIA RODRÍGUEZ MANCIA (Guatemala), noting that every State has a primary responsibility to protect its population and prevent atrocities, recalled the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. “The responsibility of protect must be acknowledged as an exceptional way to defend populations of mass atrocities,” she stressed. In this regard, Member States must guarantee that development assistance programmes benefit all communities and strengthen resilience. Recalling that Guatemala has been a member of the Group of Friends of the Responsibility to Protect since 2006, she also said that, at the national level, the responsibility to protect principle has been aligned with the country’s Constitution. While spotlighting Guatemala’s contribution of troops for peacekeeping operations, she said that the responsibility to protect is complementary to the concept of sustainable peace since it prioritizes respects for and the observance of human rights with a preventive approach.

MOON DONGKYU (Republic of Korea) noted that in implementing the responsibility to protect, addressing root causes is essential. Thus, it is deeply concerning that only 12 per cent of Sustainable Development Goal targets are on track to be met by 2030. Policies of exclusion, patterns of human rights violations and discriminatory societal structures established in peacetime can be transformed into structures of violence during atrocities, while closed and undemocratic societies often perpetuate such structures. Actions based on the responsibility to protect must address these realities. It is absolutely crucial to prevent the conditions for atrocities from being exacerbated by duly considering the risks and drivers of atrocities in the sustainable development programmes. Atrocity prevention can be achieved through participation in developing and implementing such programmes by civil society, faith communities, indigenous populations, women, children and youth, he said.

KATHERINE ANAS AHMAD AL-HALIQUE (Jordan) said the struggle to ensure the responsibility to protect is ongoing and the international community’s action on climate change is crucial as is collaboration among all stakeholders. In Jordan, many factors, including rising temperatures and massive population growth have become drivers of conflict. Forced migration, food insecurity and dwindling natural resources are also contributing to conflict. The ability to protect civilians hinges on the international community’s ability to address the inequality created by the changing climate. Women and girls are being disproportionately impacted. Investing in green growth can help relieve the pressure on communities affected by these overlapping crises. Jordan has responded to the humanitarian crises created by migration flows by hosting refugee camps. However, long-term strategies are needed to prevent conflicts that can led to atrocities. She also said that the Councils’ credibility is being hampered by its structure, which hinders its ability to respond to urgent situations.

LACHEZARA STOEVA (Bulgaria), associating herself with the European Union, said that resuming the Security Council's "horizon-scanning exercise" on atrocities risks and regular conduct of field visits to meet stakeholders would be a step towards operationalizing the responsibility to protect principle. While calling on the Council to regain its prevention focus alongside its humanitarian and peacekeeping activities, she underscored the importance of the early warning response. To energize the United Nations around peace and development, the Economic and Social Council held a special meeting in January to consider the potential of social and economic measures to prevent genocide and war crimes, she reported, pointing to a joint meeting with the Peacebuilding Commission on linking peace and development on 29 June. "Development promotes inclusive democratic societies and fosters accountable and representative political leadership," she stressed, spotlighting Member States' consensus on building social resilience to prevent atrocities.

DEVYN LYN WALLENUS (Canada), aligning herself with the Group of Friends of the Responsibility to Protect, noted that multiple overlapping crises exacerbate tensions. While they are not precursors or causes of mass atrocities, they are an important warning sign. She reiterated the call that future United Nations reports focus on country situations, including assessments of risks and recommendations. Her delegation will continue to demand accountability for violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law in Haiti, Syria, Myanmar and Ukraine, as the principle of responsibility to protect is the obligation of all States to prevent and punish genocide, war crimes and ethnic cleansing wherever they occur. It is neither an infringement or impediment on the sovereign right of nations, nor is it a justification for military intervention. She also reiterated the call for constraint on use of the Security Council veto, particularly on its mandate to uphold international peace and security.

ALINA J. LLANO (Nicaragua) said the real danger behind the responsibility to protect is its manipulation by disguised interventionists that try to interfere in internal affairs of other States. Condemning all war crimes, she stressed that the international community must fulfil all commitments for development and peace, respecting sovereignty and multipolarity. The responsibility to protect raises serious doubts for many countries, especially small countries. Elements of this principle are manipulated for role of imperialism. It is necessary to address the root causes and structural problems that lead to extreme situations. Multilateralism and respecting international law are necessary to ensure the sovereignty of States. Also condemning the use of unilateral coercive measures that hinder a country's development, she said that comprehensive reform of the United Nations system is necessary for the needs of all peoples to be taken into account.

RICCARDA CHRISTIANA CHANDA (Switzerland) said that, on a national level, prevention requires respective strategies, mechanisms and structures to identify risk factors. As a member of the Global Network of R2P Focal Points, based on the Universal Periodic Review recommendations, Switzerland has commissioned a study on measures to combat racism — one of the country's main risk factors. She expressed hope that the Swiss Human Rights Institution — founded in May — will raise awareness to identify and prevent such risk factors, while pointing out that the Global Action Against Mass Atrocities network provides a platform for States and civil society in this regard. She called on States to join this network to strengthen the atrocities prevention community. Further, she spotlighted that in the east of the Democratic Republic of Congo, Switzerland works with local authorities and the media to promote citizens' participation and good governance. "Civil society makes a fundamental contribution to social cohesion," she pointed out.

SAŠA JUREČKO (Slovenia), aligning herself with the European Union and the Group of Friends of the Responsibility to Protect, noted her country hosted a diplomatic conference in May, which resulted in the adoption of the new Ljubljana–Hague Mutual Legal Assistance and Extradition Initiative Convention. The instrument will contribute significantly to the promotion of the rule of law and the fight against impunity at the global level. As mass atrocity situations exacerbate existing sources of fragility and hinder development, it is essential that States apply a "responsibility to protect" lens in their domestic development programmes. Underscoring that the best way to diminish human suffering from atrocities is to prevent conflict happening in the first place, she nonetheless stated that when conflicts do happen, it is the Security Council that holds the greatest responsibility and should act as such.

BURHAN GAFOOR (Singapore) said today's topic is timely as the world sees more mass atrocity crimes. Noting that his country is a founding member of the Group of Friends of the Responsibility to Protect, he said that each State has the sovereign right and responsibility to protect its own population from war crimes. Yet, the international community must take collective action in a timely and decisive action if national authorities fail to do. The use of the responsibility to protect has become controversial, politicized and selectively applied. The General Assembly has a crucial role in rebuilding trust on this issue, spotlighting the need for an approach of patient dialogue. He also said that he was not comfortable with an approach that seeks a resolution that imposes an interpretation. The international community has the responsibility to support States in their national efforts to build resilience, he said, also urging regional organizations to work together to build inclusive societies.

ABDULRAHMAN ABDULAZIZ F. A. AL-THANI (Qatar), associating himself with the Group of Friends of the Responsibility to Protect, underscored the importance of international cooperation to strengthen collective security. He also recalled that Qatar has been a Co-Chair of the Group of Friends from 2018 to 2020. Highlighting the link between development and the responsibility to protect, he underscored that development ensures necessary conditions for lasting peace. Further, he noted that this concept constitutes the priority of Qatar's foreign policy, underpinned by preventive diplomacy and integrated approach to address root causes of conflict. Reporting that his country supports a number of projects in developing countries in conflict, war or atrocity situations, he said this work is conducted in partnership with the United Nations, as well as regional and international partners. He also recognized the Security Council's responsibility to prevent atrocities, urging Member States to refrain from using the veto in such cases.

ANDREA DE BONO SANT CASSIA (Malta), aligning himself with the European Union, emphasized that atrocity-prevention strategies can only be effective when affected populations are involved in their development, implementation and monitoring and the voices of victims and survivors are heard. Current conflicts in Sudan, Ukraine, Myanmar, Syria and Afghanistan, among others, lend even more urgency to narrowing the gap between Member States' obligations under international law and the reality faced by populations at risk. In contexts where the international community fails in its commitment to preventing the commission of atrocity crimes, it is vital to prioritize accountability and promote justice – with the International Criminal Court and other international judicial bodies playing a crucial role. He reiterated Malta's full support to the Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect and the Secretary-General's two Special Advisers.

JONATHAN SAMUEL HOLLIS (United Kingdom) said the challenges confronting advocates of the responsibility to protect are vast, including climate change. Since the Assembly debate held last year, atrocities have spread deeply in many parts of the world, such as Darfur in Sudan and in Ukraine. The Russian Federation's invasion of Ukraine has led to the forced deportation of civilians. The international community must remember its collective responsibility to ensure the protection of civilians. Achieving the Global Goals, such as Sustainable Development Goal 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions, is important and can help communities prevent atrocities. He called on the United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect to play a key role in countries facing conflicts which can lead to atrocities. The alarms should be raised before it is too late. Atrocity-prevention efforts must also take into account the unique vulnerability of women and girls.

ARIANI SPASSE (Albania) said that building resilient societies is critical to preventing mass atrocities. Spotlighting the efforts to further strengthen the responsibility to protect across the United Nations system, he said that the international community needs to address the root causes of such crises, including climate change and investing in prevention. Expressing support for the application of the principle's three pillars – development, human rights, peace and security – he observed: "Failure to consider early warning, threats and other factors associated with atrocity crimes would undermine protection of civilian and conflict prevention." While underscoring the importance of accountability and preventing risks, he said that persistence of impunity for mass atrocities means the "distraction" of the rule of law and the institutions, necessary to protect the basic interests of humans. In this regard, he reiterated Albania's support of the principle's further strengthening and its robust application where needed.

ANA JIMENEZ DE LA HOZ (Spain), aligning herself with the European Union and the Group of Friends of the Responsibility to Protect, noted that the report recalls how the phases leading up to the commission of mass atrocities are often characterized by certain patterns of violation of human rights. Spain has always been actively committed to the principle of the responsibility to protect, materializing it in the international arena as a member of the Group of Friends, and in interactive debates and dialogues held within the scope of the General Assembly. The Spanish Criminal Code now criminalizes genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes, in accordance with the Rome Statute. Furthermore, the current policy strategy reflects the responsibility to protect as central to its priorities of action, she said.

TOFIG F. MUSAYEV (Azerbaijan) said that thousands of Azerbaijan's civilians were executed in acts of mass murder; more than 200,000 were expelled from their historical homeland; and the occupied territories were ethnically cleansed from 700,000 people. Moreso, the country's cultural heritage was looted and vandalized. Noting that Erevan refuses to withdraw the remnants of its armed forces and disclose the landmines' locations, he stressed: "Armenia must share accurate and comprehensive information about all minefields and cease and desist from mine terrorism against Azerbaijan." He also pointed out that Nagorno-Karabakh "long ceased to exist as an administrative and territorial unit", stating that it now constitutes an integral part of Azerbaijan with a legal name "Garabagh Economic Region". "Armenia must memorize this title and never forget it," he added, noting that its allegations about the so-called "blockade" of the Lachin-Khankandi road are false and provocative.

RIYAD KHADDOUR (Syria), associating himself with the Group of Friends in Defense of the Charter of the United

Nations, said the responsibility to protect individuals from genocide, war crimes and ethnic cleansing is the responsibility of the State. Military interventions, whatever may be their justification, in most cases, lead to serious consequences which can go beyond the seriousness of the situation that led to these interventions taking place in the first place. These military interventions can lead to new conflicts, as well, which can expose civilians to the possibility of new massacres. The concept of responsibility to protect is suffering from a crisis of confidence at the international level, he said, underscoring the example of the military intervention in Libya in 2011, which aimed to oust that country's regime. Further, the occupation of the Golan and Palestine is unacceptable, and States should not turn a blind eye to that. Those same States should also have a close look at the armed fighters that brought massive instability Syria. "This is the height of hypocrisy," he said.

JONATHAN SHRIER (United States) stressed that Member States must do more to address the risks that can create conditions that lead to atrocities, including food insecurity and poverty, and more generally, accelerate progress towards achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. Detailing atrocities against civilians in Ukraine, "Burma", China and Sudan, he spotlighted Council resolution 2573 (2021) on the protection of objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population and stressed that all parties must comply fully with their obligations under international humanitarian law and protect civilian infrastructure. Moreover, all States and armed groups must implement good practices to mitigate and respond to harm on civilians and civilian objects, noting his country's Civilian Harm Mitigation and Response Action Plan, which includes doctrine, guidance and procedures to that end.

ROBERT KAYINAMURA (Rwanda), associating himself with the Group of Friends on the Responsibility to Protect, reiterated calls for the Office of Genocide Prevention to receive bolstered support. He also urged the Secretary-General to include, in future reports, an examination of progress made concerning previous recommendations, along with an analysis of emerging trends in genocide, war crimes and ethnic cleansing. "In the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, we face a disheartening situation," he warned. An escalating trend of hate speech and anti-Rwandaphone sentiment, disseminated through schools and social media platforms, wreaks havoc, causing deepening divisions. The repercussions of these acts extend far beyond immediate harm inflicted upon individuals and communities, as they create a foundation for potential large-scale atrocities. In that regard, a group of Rwandaphone women in the Democratic Republic of the Congo were recently attacked, falsely accused of propagating HIV among the Congolese people. "We find ourselves at a critical juncture, and we reiterate our warning of a potential genocide," he stressed.

NGAKO ELPHUS SEKONYANA (South Africa) stated that development policies and discrimination serve as a connection between gradual human rights violations and atrocity crimes. A State or another actor does not spontaneously carry out such heinous actions, but rather acts on pre-existing conditions whereby human rights are being violated. This is especially true when identity politics are directed to discriminate and isolate a particular group. Economic development approaches that are sensitive to the responsibility to protect serve to inherently pre-empt discrimination and counter inequality. Addressing and eliminating poverty averts competition over scarce resources, discouraging identity-oriented discrimination. He noted that, at the 2005 World Summit, Member States committed themselves to protect populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. However since then, conflicts have drastically changed to become more complex and multidimensional, he observed.

TIEMOKO MORIKO (Cote d'Ivoire) said the responsibility to protect, by serving as a deterrent, contributes to stability and peace and is a prerequisite for development. The forcible displacement of more than 100 million people around the globe reinforces his delegation's conviction that the Council needs reform to ensure greater representation and improve its working methods. To counter the risk of mass crimes being committed, his Government has adopted legislative and institutional measures and established monitoring and awareness-raising bodies. These include the High Authority for Communication and Audio-visual, which ensures the prevention of hate speech in the media and on social networks; the National Council for Human Rights; the Observatory of Solidarity and Social Cohesion, which raise awareness against hate speech; and the Cybercrime Platform, which tracks down and punishes perpetrators of hate speech. In addition, the Government has also integrated social development into its National Development Plan.

RÓBERT CHATRNÚCH (Slovakia), associating himself with the European Union and the Group of Friends of the Responsibility to Protect, said the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development can significantly contribute to atrocity prevention efforts. The Sustainable Development Goals Summit and the Summit of the Future are great opportunities to triple efforts towards achievement of the Global Goals. Underscoring the importance of early warning systems in the prevention of atrocity crimes, he said that, in the absence of a response at the local or national level, the Security Council must be able to take action if a situation poses a threat to international peace and security. He encouraged all Member States who have not yet done so to ratify the Rome Statute and its amendments and called for progress towards a new comprehensive convention on prevention and punishment of crimes against humanity. Highlighting the atrocities committed in Ukraine, he urged the Russian Federation to immediately cease hostilities and unconditionally withdraw its troops from the entire territory of Ukraine.

MOHAMMAD AAMIR KHAN (Pakistan), recalling that the responsibility to protect principle was presented as a “noble humanitarian doctrine” at the 2005 World Summit, said that in many cases the military action to protect civilians transformed into regime change and destabilization of the country. For more than seven decades, India has denied the right of self-determination to the Kashmiri people, he reported, adding that its 900,000 troops resorted to forced abductions and incarcerated the entire political leadership of the All Parties Hurriyet Conference, among other things. To this end, Pakistan has circulated a dossier with the evidence of 3,432 war crimes committed by India’s officials in Jammu and Kashmir, while adding that Muslims’ persecution has become a “routine norm” for India. Recognizing that the responsibility to protect was generated to ensure safety for those in danger, he said the selective application of the principle — driven by double standards and geopolitical considerations — undermine its credibility as a “genuine humanitarian doctrine”.

CARLOS AMORIN (Uruguay), associating himself with the Group of Friends of the Responsibility to Protect, said that poverty, discrimination, and economic inequality have all been identified as significant risk factors contributing to the occurrence of crimes. Building more resilient societies means respecting the rule of law. Armed conflict and the COVID-19 pandemic have halted development progress worldwide and millions of people have been displaced by conflict and violence. He called on the Security Council to use its methods of work to consider potential atrocity situations as soon as possible and hold periodic briefings on the matter. He underscored the importance of the Human Rights Council in terms of identifying risk factors that could lead to mass atrocity crimes. He also reaffirmed Uruguay’s commitment to the responsibility to protect and pledged his country’s commitment to deepening efforts to achieve its implementation.

NORBERTO MORETTI (Brazil) stressed that any collective action exercising the responsibility to protect should be based on an agreed set of fundamental principles and procedures, following the exhaustion of all diplomatic, humanitarian and all other peaceful means available. Noting that poverty does not always lead to violence, he underlined that there is no direct link between development deficits and genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing or crimes against humanity. A comprehensive approach that strengthens coherence between political, security, development, human rights and rule of law activities is needed. The Peacebuilding Commission is well positioned to help fill the gap between peace and security efforts and development solutions. Voicing concern that the Secretary-General’s report adopted once again uses the expression “atrocity crimes” to refer to the horrendous acts associated with the responsibility to protect, he underscored that Member States and the United Nations should avoid the temptation of using imprecise concepts. That expression is not defined in international law, nor in multilateral resolutions or decisions.

KEMAL ONUR EKREN (Türkiye) said the instability and destruction caused by terrorist organizations threatens not only lives, rights and freedoms, but economic welfare and social stability. Funds that should be allocated to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals instead are used to remedy the damage caused by terrorist organizations. He welcomed that the report stresses the importance of prevention as a responsibility of States and the international community. Yet, when efforts for prevention do not prevail, United Nations organs must step in as envisaged in the Charter, he said, underlining the Council’s responsibility to act in situations of mass atrocities. The responsibility to protect is not yet an established norm of international law. Its scope and implementation need to be defined and refined. However, such a definition must be based on the broadest possible consensus among the international community, considering the concerns of all Member States, he said.

FABIÁN ODDONE (Argentina), observing that sustainable development has ceased to be a long-term vision, stressed that “it is an urgent reality we must bring about now”. Pointing to the extremist policies, including hate speech, intolerance, exclusion and discrimination, he said they undermine protection standards in communities. In this context, the framework provided by the report is a “road map and a call for action”; his country uses these institutional instruments. Pointing out that Argentina suffered from mass atrocities in the past, he emphasized that there is always “a before and an after” for countries that lived through such crimes in their history. In this regard, prevention is “something that begins, but does not necessarily end”, he stressed, adding that the causes of violence do not “die off” but rather “simmer away”. Underscoring the importance of international cooperation, he said States should set a strategy and fulfil their duty for the benefit of all.

GIANLUCA GRECO (Italy), associating himself with the European Union and the Group of Friends of the Responsibility to Protect, said that, under his country’s national legislation, development cooperation recognizes the centrality of the human person and pursues the objectives of eradicating poverty and protecting and fulfilling human rights, among others. Welcoming a bottom-up approach to prevention, he voiced support for the ongoing work of the Office of the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide. Its recently launched Plan of Action for Women in Communities to Counter Hate Speech and Prevent Incitement to Violence that Could Lead to Atrocity Crimes — the “Napoli Plan of Action” — is the result of joint work carried out by a group of community women leaders who met in Naples in July 2022 to discuss new ways to protect, support and empower those women who are at the forefront of

atrocities prevention, he said.

JAKUB KULHÁNEK (Czech Republic), aligning himself with the European Union and the Group of Friends of Responsibility to Protect, expressed strong support for the principle since its adoption in 2005. The persistence of horrific atrocities around the world starkly reminds the entire international community it must place the implementation of this principle at the forefront of its efforts. Prevention should involve broader efforts to adopt effective public policies that help build more resilient societies and protect vulnerable populations. The emphasis on prevention requires holistic approaches that the international community can pursue through a range of tools. Foremost is strengthening the protection of human rights globally. The Universal Periodic Review, special procedures and other mechanisms play a crucial role in prevention and early warning. In addition, a safe and enabling environment must be fostered for civil society actors, including human rights defenders, humanitarian workers and the media.

Right of Reply

The representative of India, speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that words like “genocide” were freely thrown about by Pakistan’s delegate to turn the guilt away. “Pakistan is, perhaps, the only country that has committed genocide,” she stressed. Moreover, led by its bigoted policies with the use of the “blasphemy laws”, people in Pakistan live in a state of fear. She emphasized that the entire union territories of Jammu and Kashmir — currently under Pakistan’s “illegal occupation” — are inalienable territories of India.

The representative of Pakistan said she must address the assertions just made by the representative of India, who did not address the facts regarding that country’s deeply troubling trajectory of human rights. Instead, that country’s representative made a sad attempt to spread falsehoods and propaganda against Pakistan. India has used terrorism as a State policy against its neighbours, she emphasized.

The representative of China, also in exercise of the right of reply, said she rejected the United States’ baseless accusation, adding: “What is genocide? The United States knows it best.” She recalled that the “systematic slaughter and plunder” of Native Americans led to a sharp decline of its population — from 5 million in 1492 to 250,000 in the early twentieth century. “The United States should stop dictating to other countries,” she stressed, adding that the country’s “so-called anti-terrorist military operations” have caused the death of 900,000 people over the past decade.

Action

MICHAEL HASENAU (Germany), speaking for Cambodia and the Principal Donors Group, which was formed to support the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia, introduced the draft resolution (document A/77/L.76). Twenty years ago, at the Cambodian Government’s request, the United Nations helped establish the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia to prosecute the crimes the Khmer Rouge’s senior leaders. The Extraordinary Chambers has made a critical contribution to accountability by holding a number of the accused responsible for atrocities. The Extraordinary Chambers’ contributions also include legal capacity-building regarding the domestic court system and strengthening civil society organizations. They have contributed to Cambodia’s public discourse on the Khmer Rouge crimes, including the reflection of the Khmer Rouge history in the curriculum of the public education system.

With the completion of the trial phase, the important residual phase of the Extraordinary Chambers has begun, he continued, including the implementation of judicial orders, management of the Chambers’ archives and the dissemination of information. The resolution ensures that these residual functions continue smoothly. The Principal Donors Group continues its efforts to facilitate them. It is essential that the Chambers’ legacy is secured in Cambodia and internationally. This using the lessons learned from the work of the Extraordinary Chambers in the fight against impunity for core crimes under international law, he said.

SOPHEA EAT (Cambodia) recalled that, between 1975 and 1979, Cambodia’s people lived under the Khmer Rouge regime, which deprived the nation of all human rights. Around a third of the country’s population lost their lives from execution, starvation and disease. In 1988, the Government of Cambodia sought the help of the United Nations in ensuring accountability and in 2006 the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia was created to bring justice to the victims and survivors. In the course of its work, the hybrid tribunal convicted three senior Khmer Rouge leaders for crimes against humanity. It completed its work in 2022, with some residual functions. “While there is justice for victims, those surviving the holocaust — myself included — can look in the future with the sense of closure,” she said, noting: “The wounds deep down in our hearts are healing, even though scars will remain.” Throughout the Court’s process in the last 17 years, 240,000 individuals attended the hearings while many more watched live on TV, she reported, while adding that the residual functions of the Court are designed to preserve its legacy.

HOANG NGUYEN NGUYEN (Viet Nam) said the fact that the item is on the General Assembly agenda nearly five years after the verdict is an indication of the continued relevance and significant legacies of the Extraordinary Chambers. Although court proceedings and outcomes were long awaited, and even belated, the Courts have brought eventual justice to millions of innocent victims and their families, both Cambodians and Vietnamese. The verdicts were also an overdue indication of the righteousness of his country's self-defence and subsequent joining of forces in solidarity with the Cambodia National Front to end the genocidal regime of Pol Pot — an act which was unfortunately politicized at the time, with Viet Nam wrongfully sanctioned for many years. “The Courts can serve as an example of the perseverance of international law, and that atrocity crimes, such as genocides, will be duly punished,” he stressed.

The General Assembly then adopted “L.76” without a vote.

By its terms, the Assembly encouraged the Secretary-General and the Government of Cambodia to take all measures necessary to fully implement the Addendum to the Agreement between the United Nations and the Government of Cambodia concerning the prosecution under Cambodian law of crimes committed during the period of Democratic Kampuchea on the Transitional Arrangements and the Completion of Work of the Extraordinary Chambers. It further requested the Secretary-General to report to the Assembly at its seventy-ninth session on the implementation of the present resolution.

JUAN RAMÓN DE LA FUENTE RAMÍREZ (Mexico) introduced the draft resolution which aims to make explicit the importance of ensuring access to mental health services and psychosocial support in an inclusive manner (document A/77/L.77). It is also part of a longer-term strategy to place the issue on the multilateral agenda and is aligned with Security Council resolution 2668 (2022). “To recognize the importance of mental health is to recognize the dignity and integral well-being to which we are all entitled, without exception,” he said. Negotiations showed there were differences on how to refer to or understand concepts such as mental health or psychosocial disabilities. Yet, it was clear from the outset that there is a consensus on the importance of placing these issues on the United Nations agenda.

The resolution addresses all issues in a clear and balanced manner, he said. Yet, adoption is not enough as the international community must move to make mental health a part of universal health coverage. The General Assembly is adopting, for the first time, a resolution that dignifies mental health and protects human rights while calling for the right to mental health services and psychosocial support for all, he noted.

The General Assembly then adopted “L.77” without a vote.

Speakers then took to the floor, speaking in explanation of position after action.

The representative of Sweden, speaking for the European Union, reported that, on 7 June, the European Commission presented a comprehensive strategy on mental health that identified 20 flagship initiatives with dedicated finances, while pledging mental health and psychosocial support services for displaced people. The Commission also presented a new European Union Global Health Strategy in November 2022.

The representative of Oman, speaking for the Gulf Cooperation Council, emphasized that it views sexual and reproductive rights through the cultural and societal frameworks and in line with national laws and regulations.

The representative of the United States, speaking for Australia, Canada and New Zealand, welcomed the resolution's alignment with the principles of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, while expressing concern that Indigenous Peoples experience disproportional levels of psychosocial distress and suicide.

The representative of Guatemala disassociated herself from preambular paragraph 28 and expressed reservation about the use of terms on issues pertaining to sexual and reproductive rights that contravene the country's national legislation and internal legal order. She also said her delegation reserved the right to interpret the term “reproductive rights” without including the right to abortion.

The representative of Iran disassociated himself from the preambular paragraph 8, adding that consideration and implementation of provisions is subject to Iran's national laws, regulations and policies, including its cultural and social specificities.

The representative of Venezuela said the draft resolution was a historic landmark to be developed in a cross-cutting way through all United Nations bodies. Citing the effects of the pandemic, he noted his delegation had called for inclusion of language on unilateral coercive measures against some countries — which was not acceptable to the countries that brought forward the negotiations.

The representative of Indonesia disassociated his delegation from operative paragraph 17, as it is essential that no one-size-fits-all approach is taken. He further registered his reservation over the use of some terminologies and language

referring to mental health.

The representative of Egypt noted that, despite lengthy negotiations of some 50 hours, Member States only negotiated 17 paragraphs out of 55. There was a need to continue consultations on the whole text, as this was the first draft resolution of its kind, and numerous amendments were made after each negotiation cycle, including its very title. He expressed regret that numerous delegations sought to weaken all aspects of the text pertaining to sustainable development.

The representative of Nicaragua said the lack of goodwill during the negotiations resulted in the position of 28 countries wanting to include a paragraph on the negative impact of illegal unilateral coercive measures being ignored. There was no reasonable explanation for leaving out this paragraph. It is unacceptable as developing countries face great challenges and need access to financial sources.

The representative of the Russian Federation noted the resolution recognized the importance of mental health protection for the first time. The pandemic led to an increase in mental health disorders, as health care resources were diverted to combat the COVID-19 virus. Yet, the scales on this resolution were tipped towards bringing human rights into the issue of mental health care. In addition, the negative impact of unilateral coercive measures on mental health care was left out.

The representative of Belarus said she regretted that the paragraph on the impact of unilateral coercive measures on the health sector, which received broad support during the negotiation process, was not reflected in the resolution's final version and did not reflect the realities faced by the populations of sanctioned countries. Unilateral coercive measures impact the supply of medicines and medical equipment, complicate international payments and logistics and create a threat to the provision of necessary medicines.

The representative of Nigeria, pointing to the non-consensual language of preambular paragraph 19, said it is open to misinterpretation. In this regard, she urged Member States to maintain the agreed language, noting that Nigeria understands the term "gender" as "men and women".

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Bangladesh International Crimes Tribunal

War crimes accused dies at DMCH (The Business Standard) June 15, 2023

A war crimes accused died at Dhaka Medical College Hospital on Thursday (15 June).

The deceased was Nizamul Haque Miah, 76, of Sadhuhati village in Kashiani upazila of Gopalganj district.

Subash Chandra Bala, deputy district magistrate of Dhaka Central Jail (Keraniganj), said Nizamul Haque, an accused in a case over crimes against humanity during the Liberation War in 1971, was taken to DMCH after he fell sick in the prison.

Prison guards including jail guard Md Solaiman Pradhan took him to the emergency department of DMCH at 6:08am where the duty doctor declared him dead, said DMCH Police Outpost Inspector Bachchu Mia.

The body has been kept at the hospital morgue for an autopsy, he said.

Two arrested on war crime charges (New Age Bangladesh) June 24, 2023

The Rajshahi police on Saturday arrested two people in a case filed fourteen years ago on charges of 'committing crimes against humanity' during the War of Independence in 1971.

The arrestees are Mofiz Uddin, 75, and Khetab, 80, of Kaluhati village of Charchat upazila in Rajshahi.

At a press briefing, ABM Masud Hossain, superintendent of the district police, said that acting on a tip-off, a team of the Charghat police arrested the accused at their houses at Kaluhati village at about 1:00am on Saturday.

He said that Golam Hossain, a resident of Kaluhati village, filed a case against six people, including Mofiz and Khetab with the Charghat model police station on April 4 in 2009 on charges of perpetrating crimes against humanity during the country's War of Independence in 1971.

ABM Masud Hossain said that three out of six accused in the case died while the rest one was still absconding.

He said that the duo arrestees went into hiding following the filing of the case and had returned home recently.

'The process of handing them over to the International Crimes Tribunal (Bangladesh) through a Rajshahi court is underway', the police official added.

Bangladesh tribunal sentences 4 to death for 1971 war crimes in Jashore (BD News 24) June 25, 2023

A war crimes tribunal has sentenced four people to death for killings in Jashore during the 1971 Liberation War.

A three-judge panel of the International Crimes Tribunal headed by Justice Md Shahinur Islam issued the verdict on Sunday with convict Amzad Hossain Molla in the dock.

The three others, the associates of Amzad – Ohab Molla, Mahtab Biswas and Fosiar Rahman Molla – are absconding. This is the 52nd verdict issued by the tribunal, Prosecutor Shahidur Rahman said.

"Those who killed people indiscriminately during the war are enemies of humanity," the judges observed in the verdict.

The accused were convicted of killing six people after torture in detention. Another accused, Nawsher Ali, has died.

According to the tribunal's investigators, Amzad was a commander of the Razakar force, which was formed to collaborate with the Pakistani forces during the war, in Bagharpara. A Muslim League leader in 1971, Amzad was involved with the Awami League during his arrest several years ago.

The people killed by Amzad and his associates in 1971 are Md Moyenuddin, Dr Nawfel Uddin Biswas, Surat Ali Biswas, Moktar Biswas and Razab Ali Biswas.

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War Crimes Investigation in Myanmar

'No Escape': Inside Myanmar Military's Deadly War on Civilians (The Irrawaddy) By Yuzana
June 23, 2023

Daw Aye Mar's youngest daughter begins trembling in terror as soon as the nighttime explosions shatter the silence of their household. The shells are fired by heavy weapons at the regime's military base in Depyin Town, a couple of kilometers from her village of Let Yat Kone on the border of Depyin and Ye-U townships in Sagaing Region.

Daw Aye Mar rushes to soothe her three children, pushing aside the feeling of panic rising in her chest. The boom of artillery has become a regular part of village life since last year, but they never get used to it.

Residents of Let Yat Kone and nearby villages were rocked by five explosions on Monday night, the 78th birthday of detained civilian leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi.

"We never sleep peacefully at night because they [the military] often fire heavy weapons," Daw Aye Mar told The

Irrawaddy.

Last September, regime forces killed 13 people, including seven children, in an aerial attack on Let Yat Kone. Since then, junta troops based in Depyin and Ye-U townships have been shelling surrounding villages frequently, despite the absence of clashes with local resistance forces.

“I’m always worried about what will happen when a shell lands on my house,” she said.

Junta military bases in both townships have been shelling the villages every other day for the last month, according to Depyin residents.

“This year, regime infantry have suffered heavy casualties during raids on villages, so they no longer dare to conduct ground assaults. Instead, they are pounding both civilians and PDFs with heavy weapons from their base camps,” a resistance fighter from Depyin Township told The Irrawaddy.

Daw Aye Mar confirmed that regime artillery is targeting thousands of residents of around 50 villages in Depyin and Ye-U.

People living in resistance strongholds and ethnic territories have been suffering regime airstrikes, arson campaigns, infantry raids and shelling since 2021, when the military seized power from the civilian National League for Democracy (NLD) Government.

Residents of Kayah, Karen and Mon states and Bago and Sagaing regions are bearing the brunt of regime artillery assaults.

Regime troops have killed 753 people around the country so far this year, with Sagaing suffering the highest death toll (433), according to the civilian National Unity Government’s Ministry of Human Rights.

In Kayah State, more than 300 civilians had been killed in artillery strikes and other regime attacks as of May, according to the Progressive Karenni People’s Force. In Moebye, a town on the border of southern Shan State and Kayah, 43 people have been killed and 44 injured in regime assaults that began last year, according to the Moebye People’s Defense Force (PDF). The attacks have also destroyed 680 houses and buildings in the state, including churches and temples. Much of the civilian population has fled, but the Myanmar military is now targeting refugee camps in Kayah State, Moebye PDF said.

In the first week of June, two civilians were killed and two were injured by junta artillery strikes on Moebye.

Maw Ni Ka, who fled her home in Moebye amid fierce fighting in 2021, said regime artillery bombardments have followed them to their IDP camp. The 38-year-old’s two daughters were killed by shelling in late September as they sheltered in Mway Taw Monastery in Moebye Town.

She relives the trauma of her children’s death every time she hears the boom of artillery.

The heavy weapons are being fired frequently at Moebye and surrounding refugee camps by Light Infantry Battalion 422.

“No matter where we run, we can’t escape. They shell the IDP camps both day and night,” Maw Ni Ka told The Irrawaddy.

“I’m constantly hearing news of internally displaced people being hurt and killed by the regime’s weapons. So, I live in a state of fear and insecurity,” she added.

The regime troops are relying on heavy weapons and firing at the people indiscriminately, said Salai Yaw Man, spokesperson of the Mindat people’s administration in Chin State.

Light Infantry Battalion 274 is targeting not just Mindat civilians but also the town hospital and clinics, he said.

“After drinking at night, they [junta forces] start firing at civilian villages,” Salai Yaw Man told The Irrawaddy.

Mindat is a gateway to Chin State on the border with Magwe Region, a resistance stronghold. The Chin Defense Force (Mindat) and PDF in Magwe Region are currently involved in heavy clashes with regime troops.

“We heard that the Myanmar military has sent ammunition to Mindat from Magwe’s Kyauthut Town. So, the regime strikes could escalate,” Salia Yaw Man said.

Residents said they are facing almost daily junta bombardments and are desperate to get out of the situation.

“I want to live peacefully. I really want to go back home,” Maw Ni Ka told The Irrawaddy.

In Sagaing, Depyin resident Daw Aye Mar said the people would live in fear and trouble for as long as idiots ruled the country.

“Now we are scared about ground troops, warplanes and artillery every day.”

Myanmar’s Unseen War: Rising Civilian Casualties and Junta’s Brutal Strategies (BNN Network) By

Salman Akhtar

June 23, 2023

The gruesome reality of Myanmar’s civil war unfolds, as the civilian death toll relentlessly escalates. Civilian fatalities caused by the military have spiked over the past month, with the fiercest conflicts being observed in Sagaing’s northern region, the central region of Magway, and eastern states of Shan and Kayah. Radio Free Asia has reported that between May 15 and June 15, 123 civilians fell victim to military brutality in these high-conflict areas.

The circumstances of these deaths are horrific. Some victims were caught in the crossfire between junta troops and rebel forces. These rebel groups have been putting up a formidable resistance against the junta troops, which has spread throughout the country. Shockingly, in instances like in Kawlin township, Sagaing, residents have reported massacres perpetrated by the military, who detained civilians to use them as human shields.

In a chilling account, a Khan Thar village resident revealed how soldiers forced detainees to walk ahead of them to clear paths in minefields. After performing their forced labor, these civilians were subjected to interrogations, with some being killed. The brutality of the junta troops is explicit, their respect for human life seemingly nonexistent.

Over the four-week period, the casualty distribution included 43 civilians in Sagaing, seven in Magway, 37 in Shan and Kayah states, and 28 in areas controlled by the Karen National Union ethnic rebel group. This ethnic group controls regions such as Bago, Tanintharyi, Kayin, and Mon states. Additionally, eight more were killed in Mandalay region and Kachin and Chin states. In a separate incident, the junta troops carried out a series of ruthless “clearance raids” on villages in Magway’s Yesagyo township from May 26-29. These raids resulted in the death of six civilians, including a 40-year-old woman and five men in their 30s and 40s. The victims were accused of being members of the People’s Defense Force, and they were either hit by shelling, killed while fleeing the raids, or when returning to their villages to extinguish fires started by the junta troops.

A resident of Yesagyo’s Yay Lei Kyun area disclosed that the junta troops burned 671 houses from May 26 to 29, leaving more than 3,000 people homeless. Southern Shan state’s Moebye township saw a death toll of at least 35 civilians from May 25 to June 12. Among the victims were 10 women and three minors, aged between eight and 17, according to the Karenni Human Rights Group.

Despite the mounting atrocities, the junta remains unresponsive to questions or criticisms regarding these mass killings. Previous claims from the junta deny targeting civilians, insisting that their attacks focus solely on members of the armed resistance.

Banya, the founder of the Karenni Human Rights Group, denounces the junta’s conduct, accusing the military of committing war crimes and ruling through fear to maintain its grip on power. He explains how the junta aims to create divisions between the people and anti-junta forces through these terror acts. Political analyst Than Soe Naing predicts that as resistance grows, junta violence will intensify, resulting in an even greater number of civilian casualties. Institute for Strategy and Policy (Myanmar), an independent research group, has reported that at least 8,640 civilians have been killed since the military coup over two years ago. More than 2,400 of these deaths occurred amid armed conflict, emphasizing the grim reality of Myanmar’s ongoing struggle for peace and freedom.

Myanmar: Military Junta Gets a Free Pass (Other News) By Andrew Firmin

June 23, 2023

The violence keeps coming in Myanmar, under military rule since February 2021. The junta stands accused of war crimes and crimes against humanity, with evidence of systematic use of killings, rape, torture and other gross human rights violations in its attempt to suppress forces demanding a return to democracy.

Even humanitarian aid is restricted. Recently the junta refused to allow in aid organisations trying to provide food, water and medicines to people left in desperate need by a devastating cyclone. It's far from the first time it's blocked aid.

Crises like this demand an international response. But largely standing on the sidelines while this happens is the regional intergovernmental body, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Its recent summit, held in Indonesia in May, failed to produce any progress. ASEAN's response to the coup was to issue a text, the Five-Point Consensus (5PC), in April 2021. This called for the immediate cessation of violence and constructive dialogue between all parties. ASEAN agreed to provide humanitarian help, appoint a special envoy and visit Myanmar to meet with all parties.

Civil society criticised this agreement because it recognised the role of the junta and failed to make any mention of the need to restore democracy. And the unmitigated violence and human rights violations are the clearest possible sign that the 5PC isn't working – but ASEAN sticks to it. At its May summit, ASEAN states reiterated their support for the plan.

A major challenge is that most ASEAN states have no interest in democracy. All 10 have heavily restricted civic space. As well as Myanmar, civic space is closed in Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam.

It wouldn't suit such states to have a thriving democracy on their doorstep, which could only bring greater domestic and international pressure to follow suit. States that repress human rights at home typically carry the same approach into international organisations, working to limit their ability to uphold human rights commitments and scrutinise violations.

Continuing emphasis on the 5PC hasn't masked divisions among ASEAN states. Some appear to think they can engage with the junta and at least persuade it to moderate its violence – although reality makes this increasingly untenable. But others, particularly Cambodia – a one-party state led by the same prime minister since 1998 – seem intent on legitimising the junta.

Variable pressure has come from ASEAN's chair, which rotates annually and appoints the special envoy. Under the last two, Brunei Darussalam – a sultanate that last held an election in 1965 – and Cambodia, little happened. Brunei never visited the country after being refused permission to meet with democratic leaders, while Cambodia's prime minister, Hun Sen, visited Myanmar last year. The first post-coup visit to Myanmar by a head of government, this could only be construed as conferring legitimacy.

Indonesia, the current chair, hasn't appointed a special envoy, instead setting up an office headed by the foreign minister. So far it appears to be taking a soft approach of quiet diplomacy rather than public action.

Thailand, currently led by a pro-military government, is also evidently happy to engage with the junta. While junta representatives remain banned from ASEAN summits, Thailand has broken ranks and invited ASEAN foreign ministers, including from Myanmar, to hold talks about reintegrating the junta's leaders. A government that itself came to power through a coup but should now step aside after an election where it was thoroughly defeated looks to be attempting to bolster the legitimacy of military rule.

ASEAN states seem unable to move beyond the 5PC even as they undermine it. But the fact that they're formally sticking with it enables the wider international community to stand back, on the basis of respecting regional leadership and the 5PC.

The UN Security Council finally adopted a resolution on Myanmar in December 2022. This called for an immediate end to the violence, the release of all political prisoners and unhindered humanitarian access. But its language didn't go far enough in condemning systematic human rights violations and continued to emphasise the 5PC. It failed to impose sanctions such as an arms embargo or to refer Myanmar to the International Criminal Court (ICC).

Civil society in Myanmar and the region is urging ASEAN to go further. Many have joined together to develop a five-point agenda that goes beyond the 5PC. It calls for a strategy to end military violence through sanctions, an arms embargo and a referral of Myanmar to the ICC. It demands ASEAN engages beyond the junta, and particularly with democratic forces including the National Unity Government – the democratic government in exile. It urges a strengthening of the special envoy role and a pivoting of humanitarian aid to local responders rather than the junta. ASEAN needs to take this on board.

ASEAN's current plan is a recipe for continuing military violence, increasingly legitimised by its neighbours' acceptance. Ceremonial elections could offer further fuel for this.

The junta once promised to hold elections by August, but in February, on the coup's second anniversary, it extended the state of emergency for another six months. If and when those elections finally happen, there's no hope of them being free or fair. In March, the junta dissolved some 40 political parties, including the ousted ruling party, the National League for Democracy. The only purpose of any eventual fake election will be to give the junta a legitimising veneer to present as a sign of progress – and some ASEAN states may be prepared to buy this. This shouldn't be allowed. ASEAN needs to listen to the voices of civil society calling for it to get its act together – and stick together – in holding the junta to account. If it doesn't, it will keep failing not only Myanmar's people, but all in the region who reasonably expect that fundamental human rights should be respected and those who kill, rape and torture should face justice.

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Venezuela

International Criminal Court authorizes reopening probe into Venezuela security forces
(Washington Post) By Mike Corder
June 27, 2023

International prosecutors should resume investigating alleged crimes against humanity in Venezuela by security forces under President Nicolás Maduro because the country's own probe has fallen short, the International Criminal Court ruled Tuesday.

The court had suspended an investigation into alleged wrongdoing including use of excessive force and torture – its first in Latin America – after Venezuela asked to take over the case in April last year.

Seven months later, Prosecutor Karim Khan sought to reopen his investigation, saying that Venezuelan efforts toward delivering justice “remain either insufficient in scope or have not yet had any concrete impact on potentially relevant proceedings.”

Judges agreed, and the court said in a statement Tuesday that Venezuela’s actions do “not sufficiently mirror the scope” of the intended investigation, including by failing to focus on more than just low-level perpetrators.

Human Rights Watch welcomed the ruling.

“With today’s decision, ICC judges have greenlighted the only credible pathway to justice for the victims of abuses by Nicolás Maduro’s government,” Juanita Goebertus, the group’s Americas Director, said. “The decision confirms that Venezuela is not acting to bring justice for the crimes likely to be within the ICC’s investigation. Impunity remains the norm.”

The decision comes less than three weeks after Khan visited Venezuela and signed a memorandum of understanding with Maduro to establish an office for ICC prosecutors in the country.

The case was brought to the court in 2018 by member states Argentina, Canada, Colombia, Chile, Paraguay and Peru, who sought an investigation into alleged crimes in Venezuela since early 2014, the year after Maduro took office.

Khan’s predecessor, Fatou Bensouda, conducted a preliminary probe and in 2020 said she found a reasonable basis to conclude that crimes against humanity had been committed in Venezuela, since at least April 2017. Bensouda’s probe focused mainly on allegations of excessive force, arbitrary detention and torture by security forces during a crackdown on anti-government protests in 2017.

The ICC is a court of last resort that investigates alleged war crimes, crimes against humanity and other grave offenses when nations are unable, or unwilling, to do so.

Judges said that Venezuelan investigations appeared to be focused on low-level perpetrators. The ICC seeks to prosecute senior commanders deemed responsible for crimes.

The judges also noted that “Venezuela appears to have taken limited investigative steps and that, in many cases, there appear to be periods of unexplained investigative inactivity,” the court said in its statement.

They also said that the domestic investigations in Venezuela did not appear to sufficiently cover parts of the international probe — including allegations of persecution and sexual crimes.

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Grotian Moment: The International War Crimes Trial Blog:

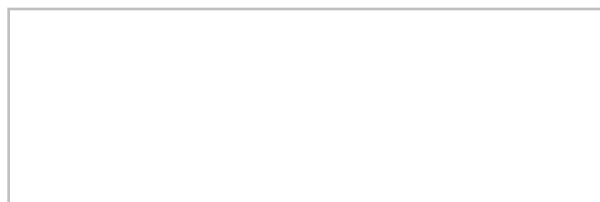
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