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AFRICA

NORTH AFRICA

Libya

2021 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Libya (US Department of State)

April 12, 2022

Libya's interim Government of National Unity was selected by the 75-member UN-facilitated Libyan Political Dialogue Forum in November 2020 and subsequently endorsed by the Libyan House of Representatives. Libya was emerging from a state of civil conflict. The government controlled limited territory. Parallel, unrecognized institutions in the eastern part of the country, especially those aligned with the nonstate actor known as the Libyan National Army, led by General Khalifa Haftar, challenged its authority.

The government had limited control over security forces, which consisted of a mix of semiregular units, tribal armed groups, and civilian volunteers. The national police force under the Ministry of Interior oversaw internal security, supported by the armed forces under the Ministry of Defense. Security-related police work generally fell to informal armed groups, which received government salaries but lacked formal training, supervision, or consistent accountability. There were credible reports that members of security forces committed numerous abuses.

The Government of National Unity and nonstate actors largely upheld the 2020 cease-fire agreement, although both sides continued receiving support from foreign military forces, foreign fighters, and mercenaries. Informal nonstate armed groups filled security vacuums across the country. ISIS-Libya attempted to maintain a limited presence in the southwestern desert. The Libyan Political Dialogue Forum and House of Representatives each convened to establish a framework for national elections as called for by the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum roadmap. Elections did not take place as scheduled on December 24.

Significant human rights problems included credible reports of: unlawful or arbitrary killings by various armed groups; forced disappearances by various armed groups; torture perpetrated by armed groups on all sides; harsh and life-threatening conditions in prison and detention facilities; arbitrary arrest or detention; political prisoners or detainees; serious problems with the independence of the judiciary; arbitrary or unlawful interference with privacy; serious abuses in internal conflict, including killing of civilians and the recruitment or use of children in conflict; serious restrictions on free expression and media, including violence against journalists and the existence of libel and slander laws; substantial interference with freedom of association; refoulement of refugees and asylum seekers; serious government corruption; lack of accountability for gender-based violence; trafficking in persons; threats of violence targeting ethnic minorities and foreigners; existence or use of laws

criminalizing same-sex sexual conduct between adults; significant restrictions on workers' freedom of association, including limits on collective bargaining and the right to strike; and forced labor.

Divisions between western and eastern institutions, a security vacuum in the south, the presence of criminal groups throughout the country, and the government's weakness severely inhibited investigation and prosecution of abuses. The government took limited steps to investigate, prosecute, and punish officials who committed human rights abuses and acts of corruption within its area of reach; however, its limited resources, as well as political considerations, reduced its ability and willingness to prosecute and punish perpetrators.

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CENTRAL AFRICA

Central African Republic

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

2021 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Central African Republic (US Department of State)

April 12, 2022

The Central African Republic is a presidential republic. Faustin-Archange Touadera was elected president for a second five-year term in the first round during December 2020 presidential and legislative elections marred by widespread violence. In December 2020 six armed groups formerly in the peace process combined to form a new alliance, the Coalition of Patriots for Change, led by former president Francois Bozize, and called for a suspension of the electoral process and the establishment of national consultations. These groups significantly disrupted the presidential and legislative elections. More than half of the country's polling stations were unable to return results primarily due to insecurity, and only an estimated 37 percent of all registered voters were able to cast votes for the presidential elections. As a result of election-related insecurity, President Touadera requested support from the Russian Federation government, which facilitated the deployment of a Russian private military company, Wagner Group, and Rwandan forces. Several opposition leaders denounced irregularities in the elections. International observers found the elections not to be free and fair due to an increased level of violence and intimidation by armed groups. On June 11, President Touadera appointed Henri Marie Dondra as prime minister

Police and gendarmes are responsible for enforcing law and maintaining order. The Central African Armed Forces report to the Ministry of Defense and have the primary role of maintaining internal security. The president is commander in chief of the armed forces. Police and the gendarmerie report to the Ministry of Interior and Public Security. Civilian authorities' control over security forces continued to improve but remained weak. There were credible reports that members of the security forces, along with Russian private military company elements from the Wagner Group, engaged in active combat and committed human rights abuses at a rate comparable to armed groups.

State authority beyond the capital improved with the increased deployment of prefects and troops in provincial capitals. Armed groups, however, still controlled some portions of territory throughout the country and acted as de facto governing bodies in those areas, taxing local populations and appointing armed group members to leadership roles.

Significant human rights issues included credible reports of: unlawful or arbitrary killings by the government; forced disappearances by the government; torture by the government; harsh and life-threatening prison conditions; arbitrary arrest or detention; serious abuses in the context of an internal conflict, including killing of civilians, enforced disappearances,

torture and physical abuse or punishment, unlawful recruitment or use of child soldiers, and other conflict-related abuses by armed groups; restrictions on free expression and media, including the existence of criminal libel laws; serious government corruption; lack of investigation of and accountability for gender-based violence; and laws criminalizing consensual same-sex conduct between adults.

The government took steps to investigate and prosecute government officials for alleged human rights abuses and corruption, including in the security forces. Nevertheless, a climate of impunity and a lack of access to legal services remained obstacles to citizens' ability to obtain formal justice.

Intercommunal violence and targeted attacks on civilians by armed groups continued. Armed groups perpetrated serious abuses of human rights and international humanitarian law during these internal conflicts. Ex-Seleka, Anti-balaka, and other armed groups committed unlawful killings, torture and other mistreatment, abductions, sexual assaults, looting, and destruction of property. The government stated it was investigating several high-profile cases of intercommunal violence during the year and considering charges of crimes against humanity and war crimes against perpetrators. (Note: This report refers to the "ex-Seleka" for all abuses attributed to the armed factions associated with Seleka, including the Popular Front for the Renaissance in the Central African Republic and the Union for Peace, which were formed after Seleka was dissolved in 2013. The armed group known as "Return, Reclamation, Rehabilitation" also committed serious human rights abuses during the year.)

Central African Republic: War Crimes Court's First Trial Offers Potential Justice Model for Other Countries (Human Rights Watch)

April 12, 2022

The opening of the first trial at the Central African Republic's Special Criminal Court (SCC) on April 19, 2022 represents significant progress in the difficult effort to see justice for grave crimes committed in the country, Human Rights Watch said today. Human Rights Watch issued a question-and-answer document ahead of the SCC's trial.

The case involves war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in May 2019 in Koundjili and Lemouna allegedly by the suspects, Issa Sallet Adoum, Ousman Yaouba, and Tahir Mahamat, members of the "3R" rebel group. Human Rights Watch has documented the events.

"The Special Criminal Court's first trial is a landmark moment for victims in the Central African Republic who have repeatedly called for justice for heinous crimes committed during successive conflicts in the country," said Esti Tambay, senior International Justice counsel at Human Rights Watch. "This novel court – which combines international and domestic experience to hold those responsible for grave crimes to account – could be an important justice model for other countries to consider."

The SCC became operational in 2018 to help limit widespread impunity for serious crimes in the Central African Republic. The court is staffed by both international and national judges and prosecutors, and benefits from international assistance. It has the authority to try grave crimes committed during the country's armed conflicts since 2003.

The question-and-answer document covers:

Background on the Special Criminal Court, its significance, and the challenges it has faced in becoming operational;

What the first trial is about and how it will proceed, including efforts to make it accessible to local communities;

What other cases the SCC is investigating and what other suspects it has charged, Key features of the court's procedure, including how defendants and victims interact with the court; and

How the SCC relates to the International Criminal Court's (ICC) investigations in the Central African Republic, as well as to domestic prosecutions.

The SCC is conducting investigations in tandem with the ICC, the global permanent court of last resort, which currently has four suspects in custody regarding charges of crimes committed in the Central African Republic. The ICC can play an important role in pursuing cases involving more senior leadership, while the SCC seeks to conduct trials in a wider set of cases in the country's capital, Bangui.

"The courts should be strategic in their coordination to maximize their combined efforts at securing justice," Tambay said. "All countries committed to justice have an important role to play in supporting these courts with much-needed funding and to carry out arrests."

Central African Republic war crimes trial postponed after lawyer no-show (Reuters)

The inaugural trial of a court established to prosecute war crimes in Central African Republic's drawn-out conflict was postponed on its first day on Tuesday when lawyers for defendants boycotted proceedings.

The trial is related to the massacre of 46 civilians in the northern villages of Koundjili and Lemouna in May 2019, killings prosecutors say were carried out by the 3R rebel group. Three members of the group have been charged with war crimes and crimes against humanity.

The defendants' lawyers failed to show on Tuesday, the exact reason for which was unclear. Joseph Bindoumi, president of the Central African League for Human Rights, told Reuters it was over a dispute about the treatment of the defenders.

The trial will resume on April 25.

The case is being heard in the Special Criminal Court, which was set up in 2015 to try crimes committed in wartime. It is seen as a milestone for Central African Republic where a decade-long conflict between government forces and rebels has forced more than one million people to flee.

Mass atrocities have led to interventions from United Nations peacekeepers and troops from Russia, France and Rwanda. But rights groups say crimes against civilians are common, often undocumented, and carried out with impunity.

The first trial signals "a better tomorrow for the victims" who can finally see the accused tried, the court's spokesman Gervais Opportun Bodagay told Reuters.

Separately, at least three Central Africa Republic militia leaders are on trial at the International Criminal Court at the Hague for crimes allegedly committed in the country. [read more](#)

Central African Republic, rich in gold and diamonds, has been rocked by violence since 2013 when mainly Muslim Selaka rebels ousted then president Francois Bozize, prompting reprisals from mostly Christian militias.

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Sudan & South Sudan

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

Sudanese court finds more Al Bashir-linked officials not guilty (The National)

By Ahmed Maher
April 8, 2022

A court in Sudan on Thursday found several former government officials and current politicians not guilty of instigating violence and undermining the transitional period that followed the ousting of Omar Al Bashir.

The verdict comes three years after the dictator was overthrown on 11 April, 2019 after 30 years in power.

Some of the 13 acquitted were officials of the former ruling National Congress Party, including Ibrahim Ghandour, a former foreign minister under Al Bashir. Islamist politician Mohamed Ali Al Gazouli, the head of State of Law and Development party, one of the political entities that sprang to political life in 2019, was also on the list.

Speaking to reporters and local media after the case, the defence lawyer Abdalla Derf said the charges were baseless and politically motivated and that the court had ordered the immediate release of his clients.

This is not the first acquittal of former officials who served under Al Bashir.

In January, a court acquitted Othman Mohamed Youssef Kibr, the dictator's former deputy at the NCP. He faced charges of

corruption and squandering public finances.

Those acquitted on Thursday had been arrested in sporadic raids over the past three years and faced a common charge of undermining Sudan's transition to democracy, a period that started only days after Al Bashir was toppled.

Sudan is witnessing growing unrest as thousands of citizens have been taking to the streets to protest against the military takeover of the civilian-led government of Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok.

The protesters insist on civilian rule. Both sides have blamed each other for the country's financial and social woes.

The military takeover has led the US and international development agencies to suspend hundreds of millions of dollars in aid and budgetary support.

Anti-coup activists say the release of the officials was orchestrated by military authorities to drum up support from a cohort of politicians of various political ideologies.

"The release of the leader of the NCP, Ibrahim Ghandour, and those with him indicates that the October 25 coup was prepared in full coordination between the generals and Al Bashir's party," Sudanese author and anti-coup activist Mohammed Mustafa told The National. "This would fuel more anger against General Al-Burhan, who claimed in his coup statement that what he had done was corrective movement for the December revolution."

In 2019, Al Bashir was sentenced to two years in detention after being found guilty of corruption.

He's still in the high-security Kober prison in Khartoum as he also faces charges of being involved in the killing of protesters during the street demonstrations, which he denies.

More than 10 years ago, the International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague issued an arrest warrant for Al Bashir to face charges of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity over his role in the conflict in the western region of Darfur.

On Tuesday, the trial of a Sudanese leader of a Darfur militia known as Janjaweed opened in the ICC. He faced charges of war crimes in Darfur.

Ali Muhammad Ali Abd—Al Rahman, 72, also known as Ali Kushayb, pleaded innocent to all 31 charges for the crimes allegedly committed between August 2003 and 2004.

Politics in Sudan: managing conflict in multiple intolerant contexts (Sudan Tribune)

By Hussien Arko Minawi

April 9, 2022

When we go through the pages of the crisis in Sudan and read between the lines, there is more than one complexity that dominates the crisis, but the most mind-boggling issue is the one related to the contexts of our conflict, it is a real challenge to our politics. According to the norms of engagement in politics, this challenge is certainly an indispensable rule of the political game as long as the rivalry is one of the ABCs of politics. To face this challenge, we need a paradigm shift in addressing the different contexts of our crisis. The plurality of the opposition and the plurality of means of resistance are also part of political complexity in Sudan and they have posed a degree of challenge, but the biggest challenge that must be faced by the Sudanese, is not in the plurality of parties to the conflict or the plurality of means of resistance, it's actually, in the plurality of contexts in which the conflict is managed, or what might be called a conflict of multiple contexts.

The term conflict of contexts used above may need a little clarification to avoid any semantic confusion. Though the term seems a new coinage, it is an old political reality that contributed to the fragmentation of Sudan in terms of geography and politics and made the state almost collapse. The conflict of contexts in Sudan is the most instrumental weapon that brought destruction to Sudan. It is a kind of conflict that can not be contained by conventional means, but rather a dogmatic one and ideologically oriented in nature, every context has no choice but to inflict a crushing defeat on its political rival. They believe in the principle of two options of no compromise; black and white options. Politically, Islamists manage the conflict on the principle of war and peace, or Muslim and Non-Muslim, communists manage the conflict on the principle of either communism or repression, and the Baathists see everyone who does not belong to Arab nationalism has no room in the world of politics. The complication of this conflict is evident in many dimensions. It is in the dimension of war, in the dimension of culture, in the dimension of our social relations, and in the dimension of religion. Multiple contexts embrace multiple paradoxes that a country like Sudan with its complex diversity can never accommodate, not even a simple community can

tolerate it.

Because of intolerance of the different contexts in our political history, many opinions related to our crisis had been suppressed and considered taboos for a long time. This has happened whether under dictatorships or during sporadic democracy. Until the recent past, It was not easy for a person in Sudan to express his opinion openly and freely about self-determination. Due to accumulated sacrifices, nowadays, the situation has changed and no longer people are held captive by taboos invented for political purposes. Now, It's an everyday phenomenon people boldly discuss issues related to the future of Sudan and its unity. In political, academic and media forms, it is not surprising that you hear opinions and comments like; Sudan is a country that has not yet formed or it is in the process of formation.

These comments at least reflect the difficulties experienced by Sudan under the national governments of the post-independence era. Certainly, it was a period of suppression and considered one of the most difficult times for Sudan as major transformations have taken place within this period were marked by extreme shock in many aspects and made the future of the country unpredictable.

The viewpoints made about the process in Sudan are also strongly supported by so many political, social and historical events of different contexts that have coincided with the idea of the process of formation.

Our history is full of a series of painful events that started with the mutiny of the Torit garrison in 1955. Some events were turning points in the process of formation. The wars engineered by dictatorial regimes against the margin in Darfur, South Sudan, Blue Nile and Nuba Mountains have had an apocalyptic ending. They have torn the social fabric, jeopardized national unity, disintegrated the country and paved the way for a wide range of war crimes. This conflict is managed in the context of what is known as Margin-Centre conflict. While the conflict of Margin-Centre constitutes a really instrumental force for replacing the old Sudan with a new one, the ideologically oriented conflict has become a stumbling block to the transition to the new Sudan.

Whether in the margin-centre context or ideologically oriented context, Sudan in its process, has experienced both military and civil resistance against tyranny in different contexts but the most intolerable contexts are the ideologically oriented contexts. In an ideologically oriented context, many political organizations and civil societies have made a lot of contributions to become part of this resistance to achieving freedom and some model of a modern state but they failed to give a precise description of what model of democracy are they trying to implement, and to what extent do they agree on the concept of a state of equal citizenship? The dilemma of the political forces is that every organization looks at the fundamental issues of Sudan from a different angle, instead of agreeing on the issues for the sake of the unity of the country.

What makes the political situation more pessimistic is the extreme discrepancy of the political forces in their visions or what I prefer to call a conflict of contexts, which has led Sudan to a crossroads.

Indeed the political organisations, with no exception, lack a common goal on major national issues and politically, they always operate in disharmony and a contentious atmosphere. They are contradictory in goals, tactics and means of resistance. Each organization does not recognize the role of the other organization. In such disharmony, it is not only too difficult for political organizations to set a common agenda on national issues, but it's unfortunate that each political organization wants to establish the state according to its viewpoint and deliberately excludes the vision of others, or wants to impose its viewpoint on the entire governance system. So logically, everything about unity is just a utopia and the political organisations can't come together to build a democratic state when a final victory of dictatorship removal is achieved.

The main conflict on the battlefield is seen through the ideologically oriented political parties particularly the Islamists, the Communists and the Baathists. The Islamists versus the Communists and the Baathists versus both the Islamists and the Communists. It is a war of all against all.

In such a climate imbued with hostility and hatred, the late Dr, John Garang tried in the early eighties of the last century to reconcile the political situation in Sudan and put forward the idea of a new Sudan, which is based on equal citizenship. Later the vision of the new Sudan had flourished by joining others from marginalized areas, especially from Nuba Mountains, the Blue Nile and Darfur. The resistance of the margin is the most notable shift in Sudan. Armed with the idea of the new Sudan, the vast majority of the marginal people have fought against the centre to restructure Sudan based on equal citizenship, regardless of religion, race, language and colour. There was a wide interaction with the idea of a new Sudan from a large sector of the Sudanese and the idea began to spread very fast among all Sudanese, especially among the educated who believed that the way out of the dilemma of the conflict of contexts will only happen through consensus on the idea of equal citizenship because this vision puts the state at the same distance from the differences that have crippled Sudan for decades.

As mentioned earlier, the conflict that is managed in the context of Margin-Centre is the real instrumental force for establishing the new Sudan. As a result of the war managed in this context, there was an immense impact on the cohesion of the NCP party and its military junta. The NCP regime in Khartoum signed the CPA in Naivasha in 2005 under heavy pressure

from the Margin-Centre context and the international community. In this agreement, Khartoum has conceded more than one-third of its revenue which the regime used to fund the state organ and wars, while the power-sharing agreement with the SPLM, made a dramatic downsizing of the Regime's ability to make crucial decisions both at the level of the Federal Government and the level of the southern region and under the agreement a new reality has emerged whereby the level of governance in Southern Sudan was closer to confederation.

Regarding the war in Darfur, Khartoum has undergone for the first time in the history of its wars against the Margin an unprecedented experience that made Sudan accept the international forces on its soil, in addition to dozens of international resolutions issued against the head of state on crimes against humanity and thus the regime became politically, diplomatically and economically crippled by the conflict of the Western region of Darfur.

The most prominent side conflict that resulted from the conflict of contexts was the internal conflict of the National Congress, which eventually led to the weakening of the position of Omar al-Bashir and he became politically liable. This internal conflict was explicit, managed by the members of the Islamic Movement in addition to the paramilitary group known as Rapid Forces. The internal conflict of NCP was a very effective weapon that weakened the Government and helped a lot to end the Regime. It was effective because most of the members and those who were loyal to the regime had taken an anti-regime position.

The internal conflict of the National Congress was an outcome of the main conflict, particularly the conflict of the Margin Centre. The conflicts that arise on the sidelines of the main conflict have a great impact on the process of transformation, as seen in the internal conflict of the National Conference in which the veil of political Islam has been lifted and the vision of political Islam is no longer a valid political programme at any time or place.

In light of the conflict of contexts, our political reality has shown that the future of Sudan is held hostage by the main conflict of the political forces of Islamic, socialist and Arab Nationalist orientations as well as marginal forces, and any other conflict is only part of the main conflict. For instance, the military intervention in December 2019 was neither independent of the main conflict nor any future intervention will constitute an independent conflict because the military institution whether in the past or today is not neutral and it will not be neutral unless radical reforms are introduced to address the presence of political elements within the military institution. The information leaked before and after the fall of the NCP regime was that there were more than three plans to seize power, two of which were led by the Islamist Movement, but in the end, the one led by the other political forces and perhaps supported by some international bodies succeeded, but in fact, all three attempts were using the military institution to topple the regime.

The situation shortly before the fall of the NCP Regime has shown the strong relationship of the military institution in Sudan to politics. There was a form of rapprochement among the main actors with the military institution including the mobilized masses. They all either had direct channels of communication with the army generals or indirect via media inciting the army to play an active role in removing Omar al-Bashir in the way that happened in October 1964 and April 1985.

It seemed that the role of the military at that crucial moment was very decisive to remove Al-Bashir, but this role had brought a major complication that affected the process of the transitional period. It gave legitimacy to the military institution to participate effectively in the structures of the state in sensitive civilian posts, both at the executive and sovereign levels. As a result, the parties to the transitional period entered into an intense conflict over the type of government at this stage. The dispute is over the question of whether it is a civilian or military government?

The dispute over the role of the military in our politics is not new. The conflict over this issue has a long history. For a long time all the ideologically oriented parties have recruited their members to penetrate the military establishment, some of them succeeded in carrying out a coup, and some of them failed. In light of the roles recently played by different actors to remove Omer Al-Bashir and in light of the absence of constitutional legitimacy, the issue of sharing power with the military institution has become a controversial issue and an area of conflict.

The conflict is between those who support a pure civilian-led government and who believe in the role of the military in the transitional period. In fact, during the transitional period, being a civilian-led government or the one shared with the military institution does not make a big difference if the actors have reached a compromise. But a compromise on this point depends on how flexible the actors are to the concept of inclusion and exclusion and to what extent they can overcome the restrictions imposed by their extreme political visions. The bitter reality is that the problem is not the idea of what type of government, but rather, who controls the military institution because each political organization is struggling to bring the military commanders under its control so that it can achieve the political goals through influential military elements who can manage coups.

Is LRA rebel leader Joseph Kony hiding in Darfur? (Deutsche Welle)

By Antonio Cascais and Jean Fernand Koena
April 14, 2022

"Joseph Kony is alive," claims Michel Mbolifouko, a former child soldier in the Lord's

Resistance Army (LRA). "He currently lives in the Sudanese region of Darfur and continues to give orders to his fighters. I saw him with my own eyes," Mbolifouko told DW.

DW correspondent in the Central African Republic (CAR), Jean Fernand Koena, who spoke with numerous former child soldiers recruited by Kony, considers the statements of 15-year-old Mbolifouko to be credible.

In addition, other former child soldiers who have fled in recent weeks to the city of Obo, in the east of the CAR, have confirmed that Kony is in Darfur, in western Sudan.

Wanted fugitive

It would be a sensation if this information proved true because the founder and leader of the Lord's Resistance Army has not been seen in decades.

He has been on the run since 2005 when the International Criminal Court (ICC) issued an international arrest warrant against him.

US special agents, UN soldiers, an African Union (AU) task force backed by members of the armies in the countries where the LRA operates have been searching for Kony since then with no success.

In 2013, Uganda suspended the search, claiming that Kony was no longer a threat due to the shrunken numbers of his rebel force.

"He has been invisible. There were even many rumors that he was no longer alive," DW correspondent Koena said.

However, the testimony of the former child soldiers could now provide new clues that could lead to the capture of Africa's most brutal war criminal.

One of Africa's oldest rebel groups

Joseph Kony founded the LRA rebel group in northern Uganda in 1987. His goal was to drive President Yoweri Museveni out of power and establish a Christian theocracy.

After being kicked out of the country by the Ugandan military, the LRA fighters moved to the region's politically unstable neighboring countries, such as southern Sudan and present-day South Sudan, to the north-east of the Democratic Republic of Congo, and also to the south-east of the Central African Republic where the LRA militants are known as "Tongo-Tongo."

They spread terror and fear, burning down villages, killing and robbing. They became notorious for kidnapping thousands of children and brutally forcing them into their armed struggle, murder, and manslaughter. They abused girls as sex slaves.

According to the United Nations, more than 100,000 people in the central African region have been killed by the LRA. They have also kidnapped between 60,000 and 100,000 children.

"I spent three years with the Tongo-Tongo. They abused me again and again. Only now was I able to escape," child soldier Michel Mbolifouko told DW. He is one of about 60 minors from the ranks of the LRA who have arrived in Obo since the beginning of April and who have been accommodated in emergency shelters and with host families.

Three years ago, at the age of twelve, Mbolifouko was abducted from his village by armed LRA fighters, he says. Heavily armed, he roamed the forests with his fellow rebels, mainly on Sudanese territory and in the Democratic Republic of Congo. He had to participate in attacks on farmers and shepherds. It was not until the end of March that he could finally run away and free himself from the "Tongo-Tongo."

Tired and unmotivated

"Now the LRA fighters are tired and unmotivated. Hardly anyone wants to stay with the LRA," says the ex-child combatant. Observers now estimate the number of fighters in the ranks of the LRA at less than 1,000. Many want to surrender and lead a normal life.

"There have also been talks between LRA leaders and representatives of the government of the Central African Republic," Ernest Mizedjo, a lawmaker in the capital Bangui, said. Earlier this year, there were rumors in Bangui that Joseph Kony himself had promised a ceasefire. In return, he sought to be involved in a possible peace process. In addition, he also wanted to take on Central African citizenship, Mizedjo told DW.

Call to lay down arms

But the implementation of the ceasefire has been delayed. "Mistrust remains high, particularly in the south-east of the CAR, where people have suffered from attacks, looting and kidnappings," explains DW correspondent Koena. For this reason, no armed fighters have arrived in Obo so far, only underage, former child soldiers.

Another refugee child soldier, Justin Aristide Niko, 17, called on all LRA fighters to come to Obo and lay down their arms. "It is possible to survive without raiding villages or robbing and kidnapping people," Niko told DW.

"We can also cultivate the land and grow sesame, potatoes, and peanuts."

Mistrust among locals

However, many locals remain skeptical and don't believe in the possibility of living next door to the perpetrators of massacres and crimes.

Maurice Mbassilimoke, head of the Sam-Ouandjia village just outside Obo, points out: "We cannot forget all the violence inflicted on us by these beasts."

He recalled how in 2008, LRA men attacked their village, captured men, murdered and tortured, and abducted many of their children.

First ICC trial for Darfur war crimes begins (BOL News)

April 14, 2022

The Hague: On Tuesday, an accused Janjaweed militia leader pleaded not guilty to hundreds of allegations of war crimes and crimes against humanity in the International Criminal Court's first trial dealing with Sudan's almost two-decade-old Darfur crisis.

Ali Muhammad Ali Abd-Al-Rahman is charged with supervising thousands of pro-government Janjaweed warriors who committed persecution, murder, rape, and torture during the violence's peak in 2003-2004. "I am innocent of all of these charges," the septuagenarian Abd-Al-Rahman told judges after the charges were read out at the start of his case. Abd-Al-Rahman, also known as Ali Kushayb, surrendered voluntarily to a court in The Hague in June 2020 after 13 years on the run. He has maintained his innocence. The trial takes place against the backdrop of an increase in what humanitarian organizations describe as intercommunal violence in Darfur following the conclusion of the United Nations and African Union missions there. The UN estimates that 1.6 million people remain internally displaced in Darfur decades after the brunt of the violence. Darfur's conflict began when a majority of non-Arab rebels took up weapons against the Sudanese government, which reacted with a counter-insurgency. Khartoum suppressed the insurrection by mobilizing primarily Arab militias known as the Janjaweed, unleashing a wave of brutality that Washington and other campaigners claimed amounted to genocide. The UN estimates that 300,000 people were murdered and over 2 million displaced. Abd-Al-Rahman faces up to life in jail if convicted on 31 counts of war crimes and crimes against humanity. During previous sessions, his attorney contended that the defendant was a victim of mistaken identity and was insufficiently educated to comprehend that the instructions he carried out may result in war crimes. Sudan's former President Omar Hassan al-Bashir, who is charged with genocide and other atrocities in Darfur by the International Criminal Court, was overthrown in 2019 and remains imprisoned in Khartoum.

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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**

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Côte d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast)

Official Website of the International Criminal Court
ICC Public Documents - Situation in the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire

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

Nigerian Military Airstrikes Kill Fishermen In Lake Chad (HumAngle)

By Abdulkareem Haruna

April 13, 2022

A yet to be ascertained number of civilians, mostly fishermen, were part of the casualties recorded when a Nigerian military fighter jet on Sunday, April 10 bombarded three locations in Lake Chad, reportedly linked to terrorist activities, sources told HumAngle.

Locals familiar with the incident informed HumAngle that the three fishing islands, comprising of Tumbun-Kare, Gadkari, and Tamangari – have been part of the locations under the control of the Islamic State West African Province (ISWAP).

Baba Zakari, an Internally Displaced fisherman, who escaped the Sunday bombardment and made it to Maiduguri, Borno State capital on Tuesday, April 12, said the terror group took control of most of the fishing islands and constituted themselves as an authority.

“Many displaced fishermen who could not stand the years of starvation had no option but to return to the Tumbus to fish for survival even though we have to succumb to Boko Haram [referring to the ISWAP splitter group] tax regime,” Zakari said.

HumAngle has recently reported how fishermen were forced to flee the Lake Chad areas due to forced taxation by ISWAP.

Zakari said most of the fishermen were caught unawares by the bombardment of the fishing islands.

“Though it was targeted at Boko Haram, many of those killed or injured in the bombing were either fishermen or farmers,” he said.

“We had to abandon everything and flee because it was an intense bombing. We later learnt that some injured people have been conveyed to the hospital in Monguno.”

HumAngle had learnt from senior military personnel who did not want to be named, who confirmed the attack on the named locations.

The officer said the Sunday operation was carried out under the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) “Lake Sanity” of Operation Hadin Kai currently going on in the Lake Chad region.

The military personnel said the air raid was carried out after credible intel about the locations was carefully evaluated to confirm that they were hideouts of ISWAP terrorists.

“If the information available to me was correct, I know enough warnings have been issued to civilians to pull out of that location, to avoid being caught in the crossfire.”

ISWAP fighters attack Chibok village, abduct three girls (Daily Post)

By Maina Maina

April 20, 2022

Members of the Islamic State for West African Province, ISWAP, have abducted three girls during an operation in a village in Chibok Local Government Area of Borno State, northeast Nigeria.

Reports on Tuesday night revealed that they attacked Yimirmigza, where they kidnapped three Chibok girls.

DAILY POST learnt that following the abduction, the insurgents contacted the family of one of the girls abducted.

A recorded conversation between the militant and a member of the family revealed that the ISWAP fighters are many in their ranks.

In the conversation, the family member asked the militant on how they could help release the girls, but the militant said he had no power to do so unless their leaders gave the order.

While conversing in Chibok language, one of the girls said the terrorists "are in hundreds".

"These people are too many. For now, we are only three girls in their custody," she said.

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Mali

Mali: UN expert calls for independent probe into Moura massacre (Saudi Gazette)

April 7, 2022

A UN human rights expert on Wednesday called for a full and independent investigation into alleged mass crimes committed in central Mali's Mopti region late last month, and pleaded with all parties to ensure the "absolute protection" of civilians and an end to the current vicious cycle of violence.

Alioune Tine, the Independent Expert on the human rights situation in Mali, expressed alarm about unconfirmed reports that members of the Malian armed forces, accompanied by Russian private military personnel, executed dozens of civilians during a military operation from 27 to 31 March, in Moura.

According to news reports, and a detailed report from the authoritative NGO Human Rights Watch, released on Tuesday, around 300 civilian men were allegedly killed over a period of five days, during the Government sanctioned operation carried out against suspected jihadists.

In addition to summary executions and other killings, the expert said in a press release, there had also been reports of rape, arbitrary arrests, looting and theft.

Mali has been plagued by violence, political upheaval and allegations of human rights abuses for the past decade, since a failed Islamist coup in the north, left swathes of the central and northern regions vulnerable to armed groups, and battling a humanitarian crisis, and constant food insecurity.

A wave of attacks by groups such as the Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin (JNIM) and the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS), as well as some operations by the Malian military, have trapped civilians in the grip of jihadist and military violence since the start of the year, said the UN human rights office OHCHR.

In a statement on 1 April, the Malian Army Etat-Major confirmed that the armed forces had conducted a "large-scale" military operation in the Moura area from 23 to 31 March. As a result, it said, 203 fighters from "armed terrorist groups" were killed and 51 people arrested. In a statement on 5 April, the Malian Army Etat-Major denied its involvement in human rights violations in Moura.

Eyewitnesses reportedly said that Malian soldiers had arrived by helicopter and exchanged gunfire with militants, but had then killed unarmed men trying to flee, in groups of up to ten at a time.

"In view of the serious allegations of mass crimes, with dozens of civilians killed during these operations, I call on the Malian

authorities to conduct a thorough, independent, impartial and effective investigation into all alleged violations as soon as possible,” Tine said. “The findings must be made public and the alleged perpetrators brought to justice.

“The information received at this stage raises serious questions and concerns about potential serious violations of international human rights law and/or international humanitarian law. In addition, some of these violations may constitute crimes within the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court,” the expert added.

Failure to bring alleged perpetrators of human rights violations to justice could undermine the confidence of the population in the armed forces and be exploited or instrumentalized by armed groups, presenting themselves as a credible alternative to the failure of the State, Tine said. “The fight against impunity is therefore a priority and a constituent element of the fight against terrorism,” he added.

“I urge the transitional Malian authorities to grant unhindered access to the Human Rights and Protection Division of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) so that it can conduct a thorough investigation to shed light on allegations of serious human rights violations, in accordance with the mandate of the UN Security Council.”

The UN expert repeated his call for the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC) to open investigations as soon as possible to establish criminal responsibility for crimes under the Rome Statute that have been committed in the past and that continue to be committed in Mali. — UN News

UN Demands Access to Site of Alleged Massacre in Mali (New Delhi Times)

April 9, 2022

The United Nations peacekeeping mission in Mali, known by its French acronym MINUSMA, has demanded the country’s military government grant it access to the village of Moura, where rights groups and witnesses say the Malian army and Russian mercenaries killed hundreds of civilians during an anti-terrorism operation in late March.

The top U.N. envoy in Mali, El-Ghassim Wane, told the U.N. Security Council Thursday that Mali’s military government has so far denied the request.

Wane said in the statement MINUSMA was only allowed to fly over the site on April 3 and that it was “imperative” that authorities give access to the site, in line with its mandate.

In a press release Thursday, MINUSMA repeated “deep concern at the allegations of serious violations of human rights and of international humanitarian law” in Moura.

Mali’s army on April 1 claimed to have killed 203 “terrorists” during the late March operation.

However, Human Rights Watch, in a report Tuesday, cited witnesses saying Mali’s army and foreign fighters identified as Russians killed 300 civilians, some of them suspected Islamic fighters.

Bamako claims Russia sent military “instructors” to Mali to help with its fight against Islamist insurgents.

But European governments and the United States say the Russians are with the Kremlin-linked Wagner Group of mercenaries, which U.N. experts accuse of numerous abuses, from Syria to the Central African Republic.

VOA spoke to a man, who for security reasons did not wish his name be used, who was detained with others in Moura for five days during the operation.

He said he witnessed “white soldiers” who spoke neither French nor English sorting men into groups.

He said he then saw Malian armed forces execute about 12 to 15 of the men.

Moura residents told VOA that while some extremists were likely among those killed, the vast majority were innocent villagers.

Mali’s military tribunal has said it is investigating the events in Moura.

The U.N. mission in Mali in past investigations has found that civilians are often wrongly targeted as militants.

MINUSMA investigators a year ago found that a French airstrike on the central village of Bounty, Mali, killed 19 people – 16 of

them civilians.

Locking Arms with Russians, Mali Denies Ethnic Massacre (POLYGRAPH.info)

By Nisan Ahmado

April 11, 2022

During a United Nations meeting on April 7 about the situation in Mali, Issa Konfourou, Mali's ambassador to the U.N., denied allegations that government forces committed atrocities in the south-central Malian town of Moura.

In late March, Malian troops and Russian mercenaries allegedly executed some 300 civilians during a counter-insurgency campaign against terrorist groups in Moura.

Konfourou said his government would investigate and release the findings. He called on others not to call the incident a massacre or make accusations against the Malian armed forces.

"The government is very committed to respect and making sure that human rights are respected by the national and international forces," Konfourou said.

That is misleading.

Evidence exposed by New York-based Human Rights Watch (HRW) and the United Nations' stabilization mission in Mali (MINUSMA) contradict his statement.

On April 4, Col. Mariam Sagara, spokesman for the Malian armed forces, said the army had killed 200 Islamist militants and arrested 51 more in Moura during a special operation involving land and air forces.

According to the Malian army, over the past several years, extremists have used Moura as a base from which to launch attacks in central and northern Mali.

The Malian army said in a statement that it respects human rights and has conducted awareness-raising and training efforts, as well as launched investigations into all allegations of wrongdoing.

But HRW reported on April 5 that Malian troops and foreign soldiers, who sources identified as Russian mercenaries, summarily executed 300 men during an operation in Moura.

HRW said it interviewed 27 people, including witnesses, traders from the local market in the village, community leaders, foreign diplomats and security analysts.

The majority of those killed were from the pastoralist Peuhl, or Fulani, ethnic group, which jihadist recruiters have targeted to exploit the group's grievances against the government.

Local residents told HRW they saw "scores of white, non-French-speaking armed men" they believed were Russians because the government previously said it had hired Russian "trainers."

Witnesses said Russian militia appeared to outnumber Malian soldiers, mainly in the first two days of the operation, when about 100 Russian troops and a number of Malian soldiers were air-dropped in the town. The Russian forces then blocked all exits.

"Over the four days, the soldiers ordered the detained men in groups of 4, 6, or up to 10, to stand up and walk for between several dozen and several hundred meters. There, the Malian and foreign soldiers summarily executed them. The witnesses said some victims were shot in the head, while other groups of men were sprayed by gunfire," the HRW report stated.

The alleged killings in Moura were not the first such allegations in Mali identifying mercenaries from Russia's Wagner Group and members of the Malian army. The Wagner Group is a Russian private military company (PMC) that analysts say has deep ties to the Russia military and Russian President Vladimir Putin. Some have likened them to Putin's "private army."

During the April 7 U.N. session, El Ghassim Wane, head of the U.N. Mali mission, called on government authorities to allow U.N. teams enter Moura and investigate.

Wane said the mission has opened "17 investigations on allegations of indiscriminate attacks against civilians, extrajudicial arrests, mistreatment, forced disappearances and extrajudicial killings in central Mali since the beginning of this year."

Reports by HRW and France's Le Monde newspaper published in mid-March cited Malians who said government and foreign troops detained and tortured them. They described the foreign troops as "white men speaking a strange language."

HRW said that the Malian army and terrorist groups have killed at least 107 civilians since December 2021. During this period, about a thousand Russian mercenaries arrived in Mali to support counter-terror operations, Britain's Telegraph newspaper reported.

On March 15, the Africa Report, a pan-African weekly magazine, said an unofficial U.N. report suggested the Malian army and Russian mercenaries were involved in the death of 30 people, including children, near the south-central Malian village of Dangere-Wotoro.

Their charred, blindfolded and bound remains were found, and witnesses said they were executed and burned. It is believed that the victims were members of the Fulani ethnic group.

"As for the perpetrators, there are reports that this incident was carried out by elements of the Malian Armed Forces, supported by members of the Russian private military company known as Wagner," the report from the U.N. Mali mission said.

The mission said that jihadists, armed militias and Mali's armed forces killed nearly 600 civilians in 2021. As of April 2021, more than 1,000 people, including soldiers, militants and at least 450 civilians, had been killed in Africa's Sahel region, which includes Mali, according to Rida Lyammouri of the Middle East Institute. In a March 2021 report on the Wagner Group in the Central African Republic, a U.N. working group on mercenaries described the Wagner Group as a shadowy network that "does not seem to have a legal existence, while operating in several countries across the globe."

"This web of enterprises shares, to different degrees, management and ownership structures, as well as personnel, and identifiers such as phone numbers, addresses and emails," the U.N. report stated.

Malian authorities have repeatedly denied the presence of mercenaries in Mali, contending only that Russian trainers are present.

"We undertook no commitment of this nature," Konfourou said during the April 7 U.N. session.

"We have a fruitful cooperation relation with Russia, a state-to-state relation since 1960, and as a result of this cooperation with Russia, Mali continues to procure military materials needed for our security, and trainers and instructors from Russia are in Mali to train the forces how to use these materials acquired from Russia," Konfourou said.

The United States and the European Union have sanctioned the Wagner Group for destabilizing activities in various countries. The mercenary group has also been accused of war crimes.

On April 10, Russia blocked a U.N. Security Council vote to create an independent mission to investigate the alleged massacre in Moura. Mali was one of the 17 African countries that abstained from voting in the U.N. General Assembly to condemn the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Mali is experiencing a political and security upheaval as it battles armed jihadist groups linked to Islamic State (IS) and al-Qaida in the Sahel region. Jihadists have spilled over into neighboring Burkina Faso and Niger. Islamic State continues to launch deadly attacks in Mali.

Mali has had a military-controlled government since June 2020, following two coups led by Col. Assimi Goita, who failed to fulfill a promise to hold elections in February and transition the country to civilian rule.

Mali's Violent, Authoritarian Turn (The Nation)

By Hannah Rae Armstrong

April 13, 2022

On March 27, as herders converged upon the central Malian village of Moura (population: 10,000) for the weekly Sunday livestock market, helicopters carrying Malian soldiers accompanied by men believed to belong to the Kremlin-linked Wagner Group flew in and started firing. They sealed shut the exits to the village and raked their way through it in a counterterrorism operation that lasted for five days and left between 200 and 400 people dead. Human Rights Watch deemed it "the worst single atrocity reported in Mali's decade-long armed conflict." Armed actors have proliferated in Mali since separatist northern militants rebelled in 2011, only to be sidelined by an Al Qaeda affiliate. The Malian army, in a statement describing the same event, claimed to have neutralized 203 terrorists in a manner consistent with international law. Eyewitnesses, however, described indiscriminate killing and targeting based on ethnic appearance or dress.

The massacre occurred two months after President Emmanuel Macron announced the withdrawal of French forces, which have played a crucial role in a convoluted Sahel stabilization mission centered on Mali for nearly a decade. Tensions between France and the ruling junta have risen steadily since 2020: Amid a chorus of cries that French troops were no longer welcome, Malian army officers used years of European military training to seize the state (twice), expel the French ambassador, and contract with Wagner. Since gaining prominence fighting on behalf of the Assad regime in Syria, the Kremlin-linked paramilitary force has expanded its footprint into African countries, propping up client regimes and securing access to extractive resources.

WESTERN FAILURE IN MALI

Since France first deployed troops in 2013 to repel the southward advance of Al Qaeda–linked militants, Paris has led a multidimensional intervention in Mali that weaves together counterterrorism, counterinsurgency, and state-building. In recent years, violence against civilians has soared at the hands of Al Qaeda- and Islamic State–backed groups, Malian security forces, and self-defense groups, and the fiction of a possible military victory over terrorists has fallen apart. Meanwhile, the burgeoning Western security and development architecture looked bloated, aimless, and impotent.

Despite tactical victories by French forces, the state just kept losing ground. Jihadists' numbers and attacks increased as did their theater of operations, which spread into central and southern Mali and seeped across borders into Niger and Burkina Faso.

More worryingly, mass-casualty violence cropped up on the back of counterterrorism efforts. Intercommunal clashes and ethnic violence flared as self-defense groups—sometimes with French support—donned the counterterrorism mantle to target their rivals, often among the Peul ethnic minority, in central Malian sites like Ogossagou and along the Mali-Niger border. As insecurity spread, the inflows of cash deepened corruption and discredited political authority. Despair drove many Malians to support the coups d'état in 2020 and 2021 and the subsequent security partnership with Russia.

PUNISHING THE JUNTA

The contours of recent Russian engagement are beginning to emerge. Where the French model of crisis leadership fell because of the arrogance of its own ambition, the Russian model embraced by the junta appears narrower and more focused on stifling dissent and targeted counterterrorism operations in central Mali. Encouraged by France, the West African regional bloc ECOWAS and the European Union imposed economic sanctions on the country and targeted sanctions against junta members over a year ago. Punishment pushed the junta toward alternative partners like Russia, as it took an authoritarian turn, harassing and arresting critics and opponents and reportedly slaughtering people in central Mali.

The ruling junta in Bamako took power in August 2020 following months of protests that saw the population rally behind a broad coalition of political, civil society, and religious leaders in decrying the incompetence and corruption of the questionably elected government. In May 2021, Vice President Col. Assimi Goita stripped the civilian president and prime minister of their powers in a coup-within-a-coup that strengthened the military's grip on power and unraveled some of its popular appeal.

The junta initially appeared keen to jumpstart lagging peace processes with northern rebels and dialogue with jihadists, and to experiment with more inclusive, democratic forms of governance. It rewarded itself for this with a generous five-year timetable for transition to civilian rule.

In response, Paris prodded the West African regional bloc ECOWAS and the European Union to impose sanctions, which are straining a fragile economy during a time of global inflation, and punish a landlocked populace by closing land borders and blocking regional remittances. To many in Mali, sanctions ostensibly aimed to speed up the political transition appear vindictive compared to the light hand-slaps meted out around the same time to military rulers in Chad and Guinea for similar seizures of power.

For years, Russia had sought to expand its influence in Mali, focusing on the capital Bamako, paying activists and influencers, sponsoring pro-Russian protests, and using fake and hacked social media accounts to amplify pro-Russian messaging. Malians have proven increasingly receptive, especially in the capital. After all, many wondered, what had decades of Western-backed democratic rule delivered?

Without securing a tighter electoral timetable, sanctions only further fanned resentment against France and support for the junta. The sense that Malians chose Russia seemed to deepen the French impulse to punish them. And punishment seemed to push the junta further into the Russian camp.

TURN TOWARD AUTHORITARIANISM

The junta's embrace of authoritarian shows of force this year suggests it may be drawing inspiration from its new Russian partners. In recent months, it has launched a brutal military campaign in central Mali and cracked down on dissent and civil

liberties. With apparent support from Wagner, the Malian armed forces launched counterterrorism offensives across the center of the country. Two weeks before the Moura massacre, Human Rights Watch reported that Malian government forces had killed at least 71 civilians mostly in central Mali since December 2021—nearly twice as many as civilian killings as it linked to Islamist armed groups. A week later, the Malian transitional authorities suspended French radio and television broadcasters RFI and France 24 after they reported allegations that the military and Wagner were killing and torturing civilians.

Meanwhile, prominent opponents and critics are being detained or left to die. The leftist political party leader Oumar Mariko, filmed calling for accountability for the spate of mass murders, is in hiding since government forces broke into his house. On March 24, former prime minister Soumeylou Boubeye Maiga died in detention after officials ignored his family's pleas regarding his deteriorating health. Maiga, one of Mali's most esteemed political authorities, was arrested on fraud charges during a purge shortly after the 2021 coup.

CLOSED RANKS

As Western capitals' resources and attention migrate toward the crisis in Ukraine, this authoritarian turn is accelerating. Is more pressure in the form of sanctions and disengagement by the West, whose last hopes to save face at this point are that the junta runs out of money or is toppled by friendlier authorities, or that Wagner shifts its resources to Ukraine, the best way to stop it? Probably not.

But it may be the most likely outcome. The Islamic State committed massacres against civilians on a similar scale in the Menaka region just a week before the killings in Moura. Whereas violence by militant Islamist groups has dominated media and human rights reporting on Mali for the past decade, few outlets published anything on this latter killing, showing how rapidly Ukraine has shifted the Western appetite away from narratives that focus on Islamic extremist perpetrators of violent crimes to ones that feature Russians. For Western actors aware that a decade of stabilization efforts may have had the opposite result, casting Russians as the new lead villain is a convenient way to skulk away from the bog they helped create, even as isolation and punishment further increase the junta's dependence on Russia.

Meanwhile, on April 10, Russia blocked a UN Security Council request submitted by France for independent investigations into the killings. Closing ranks around its new partner, the Russian foreign ministry called the massacre reports "disinformation" and congratulated Mali on its "important victory" against terrorism.

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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**

Uganda's Ongoing Genocide – The Karamoja Killing Fields (Sahara Reporters)

By Lynda Tilley
April 11, 2022

As Uganda's much loved and respected President-Elect, Robert Kyagulanyi Ssentamu (aka Bobi Wine) took the stand to deliver his speech "How To Topple A Dictator" on

Wednesday at the Geneva Summit in Switzerland, the Ugandan genocide raged on in the Karamoja region of North East Uganda, as countless people lay slaughtered, beheaded, dismembered or shot, as what remained of their homes, villages and their entire lives, dissolved into ashes as the fires set alight to destroy them, smouldered on relentlessly, throughout the night.

As if the ongoing senseless abduction, torture, rape and murder of Uganda's people is not enough, the genocide continues to add to the ever-increasing death toll as it spreads in earnest to the arid Karamoja region and it is indeed, relentless ...

The arid Karamoja earth is soaked with the blood of Uganda's innocent and all any survivors can do is to look on, dazed and in a state of shock ... for these are their mothers, fathers, children, brothers - and no one has been spared ... families, homes, lives - all gone, overnight.

Photos begin to flood social media, some so horrific they come with warnings and a choice to view or not. The uncovered ones mostly show the deceased open-eyed, a mixture of surprise and shock frozen on their faces and many are seen to still hold either a knife, bow and arrow or wooden stick in their hands - a desperate last attempt at self-defence... and the Ugandans weep, they weep in sorrow, desperation and despair for their people as the news spreads and even other, faraway African countries can feel the pain of the Ugandan people - their cries catch the wind that carries them across our continent - and even the birds stop singing, briefly. We all just want it to STOP ... watching in horror, as the world continues to turn a blind eye and as the body count grows, still maintains trade with Uganda - some countries even making new deals.

But we, outside Uganda, can see the truth - know that the sunny, happy "face" of Uganda with its inspiring tourism campaigns and cheerful photos of kids going back to school after lockdown being shown to the world as a means to further trick and deceive, is nothing more than the beautiful icing on a cake which belies that underneath it is completely, shockingly rotten to the very core.

The massacre of the people of Karamoja and the torture chambers, scattered throughout the country tell the true horror of Uganda today, as deliberately leaked footage taken inside the chambers, intends to intimidate and instil fear. Torturers are often seen in clothing bearing the letters "NRM" of the National Resistance Movement - the party of ageing 77-year-old retired senior military officer, Yoweri Museveni, who came into power in 1986 and conveniently changed the country's constitution at will, to ensure his 36-year rule.

It is widely known, internationally as well, that (despite a seemingly well-timed sabotage attempt, or "internet outage" Uganda's 2021 elections were clearly rigged and were noted as such by concerned international observers as being the most violent and unfair election ever held in Uganda's history.

As if there were a shred of doubt about who the people voted for as their President, the subsequent constant, relentless targeting of all members and supporters of President-Elect Bobi Wine's party, the National Unity Platform (NUP) is surely proof enough, as it continues unabated as those unable to flee or hide, are slowly picked off one by one, many never seen, ever again. Those that do make it, mostly have visible signs of prolonged, barbaric torture on their bodies as further proof as well as deep mental and emotional scars which will never completely heal.

The killing continues across Uganda even now, with not just increasing body counts as proof but also, deliberately leaked footage of the callous torture of the Karamoja people now also being inflicted on them. The fact that footage clearly shows that the torture is perpetrated by armed men in full military uniform, which further confirms reports like those on 29th March by local people desperately crying 'security forces are shooting unarmed civilians!' and again on 4th April in the Abim district when voices screamed: "soldiers are attacking innocents!"

The Karamoja region of Uganda, in the past decade especially, has had several clashes and allegations of violence against them, with the UDFP allegedly disarming them and another incident where both ground forces and a helicopter gunship were used. Karamoja is often referred to as the "Basket of Uganda's minerals" with over 50 minerals found there including gold, lithium, copper, iron ore, marble and graphite to name a few. Gold is said to have overtaken coffee as U\$1 billion gold was exported from Uganda in 2011 alone.

Karamoja, however, is known to have one of the highest poverty indexes and it would seem as though the area and the Karamoja people have remained an "afterthought" by the government - that is, of course, until the recent discovery of the area's vast, hidden mineral wealth.

Karamoja echoes present-day Northern Nigeria, with its own genocide raging as "cattle herding bandits" also leave families dead and burn villages in their wake. As news broke of Karamoja's killing fields, a commuter train carrying just under 1,000 innocent commuters was under terrorist attack. It was not lost on us, that this all happened whilst the world was on high alert, with their eyes and ears all focused on Ukraine.

President-Elect of Uganda, Robert Kyagulanyi Ssentamu, after delivering his powerful ten-minute speech on the world's stage in Geneva, concluded his passionate plea to the world for his people and for his country as he ended, with a clear request to the international community "If you cannot help us, please stop sponsoring our oppression, please stop being the paymasters of our oppressor. If that stops, then that will be the beginning of the liberation of the people of Uganda."

Tilley is a fellow African, in solidarity with the Ugandan people. I dedicate this article & my voice to all Uganda's truth speakers, activists, writers and journalists silenced by torture, incarceration, death and those living in exile.

Repression in Museveni's Uganda Has Entered a Deadly New Phase (World Politics Review)

By Sophie Neiman

April 12, 2022

The soldiers arrived at the Kampala home of Kakwenza Rukirabashaija, the award-winning Ugandan novelist, on a mid-afternoon in late December. Armed with machine guns and sledgehammers, they beat him and dragged him out, shoving him into the backseat of an unmarked car. The writer, desperate, attempted to call a lawyer, but his phone was swiftly confiscated by his captors.

Rukirabashaija spent the next two weeks in the bowels of a detention facility, where he was tortured daily. He emerged 26 pounds lighter and unable to walk on his own, with a map of deep scars across his back. Furious at his tormenters, and apparently uncowed by their treatment, the writer shared graphic photos of his scars on social media as evidence of what he had endured.

Stories of torture and abuse in Uganda are, sadly, not new or novel. But Rukirabashaija's experience, coming just one year after Uganda's 2021 general elections, both illuminates the horrors many Ugandans have experienced, and seems to point to a greater shift now under way. Not too long ago, the Ugandan opposition was gathering support, full of optimism about its chances of ending President Yoweri Museveni's 36-year hold on power. Now, Rukirabashaija's story raises burning questions about what future, if any, exists for political dissidents in the country.

Two weeks after emerging from detention, Rukirabashaija fled to Germany, seeking medical treatment and a safe harbor from repression. But he is wanted by Ugandan courts on charges of "offensive communication" for insulting Museveni's son and apparent successor, Muhoozi Kainerugaba, on Twitter.

It's unclear whether Uganda will attempt to have Rukirabashaija extradited from Germany so that it can pursue the case against him. In the meantime, the writer's story has sparked an international outcry over torture and political repression in Uganda, which seems to have entered an increasingly deadly phase. As the crackdown ramps up, so do activists' calls for change.

A Bloodstained Election Elections in Uganda have long been accompanied by a bolstering of state security forces and abuses against political protesters. In 2016, for example, veteran opposition leader Kizza Besigye of the Forum for Democratic Change, or FDC, was detained repeatedly before being placed under house arrest on voting day. Opposition activists were also beaten and teargassed.

Last year's election, which saw popstar-turned-politician Robert Kyagulanyi, better known as Bobi Wine, challenge Museveni, was even more violent than those in years past, especially after November 2020. That month, Wine was arrested in the eastern district of Luuka for allegedly violating COVID-19 restrictions on public gatherings. He was locked in a cell for three days and denied access to his doctor, lawyer and family.

Enraged, Wine's supporters took to the streets in major towns across the country. In Kampala, angry rioters burned tires and blocked traffic. Security forces responded with gunfire, and by the time the dust settled, at least 54 people had been gunned down, according to the government's count.

In remarks to reporters, then-Security Minister Elly Tumwine coldly justified the use of force against protesters. "Police have a right to shoot and kill you if you reach a certain level of violence," he said, emphasizing that 11 security officers had also been injured. "Can I repeat? Police have a right to shoot and kill you and you die for nothing."

In the aftermath of the bloodshed, human rights lawyer Nicholas Opiyo assembled a team to investigate the true death toll, which uncovered evidence showing that some 130 people had been killed, more than twice the official number. His findings corroborated claims from other sources that have also disputed the government's count. The opposition, for instance, claims that hundreds of its supporters were slaughtered in the aftermath of Wine's arrest.

Opiyo told WPR that many of the casualties he documented bore the marks of targeted attacks. Security forces appear to have turned their weapons on anyone wearing red—the color of Wine's National Unity Party, or NUP—and may have also targeted

mechanics for allegedly supplying the tires burned by street protesters.

And, according to Opiyo, the security forces shot to kill. “They were specific. They were aimed. They were not accidental,” Opiyo said, describing a raft of post-mortem reports he’d reviewed. “People were shot in the head, in the chest or in their necks. Many people were shot through their backs, meaning they were running away.”

Opiyo, too, was eventually targeted for his work. In December 2020, he went to a Kampala eatery to meet other counselors and review their findings—and all were arrested. The authorities accused Opiyo of money laundering, and although he denies the allegation, officials nevertheless froze the funds of his advocacy organization, Chapter Four Uganda, and threw him in jail. The evidence that he and other investigators had painstakingly gathered was confiscated, along with his notebooks, hard drive, laptop and cellphone.

“We don’t know the truth yet,” said Opiyo, who was released after spending a week in prison in late 2020. “Our attempts to have an accurate account of history were thwarted by arrests.”

The clampdown on the political opposition continued to escalate in the days leading up to the Jan. 14 election. Wine took to wearing a ballistic helmet and bulletproof vest on the campaign trail, becoming accustomed to moving through clouds of tear gas. By the end of the election, more than 100 of his supporters had been arrested, including a number of his closest advisers.

Other political opposition figures were not spared. Patrick Amuriat, a founding member of Besigye’s FDC who also vied for the presidency, was detained on multiple occasions, and poet and academic Stella Nyanzi, who was then running for parliament in Kampala, told WPR that she was arrested eight times. It soon became unavoidable to acknowledge that the opposition was competing on an uneven playing field. Both the United States and European Union announced that they would not be sending monitors to observe the vote, complaining that their past recommendations for improving electoral competition in Uganda had been ignored.

As Election Day arrived, the Ugandan government blocked access to Facebook and shut down the internet across the country, ostensibly to prevent outside electoral interference. Security forces surrounded Wine’s Kampala compound, placing the opposition leader under house arrest due to fears that his “presence in public could incite rioting,” according to the Associated Press. When Museveni announced that he’d won the election with nearly 60 percent of the vote, Wine’s NUP rejected the results. Its leaders said they were confident they had defeated Museveni. But by that point, after months of violent intimidation, much of the nation had been stunned into silence.

It was then that young opposition supporters began to disappear. Plucked from markets and busy street corners, they were bundled into unmarked cars—locally known as drones—and spirited to detention facilities. Many were never seen again, and those who did reappear were dumped along highways and in sugarcane fields, bearing the marks of torture.

According to the NUP, the vanished now number in the thousands. Some were involved in party politics and grassroots organizing, while others merely voiced their support for the opposition. Successive Ugandan leaders have relied on enforced disappearances to quiet dissenters, but the speed and widespread nature of these more recent disappearances recall the reign of Idi Amin in the 1970s, when the phrase *panda gari*, or “get in the truck,” became a popular moniker for frequent kidnappings.

“It was hell,” Wine told WPR of his days campaigning. “But the aftermath of that fraudulent election was more than hell.”

The opposition leader still faces daily challenges and threats to his safety. He says state security agents follow his every move. As a result, he has had to shift from political organizing to playing defense.

“We’ve been reduced to responding to the regime,” Wine said, his voice growing hoarse and brisk. “We’ve been reduced to only fighting back for dear life.”

Increasing Repression Violence and intimidation have long been tools of the political elite in Uganda, but the fact that the repression has continued with such force so long after the election suggests that sustained political violence and intimidation may be a new tactic for Museveni’s regime.

“We are seeing a more repressive, more consistently retaliatory stance toward civil society and freedom of expression more generally,” Maria Burnett, a Washington-based analyst with the Center for Strategic and International Studies, said in an interview.

This crackdown has also had a significant legal component. Even after Opiyo was released from prison and returned to his work at Chapter Four, he still faced legal hurdles. In August 2021, Chapter Four was among 54 nonprofit entities shuttered by the government, which accused them of working under expired permits.

Opiyo insists that he has always operated within the bounds of the law. Nevertheless, the abrupt closure of these organizations has sent a chill across the country. By suspending Chapter Four and the other NGOs, Opiyo said, “the government has turned off the lights and left the country—and the entire world—in darkness.”

The money laundering charges against Opiyo were dropped in September, but permit disputes still caused him problems in his work. Struggling to pay his staff and losing donor funding, the lawyer accepted a year-long residency fellowship at Harvard University. “I am in the U.S. involuntarily,” he said. “I would have loved to stay in Uganda and continue the work that I was doing, but it was becoming too dangerous. I needed time off.”

It was in this context that Rukirabashaija was taken from his home.

After he arrived at the detention facility, the writer says he was bludgeoned until his legs swelled up and was then forced to dance for hours. His captors used pliers to pull flesh from his thighs and back. They accused him of acting as a spy for neighboring Rwanda, and questioned him about his latest book, “Banana Republic,” which details his previous experiences in Ugandan detention centers. Between interrogation sessions, a man who identified himself as a doctor entered the cell and injected Rukirabashaija with an unknown substance.

“I knew I was dying,” Rukirabashaija told me. “The way that they beat me, I didn’t know if I was going to survive.”

After two weeks, Rukirabashaija was charged with offensive communication in connection with Twitter posts in which he’d called Kainerugaba “obese” and a “curmudgeon.” He was then remanded to Kitalya prison, a maximum-security facility located west of Kampala.* He spent another month in jail before finally being granted bail.

Advised to seek international medical treatment, Rukirabashaija attempted to fly to Europe from Uganda, but magistrates refused to give him his passport. Instead, the author had to slip surreptitiously across the border to Rwanda and travel to an undisclosed third country, before being granted asylum in Germany through PEN International’s Writers in Exile program.

“I am getting well,” Rukirabashaija told me over a Zoom call in March. Still, his recovery process may be a long one.

Speaking Out Meanwhile, Rukirabashaija’s ordeal continues to spark conversations about human rights in Uganda. The case has perhaps received so much attention because of his willingness to share what he suffered.

“Kakwenza’s act of bearing his back and showing the graphic details of the scars ... was very moving. That image cannot leave your mind easily,” Opiyo said. “That represented the plight of Ugandans who were unable to speak for themselves.”

Other writers say they, too, see their own struggles in Rukirabashaija’s wounds. Stella Nyanzi, for example, said that Rukirabashaija’s experience brought back memories of her own 16-month detention in Luzira Prison in 2019 and 2020, which was also tied to charges of offensive communication. Known for calling Museveni a “pair of buttocks,” Nyanzi had been targeted in this case for a poem in which she wished Museveni had died at birth. In jail, she was beaten so severely that she suffered a miscarriage. At the time, she was denied access to her medical files, and so was unable to record the infant’s death.

That experience changed her. “When I lost my baby because of beatings by prison wardresses, I totally lost all respect and reverence for Yoweri Museveni’s government,” she said in an interview.

Now living in exile in Germany, Nyanzi—an old friend of Rukirabashaija’s—felt compelled to bear witness to her fellow agitator’s scars in person.

“In Kakwenza’s evidence of torture, I see my own evidence,” she told me. “What Kakwenza’s back gives to the world, to Ugandans, to dissident writers, is the evidence we’ve been waiting for, that says, ‘Look, we are tortured. We are treated as criminals—because of what we write.’”

Against a backdrop of rising repression, the case resonates as an intensely public display of the challenges activists have long faced. It is sparking political conversations, too. In February, 100 elected leaders of the Ugandan opposition—some survivors of torture themselves—walked out of parliament to protest the overarching issues of brutality and extralegal detention. The U.S. Embassy in Uganda also issued a statement condemning what it called “credible and re-occurring” accounts of torture and enforced disappearances in Uganda. The European Union fired off its own remarks demanding punishment for the perpetrators of torture in Uganda.

It is unlikely, though, that these statements alone will be enough to inspire Museveni and his party to reconsider their use of violence. The U.S. and Uganda have had a long and complex relationship that has often paired condemnation with cooperation. In 1997, for instance, then-Secretary of State Madeline Albright visited the East African nation and deemed it a “beacon of hope,” praising Museveni’s support for a free press and for the rights of women and minorities. Just a year later, a State Department report condemned the Ugandan government’s restrictions on civic space and security forces’ frequent

abuses of their power.

Today, the United States provides Uganda with nearly \$1 billion of annual aid, the bulk of which goes to security and development programs. In turn, Uganda has positioned itself as a supporter of U.S. security interests in the region and beyond. For instance, the country has contributed the highest proportion of troops to the U.N.'s peacekeeping mission in Somalia and at one point sent guards to U.S. bases in Iraq.

Jeffrey Smith, the Washington-based founding director of Vanguard Africa, a pro-democracy advocacy organization, says he finds Western inaction frustrating. "Museveni and the military regime have very carefully used the security question in Uganda as a cudgel to metaphorically bang the heads of U.S. policymakers into line," he said.

A fed up Wine is now demanding more concrete action. During a February address to leaders assembled at the EU-Africa summit in Belgium, he argued that the EU must respect democracy and end its funding of governments accused of torture. He doubled down on this rhetoric Wednesday at the Geneva Summit for Human Rights and Democracy.

"The Western world continues to tolerate and enable Museveni, because he is considered a 'useful dictator' good for regional security and national stability, even if he bends a few rules," Wine said in a lengthy speech. "We call upon the world leaders to stop shaking Museveni's blood-stained hands through funding and cooperation."

What's Next? Last month, Human Rights Watch released a damning report detailing more than 100 cases of extrajudicial detention and torture across Uganda over the past four years. Much of the abuse, which targeted everyone from opposition figures to individuals caught up in business disputes, took place in so-called safehouses, private buildings that have been converted into detention centers by the Internal Security Organization, Uganda's domestic intelligence agency.

Oryem Nyeko, a researcher with Human Rights Watch and the author of the report, called the prevalence of torture in Uganda "common knowledge."

"These things have been happening in Uganda for years and years and years. It didn't start in 2018, and it certainly didn't start in 2021. There are victims of these detentions who are still languishing, who see the people who committed these abuses against them walking down the street," Nyeko told me. "It is important now, more than ever, to draw attention to these issues, because it's been happening for so long," he said.

The Ugandan government, for its part, has long shrugged off allegations of torture. During a televised address in August, Museveni blamed cases of torture on a lack of discipline among security forces, while touting Uganda's human rights record as "incomparable to any in the world." At an April meeting with Eamon Gilmore, the EU's special representative for human rights, Museveni claimed his government would impose measures and provide training to curb torture in the country, but offered no specifics.

True to form, Nyeko says Ugandan officials have dismissed his report as exaggerated. The country's director of public prosecutions outright denied Rukirabashaija's claim that he was tortured.

Despite the dangers he's faced, Rukirabashaija wants to return to Uganda in the future, despite the fact that he may be arrested there, given the warrant issued against him in late March. On Monday, Uganda's chief magistrate summoned Rukirabashaija's bail providers to court, asking them to explain why they, too, shouldn't be arrested for failing to produce the author. Nonetheless, Rukirabashaija also plans to continue writing.

"These guys thought they would silence me with their barbarism, but they pressed the wrong button with me, and I pity them," he told me.

It is a sentiment echoed by others in the political opposition. By continuing their work, Nyanzi said, writers are confronting "all the fears created by this repressive, punitive, hostile environment."

"It is very easy to yield and think, 'Oh God, I fear what they will do to me, so let me write politely: Let me not go there. Let me not open those doors that they prefer for us to shut,'" she added. "But then, I suppose, I would have failed as a dissident writer."

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

Biafra: Those who kidnapped Nnamdi Kanu from Kenya are real terrorists – HURIWA (Daily Post)

By John Owen Nwachukwu

April 12, 2022

Human Rights Writers Association of Nigeria, HURIWA, has said those who abducted Nnamdi Kanu from Kenya and bundled him to Nigeria are the terrorists and not the Indigenous People of Biafra, IPOB leader.

The human rights advocacy group said this while canvassing the unconditional release of the IPOB leader from detention and an end to his persecution.

“We believe that those who should rather undergo prosecution as terrorists are those who abducted Nnamdi Kanu forcefully and subjected him to illegal rendition and rounds of torture before being flown into Nigeria,” the group said in a statement signed by its National Coordinator, Comrade Emmanuel Onwubiko.

The rights group said it was wrong to see Nnamdi Kanu, who was flown against his will to Nigeria without compliance with international best practices and international humanitarian law, as a terrorist.

“It is known that Nnamdi Kanu was forced to run for dear life after attempts were made to kill him whilst he was on bail from a Court of law,” the group added.

“Those who use armed security forces to attack him in Umuahia leading to the slaughter of scores of members of the IPOB were instrumental to the decision of Nnamdi Kanu to run for dear life thereby staying away from those premeditated attackers sent to kill him.

“Those were actually the real terrorists who should be prosecuted for attempting to kill a man granted bail by a Competent court of law.

“This persecution of Mazi Nnamdi Kanu is irregular and unconstitutional. He has not committed any offence known to law to be prosecuted for terrorism.

“We are asking President Muhammadu Buhari in the spirit of fairness and for the accelerated end to the social upheavals in the South East of Nigeria, to bring to an end the mistrial of Mazi Nnamdi Kanu as a terrorist in a secret tribunal devoid of media coverage and transparency.

“Mazi Nnamdi Kanu’s agitation for self-determination is backed up by article one of the international covenant on civil and political Rights which states that “All peoples have the right to self-determination. By virtue of that right, they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural rights.”

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Rwanda (International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda)

Official Website of the ICTR

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Ethiopia

Ethiopia: News - Amhara State Rejects Rights Groups Report Detailing Crimes Against Humanity, Ethnic Cleansing in Western Tigray (All Africa)

April 11, 2022

The Amhara regional government issued a statement regarding the recent joint report by Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch which documented war crimes and crimes against humanity in the Western Tigray zone. The statesmen from the regional state government region released on Sunday 10 April stated that the report was biased and lacks credibility and accused the two human rights organizations of publishing "false accusations that don't play a positive role in preventing violations of human rights."

"For independent bodies who know the facts on the ground, to the people of our region, and the wider Ethiopian public, the report has three goals," the statement said. First, "the report is aimed at breaking the alliance between government officials, members of the security forces, and genuine Fano, who have fulfilled their national duty to ensure their country's sovereignty," the statement read, adding, "this is done to create a weakened union if our sovereignty is threatened."

Second, the report was aimed at denying justice to the people of Amhara who have suffered "human rights violations, genocide, and war crimes" the statement said, and added that the report was aimed at "diminishing the commitment of Amhara people in protecting the nation's sovereignty, maintaining the nation's territorial integrity by making it lose hope in international institutions of justice, human rights, and democracy-building stakeholders."

Stating the third point as to why the regional government rejects the report it said that it devalues the investigation by the African Union Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, as well as the joint report by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission. "The fact that this report came out at a time when both the regional and Federal governments are working hard to end the conflict and ensure humanitarian access is an open immoral attack on humanity," the statement read.

The statement also accused the report of meddling in Ethiopia's internal regional boundary issues as well as attempting to inhibit 'internal political changes'. "Our regional government doubts the credibility and impartiality of the two rights groups because the report indicates efforts to entice civil war by presenting opinions that are skewed in favor of one group," the statement said.

"The fact that the 427 witnesses interviewed by the rights groups, who are allegedly victims of ethnic cleansing were available for phone calls in the Amhara region is self-contradictory," it said and added that the regional government believes that the interviewees from refuge camps are "in fact members of the informal paramilitary group accused by the government of committing a massacre in Mai Kadra" in November 2020. "Ethnic Tigrayans who believe in the lasting brotherhood of people despite regime changes still live in the Amhara region which is under the rule of the Amhara regional state that is accused of displacing them," the statement added.

The Amhara regional government urged the international community to rethink how they see the state of these areas 'pre and post liberation' and to reconsider their sources. "Amnesty and HRW showed political affiliation which indicates hijacking human rights. They have betrayed the cause they stand for by sharing the political stand of a designated terrorist group," the statement read, adding, "It is even sadder that the report was shared on the official page of the American embassy in Ethiopia who pointed fingers at the victim that is the Amhara regional government."

Tigray Waits for Aid After Truce Agreed in Ethiopia's Civil War (Bloomberg)

By Samuel Gebre

April 13, 2022

Aid has trickled into parts of Ethiopia's war-torn Tigray region since federal and rebel forces declared a truce late last month after 17 months of fighting, but has only reached a tiny proportion of the millions of people who need it so far.

The World Food Programme dispatched 20 trucks carrying food and other supplies to Tigray on April 1, the first such convoy to enter the northern area in more than three months. The International Committee for the Red Cross, which had been flying in life-saving drugs into Tigray since January, dispatched its own convoy carrying food, medical and water-treatment supplies and other essentials to the area the following day. Ongoing security challenges, damaged infrastructure and fuel shortages have frustrated efforts to distribute the aid.

The WFP estimates 4.6 million people in Tigray are food insecure, and that its first 650-ton aid drop will feed about 30,000 of them for a month.

“This is just a drop in the ocean and will only serve a fraction of the needs,” the United Nations agency said in response to emailed questions on Tuesday. While the agency said it is prepared to continue providing assistance, it needs swift access to fuel and cash.

Fighting erupted in Tigray when Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed ordered an incursion in November 2020 after forces loyal to the state’s ruling Tigray People’s Liberation Front attacked a federal army base. The showdown followed months of tension stemming from Abiy’s sidelining of the TPLF, which had been the nation’s preeminent power broker for decades, and degenerated into a civil war that has claimed tens of thousands of lives. Healthcare, electricity, banking and telecommunications have all been disrupted.

“Ultimately it is essential to restore basic services in the Tigray region after almost one-and-a-half years of interruption,” the WFP said.

Tigrayan leaders last week bemoaned the inadequacy of the aid flows, and accused the government of using the cessation in hostilities to intensify a blockade of Tigray. On Tuesday, the TPLF said it was withdrawing its forces from the neighboring Afar region and an immediate improvement in access to humanitarian assistance was expected, according to a statement read out on Tigray TV.

Selamawit Kassa, state minister at the communication ministry, didn’t immediately respond to a request for comment.

The U.S.’s special envoy for the Horn of Africa, David Satterfield, and his deputy, Payton Knopf, are due to arrive in Ethiopia on Wednesday for talks with government officials, humanitarian organizations and diplomats.

“Their visit continues U.S. efforts towards ceasing hostilities, unhindered humanitarian access, transparent investigations into human-rights abuses and violations by all actors, and a negotiated resolution to the conflict in Ethiopia,” the State Department said in a statement.

While hostilities in the north have eased since the truce was agreed on March 25, conflict has flared in the center of the country, with federal troops and regional forces from the Oromia region staging a month-long offensive against the Oromo Liberation Army -- a rebel group that the government has designated as a terrorist organization.

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EUROPE

The Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina, War Crimes Chamber

Official Court Website [English translation]

Bosnian Serb Army Officer Faces Srebrenica Trial in Serbia (Balkan Insight)

By Milica Stojanovic

April 13, 2022

The wartime commander of the Drina Corps, Milenko Zivanovic, will go on trial next month in Serbia for forcing Bosniak civilians out of Srebrenica during the Bosnian Serb Army’s offensive in July 1995.

The war crime trial of former Drina Corps commander Milenko Zivanovic will start on May 30, it was decided at a preparatory hearing at Belgrade Higher Court on Wednesday.

Zivanovic was commander of the Drina Corps at the time of the offensive against Srebrenica in July 1995, which ended with the killings of more than 7,000 Bosniak men and boys and the expulsion of some 40,000 women, children and elderly people.

The Serbian Prosecutor's Office indicted him in December 2021 for ordering the forced relocation of the Bosniak civilian population and participating in their forced relocation out of Srebrenica.

Preparatory hearings ahead of trials in Serbia are closed to the public and media are not allowed to attend.

Jovana Kolaric, researcher at the Belgrade-based Humanitarian Law Centre said that the Zivanovic case is significant because until now, "no proceedings have been conducted in Serbia" against high-ranking Bosnian Serb Army officers.

She also said it is significant because this will be only the third Srebrenica-related case to be heard in the Serbian courts, excluding a plea bargain in the case against Brano Gojkovic, a former member of the Bosnian Serb Army's 10th Detachment.

A week after he was indicted in Serbia, Zivanovic was also indicted in Bosnia and Herzegovina for planning and directing the activities of Bosnian Serb Army Drina Corps units in a widespread and systematic attack on Bosniak civilians in the Srebrenica and Zepa areas in 1995.

The Bosnian indictment also accuses him of ordering artillery attacks on civilians in Srebrenica, but the Serbian indictment does not mention these offences, Kolaric noted.

She also pointed out that "it is not logical to conduct an investigation into a high-ranking officer without the prosecutions [of Serbia and Bosnia] discussing it with each other".

The importance of Zivanovic's role and the orders that he issued was highlighted at trials at the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, Kolaric added.

"One of those orders is the one from July 2, 1995 for Operation Krivaja '95, which included putting into operation [Radovan] Karadzic's Directive No. 7, which ordered the creation of 'an unbearable situation of total insecurity with no hope of further survival or life for the inhabitants of Srebrenica and Zepa'," she said.

This order is not listed in the Serbian indictment of Zivanovic.

Zivanovic was a witness at the ICTY's trial of Karadzic in 2013 after he was summoned to testify. He insisted there was never a plan to expel Bosniaks from Srebrenica or kill them.

His successor as commander of the Drina Corps, Radislav Krstic, was sentenced in 2004 to 35 years in prison. Krstic was the first person convicted of genocide by the ICTY.

Bosnian Serb Ex-Soldiers Tried for Illegal Detentions (Balkan Insight)

By Nejra Dzaferagic

April 18, 2022

Former Bosnian Serb soldiers Zoran and Radenko Ilic went on trial for the persecution, illegal detention and forced disappearance of 16 Bosniak civilians in the Rogatica area during the war.

Ex-soldiers Zoran and Radenko Ilic went on trial on Monday at the Bosnian state court in Sarajevo for persecuting Bosniak civilians in the municipality of Rogatica on ethnic and religious grounds.

The indictment alleges that on June 19, 1992, in the village of Rudo, armed and in uniform, together with other soldiers, the two defendants participated in the illegal detention and forced disappearance of 16 Bosniak civilians.

"During the proceedings, the prosecution will prove that the accused committed the acts in the indictment," said prosecutor Ahmed Mesic.

The two men allegedly committed the crime as members of the Serb Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina and of the Bosnian Serb Army's Rogatica Brigade.

Reading from the indictment, Mesic said that after several Serb troops were killed in the village, Bosniak male civilians were lined up in a column, threatened with weapons and escorted away in an unknown direction by the defendants and other soldiers.

All of the captured men went missing without trace and their bodies have never been found, the prosecutor added.

The first witnesses in the trial will be heard on May 16.

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International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY)

Official Website of the ICTY

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Domestic Prosecutions In The Former Yugoslavia

Serbia Again Convicts Bosnian Serb Ex-Policeman of Torturing Prisoners (Balkan Insight)

By Milica Stojanovic

April 8, 2022

Belgrade court found former Bosnian Serb reservist policeman Milorad Jovanovic guilty of torturing civilians in Bosnia in 1992 and sentenced him to nine years in prison in a retrial.

Belgrade Higher Court found Milorad Jovanovic guilty on Friday of torturing non-Serb civilian prisoners, one of whom died as a consequence, who were being detained at the Simo Miljus Memorial Museum in Lusci Palanka in the Sanski Most area of Bosnia and Herzegovina in the summer of 1992. The court sentenced him to nine years in jail.

The verdict repeated his sentence in his first trial in February 2021, which the Belgrade Appeal Court dismissed, ordering a retrial

Judge Vinka Beraha Nikicevic said the court took into account that it could not question all the relevant witnesses.

“They were called to testify directly or via a video conference, but this was not possible,” Nikicevic said, noting that some of them had died meanwhile, while others live in Germany or Switzerland and could not be found.

“Even without their presence [as witnesses], we had witnesses who testified and were decisive that Milorad Jovanovic did what he is accused of,” she added.

According to the indictment, the Bosnian Serb reservist policeman together with his commander Slavko Vukovic, who has since died, and other unnamed police officers, forcibly brought non-Serbs from villages near Sanski Most in June and July 1992 to the museum in Lusci Palanka where they were held.

In order to get information from them about possession of weapons or about a group allegedly resisting Bosnian Serb forces, Jovanovic hit the prisoners with his fists, a shotgun and other objects, kicked them, tied them to chairs or to beams on the ceiling and beat them.

He also forced one of the prisoners, Dedo Dervisevic, to be baptised as an Orthodox Christian, and made him crawl on the floor and kiss his boots. Dervisevic died as a result of the beating.

At the beginning of the trial, Jovanovic denied that he beat or hurt prisoners. He said he did hit one civilian prisoner several times but insisted the blows were “not strong” and the victim was not injured as a result.

Jovanovic was indicted in 2015 in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Courts in Serbia took over the case in 2017. This verdict is a first-instance ruling and can be appealed.

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Turkey

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Kosovo Specialist Chambers

US Watchdog Accuses Kosovo Politicians of Corruption Links (Balkan Insight)

By Perparim Isufi

April 20, 2022

Washington-based watchdog organisation Freedom House alleged that two political leaders in Kosovo, ex-President Hashim Thaci and ex-Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj, “have links to organised crime and high-level corruption”.

In its latest annual report on trends in democracy, published on Wednesday, Freedom House alleged that two veteran political leaders in Kosovo, Hashim Thaci and Ramush Haradinaj, are among various powerful figures in the country who have criminal connections.

“Major political figures in Kosovo, including former president Thaci and former prime minister Haradinaj, have links to organised crime and high-level corruption, which play powerful roles in politics and have influenced the installation of key leaders,” the report says.

Neither of the two men has responded to the allegations so far.

Freedom House said that although Kosovo has held credible and relatively well-administered elections, “its institutions remain weak, and rampant corruption has given rise to deep public distrust in the government”.

Thaci and Haradinaj, both former Kosovo Liberation Army guerrilla leaders, have been involved in politics since the war ended in 1999, in different political parties.

While Thaci led the Democratic Party of Kosovo, PDK and became the country’s prime minister and president between 2008 and 2020, Haradinaj established his own party, the Alliance for the Future of Kosovo, AAK, and served as prime minister for two stints, first in 2005 and then from 2017-19.

Thaci stepped down as president to face charges of war crimes at the Hague-based Kosovo Specialist Chambers and is currently awaiting trial. Haradinaj was acquitted of war crimes charges by the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia in 2012.

The Freedom House report notes that “corruption and clientelism often pressure voters’ choices during elections” in Kosovo and that “powerful businesspeople in Kosovo may influence their employees’ political choices”.

The report puts Kosovo on its list of “partly free” countries with a political system historically characterised by its “dysfunction and instability”.

“The [Albin] Kurti government, elected in February 2021, at times struggled to effectively implement its reform-oriented platform throughout the year,” it noted.

The report also says that Serbia still maintains influence in Serb-majority northern Kosovo, where Pristina’s institutions do not have a strong presence, and that the Russian, Chinese and Turkish governments “have also exerted influence over government processes in Kosovo in recent years”.

The Freedom House report covers former Communist countries in Central and Eastern Europe and post-Soviet republics in Europe and Eurasia.

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Azerbaijan

International community urged to back Azerbaijan's demining efforts (AzerNews)

April 19, 2022

Azerbaijani Human Rights Commissioner Sabina Aliyeva has urged the international community to take a firm stance in supporting Azerbaijan's demining efforts, the ombudsman's office reported on April 19.

"As the Ombudsman of Azerbaijan, I once again express my grave concern over the threat posed by landmines, remind Armenia of its commitments to respect international law, and call on international organizations to show support for Azerbaijan by taking a fair and decisive stance in this matter," Aliyeva stressed.

The landmine problem in Azerbaijan's liberated areas has not only delayed the return of IDPs to their homes but has also claimed the lives of many people or given them lifelong disabilities. After the end of the 44-day war with Armenia in 2020, about 200 Azerbaijanis were killed or injured in mine explosions, she underlined.

The ombudsperson highlighted that another such tragedy was prevented on April 18 during a trip organized for Kalbajar region's Gunashli village residents to visit their homes.

As a result of the cautious behavior of an Azerbaijani army serviceman, who was accompanying one of the residents, an anti-tank mine was discovered in the village, saving the lives of 20 people, including the residents, government and media representatives.

It is believed that these mines, which could cause mass casualties, were planted during the period given to the Armenians to vacate Kalbajar region in 2020 following the trilateral statement signed by the Azerbaijani, Armenian and Russian leaders on a complete ceasefire and termination of all hostilities.

Unfortunately, in response to Azerbaijan's humanist approach, Armenia's criminal actions threaten the lives of innocent people. In June last year, an anti-tank mine exploded in the same area, killing two journalists and a government official, the statement recalled.

The human rights commissioner underlined that Armenia's planting of mines near civilian settlements and the failure to provide accurate mine maps despite numerous calls from Azerbaijan violate a number of fundamental human rights and international humanitarian laws.

Despite Azerbaijan's repeated appeals to international organizations in this regard, no results have been achieved, Aliyeva emphasized.

Although 18 months have passed since the 44-day war between Azerbaijan and Armenia, the latter's land mines continue to endanger human lives in the liberated lands.

Almost every day, there is news of civilians or military personnel being injured or killed as a result of mine explosions in these lands.

On April 16, an anti-tank mine was discovered on the road in liberated Kalbajar's Gunashli village during a visit of a group of inhabitants to their houses.

The mine was discovered thanks to the professionalism and vigilance of the Defence Ministry's mine-sweeping personnel.

A total of 20 people, including Kalbajar residents, government agencies' representatives and an ITV film crew visited the region. Mine-searching soldier Mardali Ashurov detected the anti-tank mine on the bus route carrying the crew.

If the mine had not been discovered and the delegation had not been notified promptly, the bus carrying them would have exploded as a result of the mine blast, killing all passengers.

The preliminary investigations revealed that the anti-tank mine was planted in the area between November 10 to 25, 2020, to cause mass casualties against the civilians, who would return to their homes following Kalbajar's handover as a result of a trilateral statement signed by the Armenian, Azerbaijani and Russian leaders to end the war in 2020.

This fact demonstrates that Armenia is continuing its mine warfare against Azerbaijan's civilian population. It should be noted that approximately 80 percent of the mine maps submitted by Armenia to Azerbaijan are incorrect.

Armenia appears to be committing war crimes by concealing the locations of landmines, allowing more innocent people to be killed.

Despite certain nations' support for Azerbaijan's demining activities in the liberated regions, the majority of countries and international organizations specializing in the field have not taken sufficient actions to help Azerbaijan.

Armenia deliberately and constantly planted mines on Azerbaijani territories, in violation of the 1949 Geneva Convention, thereby being a major threat to regional peace, security and cooperation.

Azerbaijan and Armenia signed a Russia-brokered ceasefire agreement on November 10, 2020, to end 44 days of fighting and work toward a comprehensive resolution.

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Russia

Ukraine's prosecutor general says office is investigating 5,800 cases of Russian war crimes (CNN)

By Paul LeBlanc

April 11, 2022

The prosecutor general of Ukraine said Monday that her office is investigating 5,800 cases of Russian war crimes, with "more and more" proceedings every day.

Speaking with CNN's Jake Tapper on "The Lead," Iryna Venediktova said Ukraine has identified more than 500 suspects in the sprawling probe, including Russian politicians, military personnel and propaganda agents "who wanted this war, who started this war and who continued this war."

"We want to prosecute these war criminals in our Ukrainian courts, named by Ukraine," Venediktova said, while acknowledging the role of the International Criminal Court.

Her comments come as shocking atrocities in Ukraine, allegedly at the hands of Russian forces, have amplified calls to pursue war crimes charges against Russian President Vladimir Putin. After images of at least 20 bodies strewn across the street in Bucha, Ukraine, emerged earlier this month, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky called for an end to Russian "war crimes."

Russia has denied any involvement in the incident, claiming -- without evidence -- that the atrocities in Bucha were staged, and part of a "planned media campaign." But witnesses who have spoken to CNN said the carnage in the town began weeks ago, when it was occupied by Russian forces, and a video depicts Russian forces appearing to indiscriminately fire at a civilian.

Venediktova said Monday that she has made multiple visits to Bucha, where the community is "still exhuming the dead bodies from the mass grave."

"It is not only war crimes. Now we can say -- a lot of crimes against humanity," she said.

The scenes out of the Kyiv suburb have drawn international outrage, with Western leaders -- including President Joe Biden -- calling for war crimes investigations and fresh sanctions against Russia. The President said earlier this month that the images from Bucha warranted calling Putin a "war criminal," adding, "but we have to gather the information. We have to continue to provide Ukraine with the weapons they need to continue the fight and we have to get all the details so this can be an actual -- have a war crime trial."

The top war crimes prosecutor for the International Criminal Court has traveled to Ukraine to investigate, and the US Embassy in Kyiv argued in the war's opening days that specific Russian attacks constituted war crimes.

Anyone accused of a crime in the jurisdiction of the court can be tried. The court tries people, not countries, and focuses on those who hold the most responsibility: leaders and officials.

Still, investigations at the International Criminal Court take many years, and only a handful of convictions have ever been won.

Putin Is Targeting Ukrainian Hospitals. That's a War Crime (Foreign Policy) By Annie Sparrow

April 11, 2022

War is synonymous with suffering, but for civilians, the severity of the consequences depends on how a war is waged.

One war crime stands out for its singular capacity to amplify the suffering of civilians, multiply the effect of mass atrocities, and drive forced displacement: Russia's deliberate assault on health care. Because of its cruelty and devastating effect, this strategy deserves special attention and should be prioritized for prosecution.

On March 9, the Russian assault on a Mariupol maternity hospital in Ukraine sparked international condemnation. The Russian foreign minister confirmed that the attack was intentional but justified it by the specious claim, backed by fake images, that the hospital was a military base. For one critically injured mother-to-be, the attack destroyed the chance of an emergency cesarean section that could have saved her baby's life. Without the surgery that she herself needed, she also died in physical and emotional pain.

Attacks on hospitals began on the first day of the invasion, and at the time of writing, these attacks included 41 hospitals and clinics, four maternity hospitals, one blood bank, eight children's hospitals, three cancer centers, four psychiatric facilities and rehabilitation homes, seven ambulances, and several teams of first responders. At least 10 medical workers have been killed.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has a long history of bombing health facilities with surgical precision. In Syria, Russian forces systematically attacked hospitals and humanitarian convoys. They even bombed a vital vaccine storage facility containing more than 150,000 vaccines during a polio outbreak, depriving children of protection at a time of critical need.

Similarly, in 1996 during the First Chechen War, Russian forces attacked 24 hospitals and occupied a clearly marked, purpose-built International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) hospital, where they executed six ICRC staff. In the Second Chechen War, Russian forces decimated hospitals and punished doctors who treated people considered to be enemy combatants.

This history leaves little doubt that the attacks in Ukraine are a deliberate strategy aimed at denying civilians access to health care at the moment they need it most. That both deprives patients of lifesaving treatment and deters patients from seeking care at other health care facilities. This is the weaponization of health care.

The purpose of international humanitarian law is to minimize suffering in times of war. Following World War II, civilian immunity was broadly established in the 1949 Geneva Conventions and specifically in the 1977 Additional Protocols.

Yet access to health care is considered so vital for relief of suffering that attacks on hospitals have been banned since 1863, after Henry Dunant, a Swiss banker, traveled to the front lines of Italy's war for independence to seek French Emperor Napoleon III's help with a business problem. Instead, he was confronted by the visceral suffering created by the 1859 Battle of Solferino, where tens of thousands of wounded soldiers were left to die in misery.

Dunant's business trip became a humanitarian mission. Back in Geneva, his front-line report, *A Memory of Solferino*, drove the creation of the ICRC and the first Geneva Convention. The treaty explicitly established legal immunity of medical personnel, ambulances, and health facilities. Medical neutrality provides the humanitarian space required for access to treat the sick and wounded.

Still, unscrupulous warring parties sometimes violate this fundamental ban and even have used the ICRC as a target. This makes sense in terms of narrow military logic. In 1863, very few wounded soldiers returned to the battlefield. For one, most people, not just soldiers, died of infectious diseases, which doctors didn't understand and didn't know how to treat. Without anesthesia or infection control, surgery was a treatment of last resort.

As clinical care advanced, so did military rationale for attacking military hospitals: to deny care to enemy combatants. Early 20th-century advances in public health meant that by World War I, more soldiers died from combat than cholera, and during World War II, penicillin became widely available. By 1977, smallpox was eradicated, and the demise of infectious diseases seemed certain. Still, the Geneva Conventions' Additional Protocols of 1977 spelled out special protections for health workers and institutions because they were so essential to human welfare during wartime.

Bodies of 765 civilians recovered so far in Kyiv region, says prosecutor (The Guardian)

By Isobel Koshiw and Dan Sabbagh
April 13, 2022

Ukrainian authorities have collected the bodies of 765 civilians, including 30 children, in the Kyiv area since Russian forces were routed there at the start of April, a senior prosecutor in the region has said.

Oleh Tkalenko, the Kyiv region's deputy head prosecutor, said officials expected that many more dead bodies would be found

in the coming weeks.

“This is only the beginning. We have only just started working in the bigger towns such as Borodianka, Hostomel, Irpin and Bucha,” Tkalenko said. “There’s a lot we haven’t dug up yet.”

Several mass graves have been discovered since Ukrainian authorities regained control of swathes of the Kyiv region that had been under Russian occupation.

“Documenting each individual correctly takes time and effort. But we need to do this so that we have the evidence so that there won’t be any tales about it being a fake,” Tkalenko said. “I believe that [Russian soldiers] deliberately left the bodies of citizens they killed on the streets and prohibited people from burying them in order to intimidate the population.”

He described three cases of alleged torture against groups of civilians in the region that his office was investigating. Russia has repeatedly denied targeting civilians and said Ukrainian and western allegations of war crimes are concocted.

Tkalenko claimed that in the town of Motyzhyn, Russian soldiers picked out nine people who they believed had helped the Ukrainian army. Six people were tortured to death and three survived, he said.

“They were stripped naked, put in pits, beaten. They were shot in the legs, arms, and tortured,” Tkalenko said. “They starved them.”

He said officials had begun work on a larger case allegedly involving more than 40 people in the village of Dymier, north of Kyiv. “They were used as forced labourers. They made them dig their own graves and broke their fingers. They shot near their heads and between their legs. Those who refused to speak, or if they did not like what they were saying, were shot in the arm. They were strangled, their arms were twisted.”

The third case under investigation relates to the territory of a golf club near the town of Makariv. Russian forces were using the club as their headquarters and detained a group of local residents. “They were buried alive, forced to dig a grave, beaten,” Tkalenko said.

He declined to give exact figures on the instances of sexual violence or rape that had been documented. He said the number of rape cases opened by prosecutors in the Kyiv region was in the tens. He stressed, however, that women were reluctant to file police reports about acts of sexual violence because they believed the perpetrators would not be caught. Instead, they were contacting psychologists and doctors for help.

“People are ashamed to talk about rape,” Tkalenko said. “We are approaching individuals and talking to them one by one. People are more ready to talk about torture cases.”

The Ukrainian president, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, said on Tuesday the number of rape cases was in the hundreds. A spokesperson for Zelenskyy’s office declined to give an exact figure or further details about where the alleged crimes had taken place and against whom. The general prosecutor’s office could not be reached for comment on the exact number of cases.

Ukraine’s human rights ombudsman, Lyudmila Denisova, said on 8 April that 25 women had been kept in a basement in a house in Bucha and systemically raped.

“It’s hard to talk about what goes on in their head,” Tkalenko said of the psychology of Russian troops. “But I would say that the Russian army is made up of people who couldn’t afford the bribe to get out of conscription. They even stole people’s boilers.”

Internationally appointed human rights monitors said they had found “clear patterns” of violations of international humanitarian law by “Russian forces in their conduct of hostilities”, in a preliminary assessment of the conduct of the seven-week long war in Ukraine.

The three experts, appointed by the 57-country Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), whose members cover Europe, North America and central Asia, said that had Russia respected humanitarian law and carefully avoided shelling hospitals and other protected infrastructure then “the number of civilians killed or injured would have remained much lower”.

“Considerably fewer houses, hospitals, cultural properties, schools, multistorey residential buildings, water stations and electricity systems would have been damaged or destroyed,” the monitors continued in a report released by the OSCE on Wednesday.

But it also found human rights “violations and problems” attributable to Ukraine, in particular “the treatment of prisoners of war, who originally were considered criminals” after video emerged that appeared to show Russian soldiers being shot in the

leg by their captors last month.

The UN high commissioner for human rights has so far formally recorded 4,450 civilian casualties in Ukraine since the war began, of which 1,892 were killed and 2,558 injured. But the figure is almost certainly an underestimate due to the difficulties of accurate documentation while fighting is ongoing.

Ukraine was one of 45 OSCE countries that agreed to appoint the monitors, but Russia did not cooperate, meaning the monitoring group had to rely on Russian public statements, where available, for its perspective on alleged human rights violations.

'Clear Patterns' of Russian Rights Abuses Found in Ukraine, Report Says (New York Times)

By Marc Santora, Erika Solomon, and Carlotta Gall

April 13, 2022

Investigators from almost a dozen countries combed bombed-out towns and freshly dug graves in Ukraine on Wednesday for evidence of war crimes, and a wide-ranging investigation by an international security organization detailed what it said were "clear patterns" of human rights violations by Russian forces.

Some of the atrocities may constitute war crimes, said investigators from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, who examined myriad reports of rapes, abductions and attacks on civilian targets, as well as the use of banned munitions.

On Wednesday, civilians were still bearing much of the brunt of the seven-week-old invasion as Russian forces, massing for an assault in the east, bombarded Ukraine's second-largest city, Kharkiv, striking an apartment building.

In an hourlong phone call with Volodymyr Zelensky, Ukraine's leader, President Biden said the United States, already a major provider of defensive armaments to Ukraine, would send an additional \$800 million in military and other security aid. The package will include "new capabilities tailored to the wider assault we expect Russia to launch in eastern Ukraine," Mr. Biden said in a statement.

American officials said Wednesday that the United States, in helping Ukraine prepare for such an assault, had increased the flow of intelligence to Ukraine's government about Russian forces in eastern Ukraine and the Crimean Peninsula, which Russia seized from Ukraine eight years ago. The administration also is considering whether to send a high-level official to Kyiv, Ukraine's capital, in the days ahead as a sign of support for the country, according to a person familiar with the internal discussions.

War crimes claims are famously difficult to investigate, and still harder to prosecute. It's rare for national leaders to be charged, and even rarer for them to end up in the defendant's chair.

But the war in Ukraine may prove different, some experts say, and momentum has been building to hold the Kremlin leadership responsible.

An International Criminal Court investigation into possible war crimes has been underway since last month, and a number of countries have been looking at ways for the United Nations to help create a special court that could prosecute Russia for what is known as the crime of aggression. Other possibilities include trying Russians in the courts of other nations under the principle of universal jurisdiction, the legal concept that some crimes are so egregious they can be prosecuted anywhere.

Part of the motivation for accountability is the revulsion in Europe and much of the world over the behavior of President Vladimir V. Putin's forces, including reported executions of bound civilians and other atrocities.

War crimes experts also point to technological advances in forensic tools like facial identification software not available to those looking into earlier conflicts, and the sheer number of investigators on the ground in Ukraine — crucially, with the government's blessing. A dozen French investigators joined the inquiries this week.

"There will be prosecutions, and probably all over the world," said Leila Sadat, an international law professor at Washington University in St. Louis, and a longtime adviser to the chief prosecutor of the International Criminal Court on crimes against humanity. "Ukraine is actually crawling with war crimes investigators right now."

Still, experts warned that the process would be slow, and that any early indictments would most likely be against lower-ranking Russian officials and armed-service members. Russia, which has described the accusations as fictional or unfounded, is not expected to cooperate in any prosecution.

The report released Wednesday by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, a 57-member organization based in Vienna that includes Russia, Ukraine and the United States, is one of the first in-depth studies of human rights abuses during Russia's offensive against Ukraine.

Investigators looked at some of the most notorious attacks and other violent acts of the war, including Russia's bombings of a theater and a maternity hospital in the besieged city of Mariupol, both depicted in the report as apparent war crimes.

They also pored through accounts of other horrific, if less visible, acts of violence. "There are allegations of rapes, including gang rapes, committed by Russian soldiers in many other regions in Ukraine," they wrote.

But often, they were stymied.

Russia declined to cooperate with the three-person team of investigators, making it "impossible for the mission to take account of the Russian position on all pertinent incidents," the report said.

Investigators found that Ukrainian forces, too, had been guilty of some abuses, particularly in the treatment of prisoners of war. "The violations committed by the Russian Federation, however, are by far larger in nature and scale," their report said.

Michael Carpenter, the American ambassador to the O.S.C.E., said the report "documents the catalog of inhumanity perpetrated by Russia's forces in Ukraine." The European Union issued a similarly positive appraisal.

"This war is not only fought on the ground," the bloc said in a statement. "It is clear that the Kremlin is also waging a shameful disinformation campaign in order to hide the facts of Russia's brutal attacks on civilians in Ukraine. Reliable information and collection of facts have therefore never been as important as today."

The Kremlin's own mission to the O.S.C.E. dismissed the findings as "unfounded propaganda."

On Tuesday, even as the Ukrainian authorities were unearthing bodies in full view of international journalists and other observers, Mr. Putin called the atrocities a "fake" that had been elaborately staged by the West.

On Wednesday, standing near the site of two mass graves, Ukraine's prosecutor general, Iryna Venediktova, said there was an obligation both to uncover the facts and to do so in a transparent way to combat Russian disinformation.

"When you see dead bodies here, from the other side, from the Russian Federation, they say it is all fake, all this is our theater," Ms. Venediktova said. Ukrainian prosecutors and the newly arrived team of French experts exhumed bodies this week from mass graves in Bucha, a Kyiv suburb, where hundreds of civilians were killed during the brief Russian occupation of the area. The French government said that its team included ballistics and explosives experts and that it had the ability to do rapid DNA tests.

Evidence from the French investigation and others involving several different countries will be channeled to the International Criminal Court, which started looking into possible war crimes a week after the Feb. 24 invasion. Although Ukraine is not part of the agreement that created the court two decades ago, it has granted the court authority to investigate and prosecute in this conflict.

Investigators say they are intent on showing the world the reality of the war.

"They can see everything. They can see the situation here: real graves, real dead bodies, real bomb attacks," Ms. Venediktova said. "That's why for us this moment is very important."

The O.S.C.E. report described a range of subterfuge by Russian forces, including the use of Red Cross emblems, white flags, Ukrainian flags and civilian clothes. And the organization's investigators expressed concern that both sides might be holding more prisoners than disclosed.

On Wednesday, President Zelensky spoke directly about one of them: Viktor Medvedchuk, a Ukrainian politician and ally of Mr. Putin's who was detained this week. Mr. Zelensky proposed exchanging him for Ukrainians held captive by Russian forces.

Even as agreement grew among many world leaders that war crimes charges were warranted, there was some disagreement over how to characterize Russia's actions. Some leaders, among them Mr. Biden, have begun to use the term "genocide" — an escalation of his rhetoric. On Wednesday, France's president, Emmanuel Macron, dissented.

"What is happening is madness, it's a brutality that's unheard-of," Mr. Macron said. But, he said, "Genocide has a meaning. The Ukrainian people and the Russian people are brethren people."

"I'm not sure that an escalation of words serves the cause," he said.

The war crimes report came amid signs that Russia's invasion may have backfired in at least one respect. Mr. Putin has long objected to NATO's expansion eastward into the onetime domains of the Soviet Union, describing it as a fundamental threat to Russia. But on Wednesday, two militarily nonaligned nations, Finland and Sweden, said they were seriously considering joining the alliance.

Legal experts did not rule out the possibility, some day, of an indictment of Mr. Putin, who has already been castigated as a war criminal by some Western leaders. And were Mr. Putin to be criminally charged by a court outside Russia, it would likely mean he would have to restrict his international travel in order to minimize the risk of possible arrest were he to venture beyond Russia's borders.

David Crane, a legal scholar at Syracuse University who was the chief prosecutor for the Special Court for Sierra Leone, an international war crimes tribunal that convicted the former president of Liberia, Charles G. Taylor, said he was confident that the International Criminal Court or some other judicial body would find legal grounds to charge the Russian president.

And even if Mr. Putin is never arrested and remains the leader of Russia, he said, the legal and diplomatic consequences of a war crimes indictment would severely undermine his credibility.

It would be as if "there's like an ash mark on his forehead," Mr. Crane said. "There's no good options for him."

Russia's mass rapes in Ukraine are a war crime. Its military leaders must face prosecution (The Guardian)

By Gabby Hinsliff
April 15, 2022

They read like messages from one of the creepier dating apps, or else the sort of unwanted lechery with which many young women on social media are grimly familiar.

One man suggests sharing "a large bed, we could sleep together" and then letting "what we both want happen". Another is keen to let the recipient know she is "so beautiful", while a third immediately asks, "Are you single?" But these aren't just any old clumsy sexual overtures. These are messages left for women fleeing war-torn Ukraine, on a Facebook group seeking to match refugees with Britons offering sanctuary. The grotesque parody of shelter some men see fit to offer is a chance to flee the threat of rape by Russian soldiers, but only for somewhere you might want to barricade yourself into the spare bedroom at night. An undercover reporter posing as a refugee found more than half the messages sent to her came from men living alone, some explicit about the strings attached to their offers.

What kind of man, you may wonder, sees in a tragedy a sexual opportunity? Well, in Haiti after the 2010 earthquake, it was British aid workers who paid desperate locals for sex. In Somalia, ravaged by war, it was Belgian and Italian peacekeepers sent by the UN. In the makeshift refugee camps of northern France, it was people smugglers preying on potential clients. And now on the borders between Ukraine and its neighbours, it's sex traffickers, masquerading as good Samaritans offering unwary women a lift.

Wherever there is conflict, there is chaos and disruption and unguarded moments for women and children, and with depressing predictability some will always seek to exploit that. But it is the predictability that makes it more preventable. The UN has now asked the British government to ban single men from housing female refugees, advice that Michael Gove (the cabinet minister in charge of the refugee matching scheme) should act on and make policy. The more complex emerging challenge, however, is what to do about the horrific scale of systematic sexual violence emerging inside Ukraine itself, as the Russian retreat from occupied towns and villages frees victims to emerge and tell their stories.

As the war correspondent Christina Lamb writes bleakly in her book *Our Bodies, Their Battlefield*, rape is "the cheapest weapon known to man", one deployed every bit as strategically and deliberately as bombs and bullets. The aim is to intimidate, degrade and terrify civilians, and in some cultures to ensure victims are rejected by their own families. But some of the stories emerging from Ukraine now have a particularly chilling dimension, one all too familiar in wars of ethnic cleansing, which is the attempt to force women to bear the invading army's children.

In the rape camps set up by Serbian soldiers during the Balkan wars, victims were told they would be forced to bear Serbian babies. In Iraq, Islamic State systematically trafficked and sexually enslaved women from the Yazidi minority as part of a campaign to destroy the community from within, knowing the children born of rape would be deemed Muslims and not Yazidi.

Now Ukraine's human rights ombudsman, Lyudmyla Denisova, reports that in Bucha, 25 girls and women aged 14 to 24 were held in a basement by Russian soldiers who threatened to "rape them to the point where they wouldn't want sexual contact with any man, to prevent them from having Ukrainian children." Nine of them are now pregnant. The brutal message is that

even if Ukrainians won't submit to being Russian, their unborn children will have no choice. Meanwhile, Kyiv claims Ukrainian children from occupied cities have been forcibly moved across the border, fast-tracked for adoption by Russian families. When the US president, Joe Biden, talked this week of genocide in Ukraine, lawyers responded that there wasn't yet enough evidence to meet the legal threshold for such a charge. But at the very least, the propaganda coming out of Moscow suggests this war isn't simply over territory or strategic interests; that it is increasingly about eradicating the very idea of being Ukrainian, submerging national identity into some twisted fantasy of a Greater Russia. These are war crimes, every bit as much as chemical weapons attacks, and must be prosecuted as vigorously.

The foreign secretary, Liz Truss, this week launched the Murad Code – named after Nadia Murad, a Nobel peace prize-winning Yazidi woman who survived capture by IS – which is a welcome move to improve the collection of evidence from survivors worldwide. But Ukraine is already diligently gathering evidence. What it needs is help bringing the perpetrators to justice.

The Tory peer Arminka Helic has called for a new permanent international body to investigate, prosecute and stamp out rape as a war crime. Helic knows what she's talking about: a refugee from the Bosnian war, she went on to become special adviser to the then foreign secretary, William Hague. In 2012 she persuaded him to set up an initiative on sexual exploitation in war zones that is still bearing fruit today. But as she puts it, "impunity is the norm" still for a war crime that is less visible than bombed-out cities or mass graves, and often taken less seriously. Training and culture within armed forces worldwide can start to change that, but it's only when commanding officers actually end up in the dock for overseeing sexual war crimes that the message will really hit home. We can, and must, do better than this.

Bound, beaten, killed: Ukrainian civilians reveal horrors of Russian torture chamber (The Independent)

By Bel Trew

April 17, 2022

Blindfolded, arms and legs bound, and lying in the corner of the torture room, Dima could only hear his fellow prisoner scream and his ribs crack, as the man was beaten to death next to him.

The soldiers had grunted with exertion as they bound the prisoner – Kolya – into the "lastochka" or "swallow" position, an infamous torture method long favoured by Russian forces.

They then got to work as they always did in this makeshift cell below the railway station in Trostyanets, a northeastern Ukrainian town near the border with Russia.

Dima remembers how Kolya, who had apparently denounced Moscow publicly, was subjected to particularly savage violence. Even after Kolya was dragged to the blood-stained room, he refused to stop cursing Russia's invasion of Ukraine, fuelling the relentless blows that rained down on him.

It was only when he went quiet that the boots crunched out of the cell. Then Dima heard a gurgle edge Kolya's breath.

"I screamed at the guards: 'He is dying, he is dying.' I tried with my bound feet to push a bottle of water towards him," says Dima, visibly distressed.

"All they did was laugh and say: 'If he dies, he dies. All Ukrainians must die.' I kept calling to Kolya but he didn't reply," the part-time mechanic adds.

Trapped in a purgatory of darkness that erased time, Dima thinks Kolya was murdered on the second or third day of his captivity – but he cannot say for sure. "They kept the body next to me until the morning when they removed it and brought in two more people," he adds.

For 10 days, survivors of this room – all civilians – say they were starved, tortured, subjected to multiple mock executions, threatened with rape and forced to sit in their own excrement by soldiers under Trostyanets station.

This is just part of a slew of new testimonies obtained by The Independent that provide fresh evidence of possible war crimes in Ukraine's northeastern region of Sumy.

The Independent spoke to two of the survivors: Dima, the first to be held captive, and Andrei, who says he was abducted by soldiers a few days later.

Dima says Kolya was prisoner number four of at least eight civilians held there during the month-long Russian occupation of the town.

He shows us the site, located in a basement under the main ticket hall of the station. It was just a few metres wide, and still smeared in blood.

Three of the detainees are dead or missing: Koyla was killed, and two others, including a military veteran, were beaten almost unconscious before they were taken away. Their whereabouts are still unknown.

Andrei – prisoner number six – says he was stabbed in his left leg, stripped, and threatened with genital mutilation and rape.

At one point, the 33-year-old says, the Russian soldiers gave him electric shocks to his head. The beatings were so brutal he begged his captors to kill him.

His wrists, legs and ankles still bear the signs of torture, and he has lost sensation in his right hand.

“It was a nightmare. It was the worst thing that has ever happened to me,” he adds, his voice shaking.

Moscow has repeatedly and vehemently denied targeting civilians as well as committing war crimes in Ukraine, saying that accusations of torture, rape, summary execution and murder are “monstrous forgeries” aimed at besmirching the reputation of its forces.

But The Independent has collected dozens of testimonies pointing to possible violations of international law in multiple regions of the country: including most recently in Trostyanets.

Even then, the railway torture chamber is feared to be just the tip of the iceberg.

In fact, the full scale of the Russians’ month-long reign of terror here is just coming to light as terrified civilians – worried the town might be overrun again – are only now revealing what happened.

These stories are part of a mounting body of evidence of suspected war crimes across the country and echo horrific accounts told to The Independent in places including Bucha and Makariv in the Kyiv region, over 450km away, indicating that the Russian army’s use of abduction, torture, and summary executions is widespread.

On the outskirts of the capital alone, Ukrainian police said on Friday that they have so far collected the bodies of more than 900 civilians – 95 per cent of whom were apparently fatally shot.

Karim Khan QC, the chief prosecutor of the International Criminal Court who recently visited Bucha, one of the bloodiest sites northwest of the capital, went as far as to declare Ukraine a “crime scene”.

But investigators have only scratched the surface with Sumy.

Richard Weir, a crisis and conflict researcher for Human Rights Watch (HRW) that is investigating crimes across Ukraine, says the allegations in Trostyanets brought to light by The Independent “are a tragic addition to the growing list of abuses and apparent war crimes perpetrated by Russian forces during their occupation of Ukrainian towns and villages”.

“These incidents should be thoroughly and independently investigated, and those who are responsible should be held to account,” he says.

Dima and Andrei say they have decided to speak out about what happened to them to assist in the research. But it is hard for them to open up.

“I am still scared,” Andrei says. “I see their faces in my nightmares,” he adds, quietly.

Three weeks after the Russian soldiers left Trostyanets, the police received a call: another mutilated body had been found.

Bloody and bruised, the corpse of a man was discovered in the nearby village of Boromlya, next to a building used as a Russian base, just the day before The Independent came to the area.

A local police officer investigating the cases showed us photographs of that body and others discovered in the Trostyanets region. The bodies are rendered almost unrecognisable, their faces beaten to a bloody pulp. “All of them are civilians, some used to be in the army but were retired,” he says.

Before the war, Trostyanets – a sleepy rural town of 20,000 people – was best known for its chocolate factory, summer music festivals and once being the home of Tchaikovsky, who is said to have composed his first symphonic work there.

Now it is a blasted, muddy hellscape.

Because of its proximity to Russia, Trostyanets was stormed during the first few days of the invasion that Vladimir Putin launched on 24 February. The full fury of Russian forces quickly focused on it and the surrounding towns, as they represented a strategic gateway to the rest of the country.

Trostyanets lies on the crossroads between the main route north to Sumy, the capital of the wider region, and the road south to key cities such as Poltava.

Troops occupied the town and surrounding villages for 30 days, before a fierce counteroffensive by Ukrainian forces saw Russian forces withdraw on 25 March and reposition further east.

Local authorities tell The Independent the railway torture chamber is just one of several cases of abuse, violence and murder they are in the process of investigating. Men routinely disappeared during Russia's occupation.

Two police officers say they knew of five cases of bodies either showing signs of torture, or bound with gunshot wounds in and around Trostyanets. The latest body found a few days ago in Bromolya – a few kilometres north of Trostyanets – had “knife wounds to his legs and arm”. Two other bodies were found in Bilka, another nearby village.

Both police officers spoke on the condition of anonymity for security reasons. They stayed put in Trostyanets during the occupation, hiding as civilians in the town, and are concerned about the repercussions if Russian forces retake the area.

“Many of the bodies have knife wounds, all had their hands bound or taped, beaten and had bruises. Some were shot in the head, one of the bodies was covered in machine gun fire,” one of the officers recalls.

The brutality inflicted on the civilian population here not only highlights the Kremlin's playbook for Ukraine but reveals the last chaotic and desperate days of Russia's occupation of this region.

Dima says they were held because the soldiers wanted intelligence, despite the fact both he and Andrei had no military background and were just part-time labourers.

They say the soldiers wanted to know the whereabouts of the Ukrainian forces' positions and the identities of territorial defence and police officers in the town. They also wanted to know about the back roads their soldiers could take, since key bridges had been blown up.

And so Dima and Andrei say the group were beaten daily, starved, and denied permission to use the toilet – leaving them to sit for days in their own excrement. Dima says he was subjected to five different mock executions where they would take him out of the cell, make him kneel on the floor, put his hands on a wall and shoot next to his head.

“By the end I didn't know if I was alive or dead. Afterwards they would keep shouting, “Where are the Ukrainians? Where are the Ukrainians?” he says.

Andrei says he was first abducted on 18 March, two days after Dima was taken. Having ventured out to get supplies, Russian forces bagged his head and bundled him into an armoured car.

They first took him to the chocolate factory, which locals say was also used as a centre for torture, where one soldier stabbed his left leg. Andrei says he was asked similar questions to Dima. When he could not answer, they stripped him naked and soldiers threatened to cut off his penis and put it in his mouth, before warning that they would rape him.

He was eventually dragged to the railway torture room, head first.

“I was in such pain I kept screaming uncontrollably. They would storm into the room shouting: ‘Who is the bastard that keeps screaming?’ and then beat me more,” he says shakily.

Andrei eventually asked the soldiers to shoot him dead as he was in such pain. They refused and instead punished him for the request.

“They would also come to our cell and say again and again that Russians have won and that [Ukrainian president Volodymyr] Zelensky has failed.”

The pair are lucky to have survived. Among those held was a retired colonel who was already barely conscious when he was dragged to the cell. His whereabouts are still unknown.

The other man, who was tortured in the cell and vanished, had – from what Dima heard the soldiers say – been caught trying to disable a booby trap of grenades by a lake.

“I tried to give that man some water after they beat him badly, but they took him away and he never came back,” adds Dima.

A pair of civilians – whose names The Independent has withheld for their own security – were then brought in having already been badly tortured.

At that point Dima’s hands – restrained behind his back – were so swollen from the wire bindings he managed to convince one of the more reasonable guards, who rotated every three hours, to remove the wire and instead tape his hands in front of him.

“It meant I was able to move my blindfold slightly, I could see their bloody faces. It looked horrific. They didn’t speak much, they just whispered together,” he says.

There was one final inmate who Dima says nearly died of a heart attack in the cell, and was taken out by a doctor.

The prisoners say they were given just a single tin of canned meat – taken from packs of Russian military rations – to share each day.

They stockpiled the little water they were given, hiding it under styrofoam mattresses which covered the floor, in case a particularly cruel guard came on duty.

“We were soaking clothes in cold water to use on our wrists to bring down the swelling, so we could sleep just a little bit,” Dima recalls.

“Sometimes we would not be given food for a few days. We were at the mercy of the mood of the guards.”

The day the Russians arrived in Trostyanets, the police and members of the territorial defence vowed not to leave and stayed put – working secretly under Russian occupation.

Among them was Anatoliy, a former USSR soldier who came out of retirement to defend his hometown.

He has seen his fair share of horrors. In 1986 he was one of the “liquidators” who risked radiation sickness to clear up the Chernobyl nuclear disaster. This year, he put his life on the line again to stay in Trostyanets and help bury the bodies of residents killed by Russians.

The grandfather was also among those who on 27 March, just two days after the Russians left, discovered the first tortured corpse.

“My first thought when I saw the body was that this cannot be possible,” he tells The Independent.

“There was a disconnect in my brain. Why would Russia, that shouts about being our brothers, do such a thing?”

This first body was found in a garage behind the town’s administration building that the Russians had made their local headquarters.

An investigating police officer who takes us to the site says the man was from Boromlya. His name was not permitted to be made public, but photos of the body were shown to The Independent.

He is just in his underwear and coat, his face so badly beaten it is disfigured and unrecognisable. There appear to be bruises on his thigh, and smears of blood.

“He was found hands tied together and shot in the head,” the officer says.

The police are still trying to piece together what happened to him and how he got to Trostyanets. They are also working to locate the rest of the missing.

A recent investigation by the Organisation for Security and Cooperation (OSCE) in Europe into allegations of Russian violations of humanitarian law in Ukraine has found evidence of multiple war crimes, including in Trostyanets.

In its report, the OSCE referred to a man in Trostyanets who was allegedly brutally abused and killed before being found with “multiple bodily injuries in his garage”. It is unclear whether it is the same case uncovered by The Independent.

Anatoliy says a friend of his, also a retired officer, vanished on 12 March when Russian soldiers came to his house, put a bag over his head, and marched him away.

His whereabouts are unknown.

“He is not the only one. There are a lot of people still coming forward saying, my brother or my father are missing,” Anatoliy says. There are cases of missing people in Trostyanets, and the nearby villages of Bilka and Boromlya.

“We heard reports that bodies were thrown in the river, which we need to dredge,” he adds.

Anatoliy takes us around the Trostyanets administration building that was the Russians’ main base during their one-month occupation.

It is littered with excrement, blood smears, Russian military food rations, and discarded bottles of alcohol. In the main room, apparently used by the commander, is a half-drunk bottle of prosecco.

Alcohol is a running theme in the testimonies from the town: everyone The Independent interviewed says the soldiers were routinely drunk and erratic.

At the city’s main hospital – which was shelled – chief doctor Anatoliy Plahtyrya recalls how three days before the Russians were ultimately forced to retreat, an inebriated colonel stumbled into the building.

“He was drunk or on drugs, he went from cabinet to cabinet looking for medical alcohol to drink, and then went off,” Dr Plahtyrya says.

The doctor says that his centre, already under pressure as the Russian soldiers had taken over the town’s main emergency hospital and stolen all but one of the ambulances, began receiving an increasing number of people with gunshot wounds.

Several had apparently been shot at the railway station that had become a Russian base and where Dima and Andrei were, unbeknown to people, still being held underground.

“There was a sniper positioned there who would shoot at anyone who approached,” Dr Plahtyrya says.

Today, the entrance to the busy station is a blasted wasteland littered with empty Russian ammunition boxes, dozens of which were used to barricade up the windows. Destroyed tanks and armoured vehicles squat like toads in the mud with the vertebrae of detached caterpillar tracks slung across their sides.

The prisoners below ground heard the last fierce battle unfold, which shook the ground and walls. There was a flurry of movement, as soldiers appeared to be packing in hurry.

“And then all of a sudden there was silence,” Dima says. Even the fighting stopped.

It took them half a day to pluck up the courage to try to break out of the cell and see what happened. They stumbled blinking into the wintery sunlight, to discover they were under the railway station – and that the Russians had gone.

Andrei says he is still struggling with nightmares and trauma from his ordeal. The physical injuries also bother him: he has no sensation in his hands and may have permanent nerve damage.

“I am lucky to be alive and free. There are still so many who are kidnapped and their fate is unknown,” he says, worried that torture rooms like the one he was held in exist across the country.

He is particularly concerned about those living under occupation along Ukraine’s coast and to the east – where Russia is poised to start a new offensive to take more land.

“Our worst nightmare has already happened to us here in Trostyanets. But what about people in Mariupol or Donetsk?” he asks. “When will it stop?”

Russia Opposes UN Investigation of Bucha War Crimes Allegations (Newsweek)

By Brendan Cole
April 19, 2022

Moscow has said it would oppose an independent investigation into an alleged massacre at Bucha at the center of claims Russian troops committed atrocities, which might form an International Criminal Court (ICC) case against Vladimir Putin.

Reports of a mass grave and bodies strewn in the streets after Russian forces pulled out of the Kyiv suburb shocked the world and prompted Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky to call for an end to Russian "war crimes."

But Russian foreign affairs ministry official Pyotr Ilyichev raised the prospect that Russia would use its veto to stop any move by the United Nations to investigate alleged atrocities in Bucha.

"So far, this topic has not been raised at the UN," said Ilyichev, who is the foreign ministry's director of the department of international organizations.

"We need to look at what kind of investigation it might be, who will conduct it," he told state-run news agency RIA Novosti. "Unfortunately, the experience of previous investigations, including through the ICC, shows only a biased position."

The RIA Novosti article Ilyichev is quoted in, reported "many questioned" the authenticity of the images of dead civilians in Bucha.

This reiterated the Russian defense ministry's line that Kyiv had presented the images as a "provocation," with RIA reporting that "none of the local residents suffered from violent actions."

War crimes cases can be referred to the ICC by the United Nations Security Council, in which Russia holds a veto. They can also be brought by national governments.

So far, dozens of referrals have been made about the war in Ukraine to the ICC, whose chief prosecutor Karim Khan visited Bucha last week.

These include the strike on a railway station in the eastern city of Kramatorsk, where civilians were waiting for evacuation trains to safer regions of the country. At least 50 people were killed, according to Ukrainian authorities.

Russia's bombing of hospitals and a theater in Mariupol where children were among those seeking refuge have also been described as war crimes.

Last month, Khan told CNN "it's never as easy as people think to get to the truth" which might lead to a successful war crimes prosecution.

"But at the same time, we've seen time and time again, from Nuremberg onwards, the truth will out, and that gives me confidence."

Ukrainians Are Speaking Up About Rape as a War Crime to Ensure the World Holds Russia Accountable (Time)

By Amie Ferris-Rotman

April 20, 2022

Rape as a weapon of war may date to the dawn of conflict. But in Ukraine, female lawmakers are waging a campaign to turn sexual violence by Russian soldiers against the invaders.

"No one thought that such cruelties and atrocities could happen in the middle of Europe," says Lesia Vasylenko, a Ukrainian Member of Parliament who in March traveled from Kyiv to London, where she and three other female lawmakers urged Prime Minister Boris Johnson to stop U.K. trade with Russia on the grounds that it was funding the rape of their countrywomen. A few weeks later, they took their message to Paris, raising the same issue with President Emmanuel Macron. On April 21, they will head to Brussels, seat of the European Union.

"It's important that people do not avert their eyes from this crime," says Vasylenko.

When Russian troops retreated from areas around Kyiv on April 1, official reports of sexual violence, which had trickled in during the five weeks after the invasion, suddenly took the shape of a systemic, coordinated campaign of sexual violence. Women and girls were the main target, but victims spanned old and young, male and female.

Ukraine's human rights ombudsman, Lyudmyla Denisova said that 25 teenage girls were kept in a basement in Bucha and gang-raped; nine of them are now pregnant. Elderly women spoke on camera about being raped by Russian soldiers. The bodies of children were found naked with their hands tied behind their backs, their genitals mutilated. Those victims included both girls and boys, and Ukrainian men and boys have been sexually assaulted in other incidents. A group of Ukrainian women POWs had their heads shaved in Russian captivity, where they were also stripped naked and forced to squat.

Human rights monitors say the number of additional cases extend into the scores, stoking fears for Ukrainians both still under Russian control or facing the prospect of becoming so, as Moscow launches a massive assault in the country's east.

"These sex crimes...are a weapon of war in order to humiliate, subjugate, terrorize and force people to flee the territory," says Marta Havryshko, Research Associate in contemporary history at the I. Krypiakevych Institute of Ukrainian Studies and a URIS Fellow at Basel University. "Russian soldiers are trying to send a signal to the whole community: we are the winners, you are weak, we will destroy you, so you better give up your struggle for independence."

The Ukrainian campaign reflects the evolution of outrage. Rape was first recognized as a war crime in 1919, but many wars and decades passed before the first prosecution of rape as a war crime took place, against a Rwandan politician in 1998. The U.N.'s first prosecution was for the Former Yugoslavia, when Serbian forces maintained "rape camps" as what judges deemed "an instrument of terror."

In Kyiv, the current effort for justice shows not only advances by women—Ukraine currently has the largest number of female lawmakers in its history, several of whom are raising awareness about wartime rape—but also of the rising awareness that robs sexual violence of the stigma its perpetrators intend. As the lawmakers press the case for prosecution in the capitals of Europe, viral posts on Ukrainian social media—from a gynecologist, a lawyer, even a popular TV host—implore fellow Ukrainian women to come forward with evidence of sexual violence committed by Russian troops.

Technology also helps. A war broadcast 24/7 over social media feeds not only hastens the documentation of other war crimes; it also makes it harder for the Kremlin to deny sexual violence. Images of the dumped naked bodies of women and children, as well as the bloodied thighs of dead men with their hands tied behind their backs, are indelible.

There are signs the world is beginning to listen.

In the United Kingdom, which has a track record of documenting sexual violence in conflict, from Syria to Iraq to Somalia and South Sudan, Ukraine's mass rapes have reignited calls for a permanent, independent, international body to investigate and prosecute rape as a war crime.

"If we're going to make a meaningful dent in the calculated and planned use of sexual violence in war then we need to have a proper, separate individual body," says British MP Alicia Kearns, who organized for the Ukrainian lawmakers to visit London. "I think it would be transformative." The effort is backed in the House of Lords by Arminka Helic from the House of Lords, who fled Bosnia as a refugee in the 1990s and helped set up a landmark initiative by the UK on preventing sexual violence in conflict a decade ago, with then-Foreign Secretary William Hague and Angelina Jolie, a U.N. Special Refugees Envoy.

Kearns describes how such a body—with a member-state setup, headquartered in London or the Netherlands, which is already home to the International Criminal Court at the Hague—might function in a warzone. At the beginning of a conflict, protective measures would be put in place and experts immediately deployed to help the local prosecutor's office collect evidence to prosecute the "low level and middle-ranking commanders who are the ones ordering their men to commit rape."

The goal is to gather evidence contemporaneously. What usually happens now, Kearns says, is a scramble for evidence when the "conflict finally resolves and by then, quelle surprise, it's too late."

A step toward the new body came April 13 with the Murad Code, guidelines for conduct focused on gathering information about sexual violence in conflict. Launched by the U.K. and Nobel Laureate Nadia Murad, the Yazidi campaigner and former ISIS captive, it aims to set a gold standard for collecting evidence from survivors and witnesses. It was introduced as Murad spoke to the United Nations Security Council last week about the need to develop a plan addressing the sexual violence in Ukraine. The U.N. said its human rights monitors have been seeking to verify allegations of rape and sexual violence.

Meanwhile, Ukraine's prosecutor general Iryna Venediktova—who in 2020 became the first woman to hold this position—has consulted with Beth Van Schaak, the U.S. Ambassador-at-Large for Global Criminal Justice, on how to work with Ukrainian prosecutors and investigators on cases of sexual violence. A spokesperson for the State Department told TIME the U.S. included rape and other gender-based violence in its consideration of war crimes.

Russia denies allegations of rape by its soldiers in Ukraine. "It's a lie," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters at the end of March. A week later, Russia's chief propagandist Vladimir Soloviev held a discussion with five other men on state TV, where they dismissed the accusations of rape as a "British psyops".

But Kateryna Busol, a Ukrainian lawyer specializing in international human rights, says Russian soldiers received the encouragement to rape from the very top. She noted that at a news conference with Macron on Feb. 7, Putin cast aside Ukraine's objections with a ditty about rape from a Soviet-era punk song: "Like it or don't like it, it's your duty, my beauty."

"It was both chilling and outrageous to me that a president who's also the commander of the armed forces would so easily make a rape joke.... It's enabling the troops on the ground," says Busol, an Academy Associate at Chatham House's Russia and Eurasia Program in London.

It would not be the first time Putin has joked about rape, or made degrading comments about women. In recent years, he has put down women for menstruating, and boasted his country's prostitutes are the best in the world. In 2017, he decriminalized domestic violence. (That same year, Ukraine, which has some of Europe's highest rates of domestic violence, went in the opposite direction and outlawed it).

And while Ukraine has been caught unawares by the scale of sexual violence in the war, it is slowly moving towards greater gender equality, says Sasha Kantser, external affairs manager for Feminist Workshop, an NGO based in Lviv in western Ukraine that provides women and men in the occupied territories with information about everything from emergency contraception to sexual health.

"Women are being encouraged by society to talk about the sexual violence they've experienced because that makes the Russian side accountable," she says. "And people are responding as humans... This is partly an achievement."

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Syria

Syria gas attack victims, awaiting justice, say impunity fuels war crimes (Reuters)

By Khalil Ashawi and Tom Perry

April 10, 2022

Abdel Hamid al-Youssef said 25 members of his family, including his wife and infant twins, were killed when poison gas was dropped on their town in Syria in 2017, in an attack a U.N.-backed inquiry concluded was launched by the Syrian state.

"In seconds, everything was erased. Life was completely erased," Youssef, 33, said of the sarin attack that struck the town of Khan Sheikhoun, one of scores of times chemical weapons have reportedly been used in the country's 11-year-old war.

The bombardment, in Syria's rebel-held northwest, killed at least 90 people, 30 of them children, Human Rights Watch, a New York-based rights group, said.

By the time of the strike, Syrian-allies Russia and China had already vetoed efforts at the United Nations to open an investigation by the International Criminal Court (ICC) into war crimes and crimes against humanity in Syria.

As the Khan Sheikhoun attack marks its fifth anniversary, survivors and human rights campaigners say the failure to hold anyone accountable for chemical attacks in Syria could encourage further use of such banned weapons.

The United States and other countries have warned Russia could deploy chemical or biological munitions in its invasion of Ukraine, without providing concrete evidence. The Kremlin has dismissed the statements as "diversion tactics".

"There is no deterrent for Russia," said Youssef, who wants Syrian President Bashar al-Assad to be held to account. "Until this day, the criminal is free."

Assad's government has denied using chemical weapons in the war, which started as an uprising against his rule and has killed

at least 350,000 people. Syria signed international conventions outlawing the use of such weapons in 2013.

The details of the Khan Sheikhoun attack are seared into Youssef's memory, starting with the noise of warplanes that launched several air strikes on the town beginning at 6:30 a.m.

Trying to get his family to safety, Youssef headed towards his parents' home. His wife went ahead as he stopped to aid a neighbour who was screaming for help.

Youssef said he helped load casualties into a pickup truck. Some were foaming at the mouth.

Youssef lost consciousness as he tried to help his niece. He awoke in hospital hours later, only realizing the scale of the calamity when he returned home that afternoon.

"There were rooms of martyrs. I didn't know which one to take: my brother, my nephew, my children, my wife," said Youssef. "They put them in shrouds. We took them to the cemetery and buried them there."

U.S. President Donald Trump's administration responded by firing 59 cruise missiles at the air strip from which it said the attack was launched.

Six months later, a report by an investigative mechanism established by the United Nations and the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) - which enforces treaties banning the use of such arms - said the victims' symptoms were consistent with large-scale poisoning by the nerve agent sarin.

It said it was "confident that the Syrian Arab Republic is responsible for the release of sarin at Khan Shaykhun on 4 April 2017". The town fell to government forces in 2019.

Five years later, Youssef says he still feels the effects and sometimes faints when he smells strong odours such as household chlorine. The biggest impact, however, has been psychological, he said, adding that he lives in fear.

For survivors of sarin attacks, the effects can include persistent vision problems, gastro intestinal issues, and post-traumatic stress disorder, said Professor Alastair Hay, a chemical weapons expert.

"The main impact is usually catastrophic death, and very quickly," he said, adding that more data is needed on the long-term consequences of exposure to chemical weapons.

At the time of the attack, Russia - which threw its military support behind Assad in 2015 - said the chemicals belonged to Syrian rebels, not the government. President Vladimir Putin said he believed Washington planned more missile strikes, and that rebels planned to stage chemical weapons attacks to provoke them.

The United States has warned that Russia could attempt similar so-called "false flag" attacks following its invasion of Ukraine in late February.

Washington and its allies have accused Putin's government of spreading an unproven claim that Ukraine had a biological weapons program as a prelude to potentially launching its own biological or chemical assault.

The White House has not provided evidence Russia has been planning such an attack. Nor has the Kremlin provided support for its claim that Ukraine is preparing to use chemical weapons.

Russia says it is mounting "a special military operation" to demilitarize its western neighbor and has denied that its troops have targeted civilians.

Syria has seen some of the most extensive use of chemical weapons since the First World War.

Around 150 cases of alleged uses of chemical weapons in Syria are being investigated by the OPCW and there have been 20 confirmed uses of such weapons, a source familiar with the matter said.

Investigations at the United Nations and by the OPCW special Investigation and Identification Team concluded that Syrian government forces used sarin and chlorine barrel bombs in attacks between 2015 and 2018. Investigators have also found the Islamic State group used chemical weapons in Syria.

The deadliest sarin attack of the war to date was in 2013 on rebel-held Ghouta near Damascus that killed hundreds of people but prompted no Western military response. The threat of a U.S. missile strike was averted when Moscow brokered a deal for Syria's chemical weapons to be destroyed by the following year.

Many diplomats and weapons inspectors later concluded Syria's promise to give up its stockpile was a ruse.

Critics said U.S. President Barack Obama failed to enforce his own "red line" against the use of chemical weapons by Assad.

"In Syria, the fact the Obama 'red line' disappeared in a puff of smoke really gave license for every dictator, despot, rogue state and terror group to use chemical weapons," said Hamish de Bretton-Gordon, a specialist in biological and chemical warfare.

"It also made the likes of Putin believe the West was weak and he could do what he likes with impunity."

A Kremlin spokesman did not immediately reply to emailed questions from Reuters. Neither did the Syrian information ministry.

Assad's opponents have drawn parallels between the war in Syria and the military methods used by Russia in Ukraine, including besieging and bombarding cities.

The ICC said last month it was opening an investigation into war crimes in Ukraine after a petition from an unprecedented 39 member states.

Russia and China's U.N. veto of an ICC inquiry on Syria has forced rights advocates to pursue other legal avenues.

Civil society groups have filed complaints over chemical weapons attacks in Syria to judicial authorities in France, Germany and Sweden, where criminal investigations have been opened under laws giving universal jurisdiction for crimes against humanity.

The cases have not yet been brought to prosecution, according to the Open Society Justice Initiative.

Hamid Ketteny, a civil defence rescue worker who says he carried the bodies of six children killed in Khan Sheikhoun, said he helped document the massacre.

"The silence of the international community towards the crimes previously committed here in Syria has allowed Russia and others to commit crimes in the rest of the world, and currently in Ukraine," he said.

Nidal Shikhani, director general of the Chemical Violations Documentation Centre of Syria, said he remained optimistic that perpetrators would be held to account, noting the large amounts of evidence gathered by his group and others.

His organisation had received requests for evidence from prosecutors on five cases in three European countries, most recently in September.

"These crimes do not fade with the passing of time," he said.

Suspect in Syria killings faces German war crimes charges (Associated Press)

April 14, 2022

A man who allegedly launched a grenade into a crowd of civilians waiting for food in Damascus in 2014, killing at least seven people, has been charged in Germany with war crimes and murder, prosecutors said Thursday.

The stateless man, identified only as Moafak D. in line with German privacy rules, was a member of the Free Palestine Movement, one of the groups that at the time controlled the Yarmouk district of the Syrian capital on behalf of Syrian President Bashar Assad's government, federal prosecutors said in a statement. They said that, on March 23, 2014, the suspect launched a grenade from an anti-tank weapon into a crowd in the district's Rejeh Square who were waiting for food aid from UNRWA, the U.N. agency for Palestinian refugees. At least seven people were killed and three wounded, including a 6-year-old child. The Yarmouk district, which grew out of a Palestinian refugee camp, was cordoned off by the Syrian government from July 2013 to April 2015, causing shortages of food, water and medical supplies. The suspect was arrested in Berlin on Aug. 4. Prosecutors didn't say how or when he came to Germany. He has been charged at a regional court in the German capital with war crimes, seven counts of murder, three of attempted murder and three of bodily harm. Germany's application of the rule of "universal jurisdiction," allowing the prosecution of serious crimes committed abroad, led in January to the first conviction of a senior Syrian official for crimes against humanity. The Berlin court will now have to decide whether to bring Moafak D.'s case to trial.

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Special Tribunal for Lebanon

Official Website of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon
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Israel and Palestine

Israel/OPT: Palestinian administrative detainees complete 100 days of boycotting Israeli courts (Amnesty International)

April 11, 2022

The 100-day boycott of Israel’s military courts by hundreds of Palestinian administrative detainees — those detained without trial or charge — underscores the need to end this cruel, unjust practice which helps maintain Israel’s system of apartheid against Palestinians, Amnesty International said today.

Nearly all the 490 Palestinian administrative detainees currently being held by Israel began a collective boycott on 1 January 2022, by refusing to participate in military court procedures that lack due process and are used merely to rubber stamp arbitrary detention. Their act of disobedience highlights the long-standing complicity of military courts in the use of administrative detention against Palestinians, where individuals are held for months without charge or trial, often on the whims of military officials or the Minister of Defence and based only on secret information provided by the Israeli Security Agency.

“Palestinian human rights defenders, journalists, academics and others have suffered from this cruel and inhuman practice and have been protesting it for decades including through hunger strikes. This boycott is a renewed collective call saying enough is enough,” said Saleh Higazi, Amnesty International’s Deputy Director for the Middle East and North Africa.

“This courageous boycott highlights Israel’s inhuman treatment and punishment of Palestinians. The international community, particularly states with close relations to Israel, must now take concrete action and pressure Israel to end its systematic use of arbitrary detention as a step towards dismantling apartheid.”

According to Palestinian human rights group Addameer, Israeli authorities issued 5,728 administrative detention orders against Palestinians across the Occupied Palestinian Territories between 2017-2021. In 2021, there was a surge of 1,695 orders, which were tied to a campaign of mass arrests by Israeli authorities during weeks of violence in May and June.

For decades, Israel has intentionally used administrative detention to detain individuals, including prisoners of conscience held solely for exercising their rights to freedom of expression, assembly and association, to punish them for their views and activism.

Salah Hammouri, a French-Palestinian lawyer, has been in administrative detention since 7 March 2022. For years, the Israeli

authorities have repeatedly harassed him, forcing him into multiple periods of administrative detention as well as taking action to revoke his residency status in East Jerusalem.

The Israeli authorities have increased the use of administrative detention in recent years, consistently detaining around 500 Palestinians, including children. On 28 March 2022, a day after two Israeli police officers were shot and killed by two armed Palestinian citizens of Israel, Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett ordered security services to hold anyone suspected of being involved in the attack under administrative detention.

Amal Nakleh, an 18-year-old Palestinian who joined the boycott, has been held in administrative detention since 21 January 2021. He suffers from a rare neuromuscular disorder that causes weakness in skeletal muscles; he was 17 at the time of his initial detention. He has since seen his detention renewed three times, including most recently on 18 January 2022, when a military court extended his detention for another four months.

“Amal Nakleh turned 18 after spending nearly a year in detention without charge. It is already tortuous enough for a family to fret about their child’s deteriorating health without having to suffer the cruelty of limbo in administrative detention. He must be immediately released,” said Saleh Higazi.

Islam al-Taweel, mayoral candidate for al-Bireh, a city in the West Bank, was arrested by Israeli forces on 21 March after a raid on his home at 1:30 in the morning. On 27 March, he received a four-month administrative detention order. His arrest took place five days before municipality elections took place, in which his electoral list won a majority of seats in al-Bireh municipality.

The Israeli authorities’ widespread and systematic use of arbitrary arrest, administrative detention and torture against Palestinians forms part of the state’s policy of domination and control over the Palestinian population. These actions amount to the crimes against humanity of apartheid, imprisonment and torture.

Background

The Israeli authorities have used administrative detention orders ever since the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip in 1967.

Israeli military commanders can issue administrative detention orders of up to six months to detain Palestinians if there are “reasonable grounds” that an individual is a risk to “the security of the area” or to “public security”.

The commander can extend the detention orders indefinitely, yet detainees must be brought before a military judge within eight days of the issue or renewal of a detention order — or released.

Although administrative detainees have the right to appeal every detention order and are entitled to legal counsel of their choice, neither the lawyer nor the detainee is informed of the details of the evidence against them. A military judge has the power to uphold, shorten or cancel the order. If the order is upheld, Palestinian detainees can contest the military judges’ rulings by petitioning the Supreme Court of Israel.

Israel’s Supreme Court has noted the importance of appeals and stated that administrative detention should only be used as a preventative measure against an individual who poses a danger to security that no other means will prevent.

The Court, however, has yet to introduce any clear rules for reviewing administrative detention, rarely questions the information on which detention orders are made, and generally fails to examine the decisions made by military court judges.

Calls grow for release of Palestinian prisoner Ahmad Manasra (AlJazeera)

By Zena Al Tahhan

April 13, 2022

Manasra, who suffers mental health issues, is appealing a rejection of his parole request.

Palestinians are increasing calls for the release of Ahmad Manasra, who was arrested and interrogated under horrific circumstances at the age of 13, before being imprisoned by Israel, and is currently suffering from serious mental health problems.

A hearing to review the now 21-year-old Manasra’s case was held at the Beer Sabaa (Beersheva) district court on Wednesday afternoon.

Manasra’s lawyers had appealed to the court against a special prison committee’s rejection of Manasra’s earlier request to have his case reviewed by a parole committee after he had served six years on his nine-year sentence.

Shortly after the hearing, one of Ahmad's lawyers Khaled Zabarqa said the court ruled the committee must review his case and listen to the lawyer's arguments. It is unclear when the committee session will be held.

According to regulations, prisoners who have served two-thirds of their sentences are eligible for this review. The committee originally rejected looking into his file on the basis that it was a case of "terrorism" – for which such regulations do not apply.

"These are all attempts to try and change the conditions he is in, even if we get him out only a few days earlier," his uncle, who shares the same name, told Al Jazeera.

Ahmad Manasra was initially sentenced to 12 years in prison, later reduced to nine years, for being with his cousin Hassan Manasra, who allegedly stabbed two Israeli settlers near the illegal settlement of Pisgat Ze'ev in occupied East Jerusalem in 2015.

Hassan, who was 15 at the time, was shot dead by an Israeli civilian, while Ahmad was severely beaten by an Israeli mob and run over by an Israeli driver, suffering fractures to his skull and internal bleeding.

A video showing Ahmad Manasra bleeding on the ground and gasping for help, while Israeli bystanders shouted and swore at the boy, telling him to "die", garnered widespread attention and outrage. Another video of Manasra undergoing harsh Israeli interrogation after the incident caused further anger.

Despite not having participated in the attack – which the courts acknowledged – Manasra was charged with attempted murder.

At the time of Manasra's arrest, Israeli law stated that children under 14 could not be held criminally responsible.

To circumvent this, Israeli authorities waited until Manasra was 14 to sentence him, before the law was changed by the government in August 2016.

The new law states that it is permissible "to imprison a minor convicted of serious crimes such as murder, attempted murder or manslaughter." Mental health

Manasra has been held in solitary confinement for the past five months, which has only worsened his mental health condition, the signs of which began appearing about a year and a half ago, according to Manasra's lawyer Khaled Zabarqa and his uncle.

In December 2021, an external doctor was allowed to visit Manasra for the first time since his imprisonment. The doctor, a psychiatrist from Doctors Without Borders (MSF), issued a medical report, which has since been attached to his case file, stating that Manasra suffers from schizophrenia.

"His mental health is deteriorating inside the prison. He keeps crying, he imagines things and situations that don't exist, he mixes up his speech," Manasra's uncle said. "I've been in prison and I've seen cases like this – we thought it was a phase that would pass – but he is only getting worse."

"We must use the tools that are at our disposal," Zabarqa told Al Jazeera while admitting that he was not hopeful of a positive outcome from the Israeli courts.

"Ahmad should have been released a long time ago," Zabarqa added, noting Manasra's non-participation in the attack.

"He is suffering, he is a chronically mentally ill patient, and there is a real danger to his life. The last time I visited him, three weeks ago, he asked me whether I am sure if it is unlawful in Islam for people to [kill themselves]," Zabarqa said.

Global campaign

The Palestine-Global Mental Health Network launched a campaign last month calling for Ahmad's immediate release, which has made ripples on social media under the hashtag #FreeAhmadManasra.

An online petition has more than 178,000 signatures so far.

"We want to attest to the fact that Ahmad has been subjected to continuous punishment and abuse, multiple physical, psychological, and social torture, including deprivation from family connectivity, visits and communication with his parents and brothers, and recent solitary confinement," the Network said in a March 6 statement.

Bilal Odeh, one of the campaign's organisers and a social and psychological expert, said Manasra's mental health is "highly damaged as a result of the tremendous pressure that was placed on him since his violent arrest [and] the violations of his right as a child".

“His mental health has severely deteriorated in the last period, as a result of his ongoing solitary confinement,” Odeh told Al Jazeera.

Odeh said Israeli prison authorities have made it very difficult to obtain medical information about Manasra, and that the doctor’s report diagnosing Manasra’s case as schizophrenia cannot be admitted as an official medical report.

“There is a serious need to release him immediately, so that he can get the psychological support he needs, to be with his family, and to lessen his suffering and that of his family.”

West Bank: Israeli forces kill two Palestinians, bringing April death toll to 17 (Middle East Eye)

April 14, 2022

Israeli troops shoot the pair during a new raid on Jenin city.

Israeli forces shot and killed two Palestinians early on Thursday during a raid on the occupied West Bank city of Jenin, the health ministry reported.

The victims were identified as Shaas Kamamji from Kufr Dan village, and Mustafa Abu al-Rab from Mesilia village.

The ministry later announced the death of a 45-year-old Palestinian father of six who was "critically wounded by Israeli bullets" on Wednesday in Beita, south of Nablus.

He was identified as Fawaz Hamayel by local sources.

Their deaths bring the total number of Palestinians killed by Israeli forces in less than 48 hours to six, as Israel ramps up its operations and raids across the West Bank.

Since the start of Ramadan on 2 April, 17 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli fire. A total of 41 have been killed this year.

Israeli attacks increased this week after Prime minister Naftali Bennett warned that Israel is now "on the offensive" and granted the security forces "full freedom of action".

His remarks were made after four attacks in Israel carried out by Palestinians between 22 March and 7 April left 14 people dead.

A wave of killings

On Wednesday evening, Israeli forces shot and killed two Palestinians in separate incidents in the West Bank.

The first victim, a young teenage boy, was killed in Husan village near Bethlehem. He was identified as Qusai Hamamra, 14, and his body was briefly withheld by Israeli forces after his death, according to the Palestinian Ministry of Health.

Northeast of Ramallah, Israeli forces fatally shot Omar Elayian, 20, in the chest, as they raided the town of Silwad and other parts of the city, the ministry said.

Earlier this week, Ghada Ibrahim al-Aridi, a 47-year-old widowed Palestinian mother of six, was shot and killed by an Israeli soldier in Husan village, west of Bethlehem.

Footage documenting the moment she was shot showed her posing no threat to the soldiers. No weapon was found on her.

The tensions have come during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan and ahead of the start of Passover Friday, an overlap that can heighten tensions around sacred sites in Jerusalem's Old City.

“Colonial Violence Is the Norm”: Israel Raids Al-Aqsa Mosque, Injuring 160+, Arresting Hundreds (Democracy Now)

April 18, 2022

At least 19 were injured around occupied Jerusalem’s Al-Aqsa Mosque on Sunday

after a violent crackdown by Israeli police cleared out worshipers from the compound. It was the second raid since Friday, when Israeli police used rubber bullets, stun grenades and tear gas on unarmed Palestinians, resulting in the arrest of more than 300 and at least 158 injuries. This latest violence in Jerusalem comes as the holy days of Ramadan and Passover overlap. Meanwhile, Western media has been describing the attacks as “clashes” and using other obfuscatory language “as if there is no imbalance of power here, as if there is no nuclear state using its rubber-coated bullets and tear gas against worshipers at a mosque,” says Palestinian writer Mohammed El-Kurd.

Transcript This is a rush transcript. Copy may not be in its final form. AMY GOODMAN: This is Democracy Now!, democracynow.org, The War and Peace Report. I'm Amy Goodman.

We begin today's show in occupied East Jerusalem, where Israeli forces raided the Al-Aqsa Mosque for the second time in three days, clearing worshipers from the third-holiest site in Islam. Nineteen Palestinians were injured. Some were hit by rubber-coated steel bullets. Over 150 Palestinians were injured in another raid at the mosque Friday. On Sunday, Palestinians described how Israeli police blocked their access to the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound.

PALESTINIAN MAN: [translated] We were forced out of the Al-Aqsa Mosque after the dawn prayer. Then Jewish settlers started to enter. After we saw two groups of them, we started to chant, and the Israeli forces tried to detain me. They are invading in big numbers. During this holiday, it is known every year that they, the Jewish visitors, invade the Al-Aqsa Mosque. I am calling on everyone who can reach Al-Aqsa gates to come and support us.

AMY GOODMAN: To protest Israel's violent crackdown, the United Arab List political party has suspended its participation in Israel's coalition government led by Prime Minister Naftali Bennett, who lost his majority last week.

For more, we're joined by Mohammed El-Kurd. He's the Palestinian writer and poet, the Palestine correspondent for The Nation magazine.

Mohammed, welcome back to Democracy Now! Can you describe the series of events this weekend that have led to, what, almost 170, if not more, Palestinians being injured at Al-Aqsa?

MOHAMMED EL-KURD: Absolutely. Thank you for having me.

You know, over the weekend, starting on Friday, almost 500 Palestinians were arrested by the Israeli occupation authorities from Al-Aqsa Mosque, and, as you said, 170 were injured, several of whom were in critical condition and several of whom were journalists, that we saw on video were targeted by design by the Israeli soldiers. And some had their cameras broken. Some had rubber-coated steel bullets hit their heads.

This is not particularly a unique incident. You know, violence, colonial violence, is the norm in occupied Jerusalem. And we see this kind of escalation and violations happen in Al-Aqsa Mosque constantly. What is particularly alarming here is the Israeli occupation authorities' attempt to install a new status quo, similar to the one in the Ibrahimi Mosque in Hebron, where Palestinian Muslims are forced to share their holy site, their mosque, their 980-year-old mosque, with Jewish settlers. And it should raise eyebrows, because the Al-Aqsa Mosque and Damascus Gate are maybe the only remaining public spaces for Palestinians in the entirety of Jerusalem, where Palestinian existence is criminalized, where a Palestinian taking up space is criminalized.

Al-Aqsa Mosque is, yes, the third-holiest site in Islam, but it's not only that. It is a social site. It's a political site. It's a site where I, as a teenager, used to go and study for my tests. And if we are robbed from that, then in our native city we do have any public spaces left.

AMY GOODMAN: Can you talk about what led up to what took place this weekend?

MOHAMMED EL-KURD: Well, you know, there is a bunch of Jewish groups, some of whom have fantasies of demolishing Al-Aqsa and installing a temple on top of it, were calling for invasions of Al-Aqsa, some of which were saying that if you sacrifice a goat on the Temple Mount, you'll get this sum of money as a reward. And, you know, we understand that the Israeli authorities are in partnership, are in collusion with the Israeli settlers, and so they have made the situation easy for them.

But in no way is this a new thing or — this is, in fact, a routine, and this is something we see all the time. And I believe that since it's becoming a lot more visible, it is an opportunity for journalists, particularly Western media, to be able to describe this objectively, because we have been seeing — for the past weekend, we have been seeing a lot of describing this as “clashes,” as if there is no imbalance of power here, as if there is no nuclear state using its rubber-coated bullets and tear gas against worshippers at a mosque.

AMY GOODMAN: Can you talk about the far-right Jewish group Return to Temple Mount that offered a reward to anyone who sacrificed a goat inside the Al-Aqsa Mosque?

MOHAMMED EL-KURD: Yeah, I mean, I think the adjective here, the proper adjective here, is “fanatic,” right? This is a group with some kind of religious fantasy that they are trying really hard to fulfill. And, to them, it's an awakening of a ritual. If they are sacrificing this animal on Al-Aqsa compound, or what they call the Temple Mount, then they are resurrecting that temple, or they are starting the resurrection of that temple. But I don't know much about that group, particularly, but I know that it's not — I wouldn't call it far-right. It's not a fringe group. This is an idea that is shared widely by settlers in Jerusalem, in which they want to dismantle Al-Aqsa, and they want to install a new status quo in which either there's no more Al-Aqsa or that Muslim Palestinians can only attend it and be in it during certain times of the day.

AMY GOODMAN: And can you talk about the media describing what's taking place as “clashes,” Mohammed?

MOHAMMED EL-KURD: Yeah, absolutely. You know, it's as though we are not seeing dozens and dozens of videos of Israeli occupation forces breaking windows of the mosque, as if we're not seeing videos of them targeting children and beating them with batons or targeting journalists and beating them with batons. To put this — to set up a false equivalence in which we are referring to these raids, these violations, these clear violations as “clashes,” we are not being objective journalists here. We are simply being mouthpieces for the Israeli government. We are parroting the official Israeli narrative. And this has happened also last year. This happens all the time. And I always try to invite journalists to take the opportunity to actually be objective and refer to an internationally recognized occupation as such, to refer to soldiers, dozens of soldiers, using batons and rubber bullets and tear gas against unarmed civilians as such. There are no clashes, in which the powers are not equal.

AMY GOODMAN: And can you talk about the numbers of Israelis and Palestinians who have died in the last few weeks?

MOHAMMED EL-KURD: I'm not aware of the numbers, but I know that in the past three days alone, over a dozen Palestinians were killed. A mother of six, who was partially blind, was shot down in the street for no reason other than, quote, “looking suspicious.” I know that young Palestinians in Jenin refugee camp have been shot and killed in the past few days. I know that a Palestinian lawyer and a member of the Public Committee Against the Wall in Nablus, in Beita, has died, has been killed by the Israeli occupation forces as he took his nephews and nieces to school.

I understand that Palestinian death is a common occurrence that does not raise anybody's eyebrows in Western media. And that disparity is what needs to be addressed. The statistics show the disparity in the deaths, and the statistics show who is the true victim of systemic material violence, institutional violence, violence backed by legality, by the judicial system. It is the Palestinians, because we continue living under 70 years of Zionist colonization, that murders us in the street, that robs us of our homes, that exiles us, that keeps us in an open-air prison.

AMY GOODMAN: I was wondering if you can talk more about the Israeli raids throughout the West Bank. I'm looking at a New York Times piece that says, “For the past week, Israeli forces have carried out a widespread campaign of raids into towns and cities across the West Bank, in a response to a wave of recent Palestinian attacks inside Israel that have killed 14 people. ... At least 14 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli forces since the beginning of Ramadan on April 2, including 16-year-old Mohammad Zakarneh, who was shot and killed on Sunday during one of the Israeli raids in Jenin, his mother said.” Mohammed El-Kurd?

MOHAMMED EL-KURD: You know, the positioning of these raids as some kind of response or some kind of retaliation is dishonest, because these raids happen whether or not Palestinians commit any acts. These raids are, by design, part of Israel's colonial violence against Palestinians. I know this because we see every single — every single day. If you look at Palestinian media, if you follow Palestinians on social media, you see every single day the raids, that have never abated for the past 70 years. But it is only when Israelis are

affected, it is only when Israelis, the settlers' sense of peace is disturbed, that we have international eyes looking at the situation.

AMY GOODMAN: I also wanted to ask you about Sheikh Jarrah, your community, where you've been detained as you fight to prevent homes from being demolished there, including fighting against being forced out of your own. You and your twin sister Muna were arrested and detained last year in the campaign to prevent the forced expulsion of Palestinians there. In February, you wrote about the Israeli member of parliament Itamar Ben-Gvir, who decided to move his office from the Knesset, from the Israeli parliament, to a yard in Sheikh Jarrah?

MOHAMMED EL-KURD: Yes, absolutely. And this is — you know, it sounds like a bizarre circus act almost. Why would an Israeli politician decide to move his office into somebody's backyard? But this actually has happened way more many — way so many times, more than I can count, in fact, with many other politicians who have set up office, makeshift offices, on our streets for purely political gain, right? It's a performance. It's a spectacle in which they are hoping to attain some kind of political popularity. And this is happening. Itamar Ben-Gvir, the same politician, has now decided to move his, quote-unquote, "office" from our neighbor's backyard in Sheikh Jarrah to Damascus Gate, where Palestinians are being brutalized and assaulted by the occupation forces for simply taking up a space that has historically been a public space for Palestinians.

I also want to just note that all of this is also happening in response to community organizing, be it in Sheikh Jarrah or in Silwan or in Damascus Gate or in Al-Aqsa Mosque. In fact, over — on Saturday and Friday, we have seen Israeli forces attack and assault Palestinians with batons and tear gas. We have seen people with bruised eyes because of the rubber bullets. We have seen all of that. But what we didn't see much of is, in fact, you know, the 500 Palestinians that were arrested — Palestinian drivers of Israeli public transportation were summoned to transfer them to detention centers, and many of these Palestinian drivers actually walked away from their buses, declined to do so, fearing not any consequences. We did not see also that there were hundreds of Palestinians waiting outside of the jail cells — waiting outside of the jailhouses and bailing out random Palestinian strangers and taking them back home, sometimes hours away from Jerusalem. This kind of community organizing, this kind of mutual aid is also empowering, and we haven't been seeing much of it in American media.

AMY GOODMAN: Finally, I wanted to ask about the journalists that have been attacked covering Al-Aqsa. In Ukraine, we're hearing about one journalist after another being injured, being killed, and the whole discussion by the Ukrainian president, Zelensky, deeply concerned by what he talks about, the occupied territories. And I was wondering if you could make some comparisons. I'm using the journalists as an example, but the Journalist Support Committee documented Israeli attacks on photojournalist Rami al-Khatib, the journalist Nasreen Salem and a third unnamed female photojournalist by Jewish soldiers at Al-Aqsa. Can you describe what happened and talk about the comparison, as we wrap up, Mohammed?

MOHAMMED EL-KURD: The attacks on journalists are as routine as it gets. This is a part of the Israeli colonial establishment, to attack journalists, to let people know that "if you attempt to not only resist, but if you merely attempt to document our violations, our crimes, then you are going to be punished." This is also echoed outside of the physical realm, outside of just physical attacks on journalists. But we are sitting sanctions on Palestinian journalists in many Western countries and baseless accusations of bigotry. This is the same kind of attacks we are seeing with censoring Palestinian voices on social media and elsewhere.

I'm not particularly interested in making comparisons. I think everybody — you know, anybody with any critical thinking skills is able to look at the bitter contrast in which how Ukrainian resistance has been met, whereas how Palestinian resistance has been vilified. I think anybody is able to look at how rapidly the world responded to the Russian occupation versus the 70 years of ongoing Zionist colonization that no one has batted an eye to almost.

AMY GOODMAN: Well, Mohammed El-Kurd, I want to thank you for being with us, Palestinian writer and poet, Palestine correspondent for The Nation magazine. He is the author of a volume of poetry titled Rifqa.

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Gulf Region

'Why did our Muslim brothers do this to us?': How Arab states are 'major culprits' in illegal Uyghur rendition back to China (The New Arab)

By Ruth Ingram

April 12, 2022

Children torn from parents, husbands from wives, and fractured families scattered to the four winds at China's bidding, are the fallout from Arab state complicity in forceable Uyghur rendition.

Since 2001, according to new findings, 292 Uyghurs have been picked up, detained or deported from at least six Arab states, some whilst performing their Hajj pilgrimage.

One hundred and ninety-one of these individuals, having been given bonafide visas to study at Al-Azhar Mosque and University – one of the jewels of the Islamic world – were summarily hunted down in 2017 with the agreement of the Egyptian authorities, interrogated jointly with Chinese intelligence officers who reportedly joined Egyptian security services in Cairo's notorious Tora Prison, and many forcibly returned to China.

Countless numbers of these vanished completely into the extra-judicial network of detention facilities built to intern "wayward" Uyghurs. They have never been seen or heard of again.

Beyond Silence, a comprehensive analysis of the roundups, by the Uyghur Human Rights Project (UHRP) and the Oxus Society for Central Asian Affairs, cites Egypt, Morocco, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), as the main culprits, all of which are involved in varying degrees of complicity with Beijing to pursue and return Uyghurs who have escaped Beijing's dragnet.

Islamic brotherhood and loyalty are no longer guarantees of safe haven for fleeing Uyghurs that they might once have been, according to the report whose in-depth analysis of dozens of case studies shows Arab collusion with the PRC on many levels to hunt down fellow Muslims.

Multi-layered tactics are employed to corral them "home". Transnational digital surveillance enables close monitoring of those living outside the motherland and denial of travel documents renders Arab state-resident Uyghurs stateless and vulnerable to deportation.

Uyghur students in Islamic education are sitting targets, as are those performing the Hajj or Umrah in Saudi Arabia, with the fail-safe excuse of the "Global War on Terror" and "counter-terrorism" to justify illegal detentions.

The findings assume greater poignancy with the invitation of China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi as the special guest at this year's 57-member Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) gathering in Islamabad, Pakistan on March 22.

Praising his country's effort at supplying 1.3 billion doses of Covid-19 vaccines and miscellaneous pandemic paraphernalia to 50 Muslim countries, Wang Yi's appearance signals a growing rapprochement with Arab states.

They are increasingly prepared to overlook human rights abuses against the Uyghurs in China's North West in favour of millions of dollars of loans and infrastructure projects that necessitate turning a blind eye to the well-documented atrocities.

Billions in aid payments are finding their way from China into Arab state coffers with Xi Jinping describing Chinese and Arab peoples as "though far apart in distance, as close as family."

Growing unease with Washington over its activities in the Gulf is fuelling a reluctance to ease rising oil prices precipitated by the Ukrainian crisis. Talks are also underway with Beijing to price some of its oil deals with China in yuan in order to chip away at the US dollar's dominance of the global petroleum market, and a rare visit by Chinese leaders to Riyadh is imminent.

A recent final insult is the threatened deportation of two Uyghurs from Saudi Arabia who were detained at

the behest of Beijing in November 2020 while on a Hajj pilgrimage. Aimidoula Waili and Nuermaiti Ruze have languished without trial and face certain imprisonment or worse should they be returned to Xinjiang.

Beyond Silence's in-depth analysis of the authors' own "China's Transnational Repression of Uyghurs Dataset" examines 1,546 cases of detention and deportation from 1997 until March 2021.

Original interviews with Uyghurs who have fled the region, multiple reports by expert witnesses, government documents in both English and Arabic and human rights reports, all point clearly to a greater cosyng up of the Arab world to the PRC over the past 20 years, and incremental powerlessness of Uyghurs and their champions in the face of the might of the two power blocs.

UHRP Executive Director Omer Kanat is outraged by the connivance of Arab governments with the Chinese government to persecute the Uyghur community.

"China's hunt for Uyghurs across the globe means no Uyghur feels safe inside or outside of China," he said. He urged governments to challenge the PRC's transgression of sovereign borders to rein in Uyghurs.

"Muslim-majority states should be standing with Uyghurs against China's crimes against humanity and genocide and not sending back vulnerable individuals to the government that is conducting an all-out campaign to stamp out Islam," he said.

Beyond Silence urges the international community to step up protection of vulnerable Uyghurs whose safe havens are diminishing around the world.

The authors stress the need for safe pathways outside UNHCR processing channels that are all too easily intercepted by the CCP in its relentless hounding of Uyghur prey.

They plead with Arab governments to confront Chinese trans-national repression in the region by forming coalitions of Islamic organisations strong enough to combat the might of the superpower and students under their protection should never again be subject to inhuman events such as those that unfolded in Egypt in 2017.

Bradley Jardine, Research Director at the Oxus Society for Central Asian Affairs and a co-author of the report, said, "I hope this report will raise awareness of the global scale of China's repressive crackdown on Uyghurs by noting that large parts of the Muslim world are not only silent, but they are also actively complicit in China's humanitarian abuse."

Speaking anonymously to The New Arab from Turkey, the wife of an Al-Azhar student who had fled Egypt amidst the roundups described the afternoon her husband had been dragged with his Uyghur classmates from class in 2017.

Six months pregnant with their first child and unable to attend lectures herself that day, she said there had been no warning of the impending arrests. "We were studying with both China's and Egypt's permission," she said. "We had done nothing wrong."

After she heard the news she knew if she stayed in Egypt the authorities would come after her. She was urged to go straight to the airport in case the border was still open and flee immediately to Turkey.

By some good chance, word had not yet reached the airport and she made it to Turkey. Five years since she lost her husband and the father of her child she feels betrayed by the country that should have given her refuge. "I will never see him again, and my son will never know his father," she tells through her tears.

"We have had no news and have no idea what happened to him... Why did our Muslim brothers do this to us?"

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Afghanistan

Dutch court convicts Afghan man of involvement in war crimes (Washington Post)

April 14, 2022

A Dutch court on Thursday imposed a 12-year prison sentence on a 76-year-old Afghan man convicted of involvement in war crimes in a Kabul prison in the 1980s.

The suspect, identified as Abdul Razzaq Rafief, had told a court in The Hague that his prosecution was a case of mistaken identity.

Dutch war crimes prosecutors are convinced they have the right man after interviewing about 25 witnesses around the world and tapping the phones of the suspect and his family before arresting him at his home in the southern Dutch city of Kerkrade in 2019.

A court statement said that between 1983 and 1987 “the man worked in the Pul-e-Charkhi prison where at the time of the civil war many opponents of the regime in Kabul were locked up as political prisoners under appalling conditions.”

Prosecutors said he was commander and head of political affairs from 1983-1990 and kept political prisoners in cramped, filthy cells, where they were routinely tortured.

“He treated the prisoners cruelly and degradingly and robbed them of their freedom at random. These are war crimes: he has acted in violation of international humanitarian law,” the statement said.

At the time, Soviet occupation troops and Afghan government forces were fighting rebels backed by the United States and Pakistan. The Soviets left Afghanistan in 1989, but the Afghan government continued the fight until 1992.

The suspect stood trial in the Netherlands, under Dutch law, because he successfully applied for asylum in 2001 — prosecutors say he used a false name when he arrived and was granted Dutch citizenship.

He was charged with being an accessory to inhuman treatment and deprivation of liberty, charges that carried a maximum sentence of 20 years to life.

The trial is not the first time Dutch courts have tackled war crimes committed in Afghanistan.

In 2008, the Supreme Court upheld the torture convictions by lower courts in The Hague of two high-ranking officers in Afghanistan’s military intelligence service.

Rockets fired by Pakistan forces kill six, including children in Afghanistan (The New Arab)

By New Arab Staff

April 16, 2022

At least five children and a woman were killed in an eastern Afghan province when Pakistani military forces fired rockets along the border in a pre-dawn assault Saturday, an official and a resident said.

Since the Taliban seized power last year in Afghanistan, border tensions between the neighbours have risen, with Pakistan alleging militant groups were carrying out attacks from Afghan soil. The Taliban deny harbouring Pakistani militants, but are also infuriated by a fence Islamabad is erecting along their 2,700-kilometre (1,600-mile) border known as the Durand line, which was drawn up in colonial times.

An Afghan government official and a resident in Afghanistan's eastern Kunar province said Pakistani forces fired rockets early on Saturday that left six people dead. "Five children and a woman were killed and a man wounded in Pakistani rocket attacks in Shelton district of Kunar," provincial director of information Najibullah Hassan Abdaal told AFP.

Ehsanullah, a resident of Shelton district who goes by one name as many Afghans do, said the assault was

carried out by Pakistani military aircraft. He confirmed the death toll. A similar pre-dawn assault was carried out in Afghanistan's Khost province near the border, another Afghan government official said.

"Pakistani helicopters bombarded four villages near the Durand line in Khost province," he said on condition of anonymity.

"Only civilian houses were targeted and there were casualties," he added, but did not offer more details.

An Afghan tribal elder from Khost, Gul Markhan, confirmed the incident in Khost. Hundreds of civilians of Khost poured into the streets chanting anti-Pakistan slogans later on Saturday, Afghan media reports said.

Pakistani military officials were not immediately available for comment, and Taliban government spokesmen in Kabul declined to comment when contacted by AFP.

The Afghan foreign ministry said Saturday it had summoned the Pakistani ambassador in Kabul to protest the attacks.

"Such military violations including in Khost and Kunar should be prevented as ill-wishers and groups with vested interests will exploit these incidents," Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi told the Pakistani envoy, according to a ministry statement. Border areas between the two countries have long been a stronghold for militant groups such as the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), which operates across the porous frontier with Afghanistan.

The Afghan Taliban and the TTP are separate groups in both countries, but share a common ideology and draw from people who live on either side of the border. Since the Taliban seized power in Afghanistan, the TTP has become emboldened and launched regular attacks against Pakistani forces.

In February, six Pakistan soldiers were killed in firing by the TTP from Afghanistan. Thousands of people usually cross the border daily, including traders, Afghans seeking medical treatment in Pakistan, and people visiting relatives.

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Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC)

Official Website of the Extraordinary Chambers [English]

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Bangladesh International Crimes Tribunal

Bangladesh sentences four to death for prominent writer's murder (Al Jazeera)

By Faisal Mahmud

April 13, 2022

A court in Bangladesh has sentenced four people to death for the murder of prominent writer and academic Humayun Azad in 2004.

Azad, 56, was hacked with cleavers by the members of Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) on February 27, 2004 when he was on his way home from a book fair in Dhaka.

He died in August that year while undergoing treatment in Germany. Amid outrage over the killing, the JMB was banned the next year.

Azad's murder is considered the first in a series of brutal killings of academics, writers, bloggers and secularists in Bangladesh a decade later – between 2013 and 2016 – by Muslim right-wing groups. Most of them were killed in broad daylight using machetes.

While announcing the verdict in a packed courtroom on Wednesday, Additional Metropolitan Sessions Judge Al-Mamun said the convicts – Mohammad Mizanur Rahman Minhaz, Anwarul Alam, Nur Mohammad Shamim and Salehin Sani – committed a “heinous offence”.

Among them, Sani and Shamim are on the run. A fifth suspect in the case, Hafez Mahmud, was killed in an alleged gunfight with police in 2014.

‘Delayed justice’

“It's better to get delayed justice than no justice at all,” Azad's elder daughter Mauli Azad told Al Jazeera after the announcement of the verdict.

“It took 18 years to get a verdict. I am nonetheless happy. I want the government to find out the two who are absconding and bring them to justice as well.”

Azad was an award-winning author and professor of Bangla literature at Dhaka University.

He has more than 60 publications to his credit, including seven poetry books, 20 novels and dozens of non-fiction books. In 1986, he received the Bangla Academy Award, the country's highest literary award.

In 1995, his book on modern feminism, Nari, was banned, three years after its publication, for offending “Muslim religious sentiment”. The ban was lifted after a protracted five-year legal battle.

In 2004, his novel, Pak Sar Jamin Sad Bad (Blessed Be the Sacred Land), which criticised religious fundamentalism, angered Muslim right-wing groups in Bangladesh, who started issuing threats to him.

A week before the fatal attack on Azad, Muslim preacher and then member of parliament Delwar Hossain Sayeedi told the house the writer's work should be banned and a case of blasphemy be filed against him.

Sayeedi's speech in parliament is said to have led to the writer's killing, though charges against the hardline politician were dropped.

“He [Sayeedi] should have been implicated,” Azad's younger brother Manjur Kabir told Al Jazeera.

In 2014, Sayeedi's death sentence for crimes against humanity during the 1971 war for Bangladesh's liberation from Pakistan was commuted to a life sentence.

Dhaka-based journalist Shariful Hasan was a second-year student at Dhaka University when Azad was attacked. Hasan said he was present at the scene and took the blood-soaked professor to hospital.

“It was the first incident in Bangladesh when machetes came out against the pen. Before that, it never happened,” he told Al Jazeera.

According to Hasan, religious intolerance began to grow in Bangladesh after Azad's murder.

“About a decade later, we saw how writers and bloggers were attacked and killed. If we could have served justice in Azad's murder sooner, the other murders could have been stopped.”

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War Crimes Investigation in Myanmar

Military Dictatorship and Online Activism in Myanmar (Borgen Magazine)

By Lauren Sung

April 17, 2022

Myanmar's military dictatorship renders the country in a state of near-collapse. Though international and domestic forces challenge its legitimacy, the junta has remained in power since its coup in February 2021. Following the coup, the military junta imprisoned former President Aung San Suu Kyi and cracked down on grassroots movements demanding democracy, killing and displacing hundreds of thousands of people. When people took to the internet to demand assistance, the junta shut down internet access across the country, cutting off citizens' abilities to contact each other or raise awareness online. Additionally, as the National Unity Government (NUG), which consists of the elected politicians exiled after the military takeover, advocates a return to democracy, military clashes, protests and online activism in Myanmar show no signs of stopping.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the military dictatorship's actions have led to a deterioration of the economy while leaving millions struggling with food insecurity. Though Myanmar had some successes reducing poverty in previous years, the junta stymied the economy and the World Bank reported that a variety of factors brought on by a combination of political instability and the COVID-19 pandemic would "substantially reduce human capital, skills and productive capacity over the longer term."

Myanmar's desirability to foreign markets also plummeted. As the costs of imports rise while private investments fall, the people of Myanmar struggle with fewer opportunities and fewer goods.

In an interview with The Borgen Project, an anonymous university student from Myanmar said that should the military remain in power, "the country would be knocked back multiple decades" in terms of living standards.

Even now, the junta, in its desperation for power, has tightened its grip on civil life, even "deferring money from other sources to military arsenal and personnel" and attacking civilians to "bait the resistance." Arrested resistance members face brutal torture methods. The former citizen has stated that "Some torture methods leaked through videos I have seen include decapitation, whipping, beating and acid injection toward the face."

The actions of the junta have dire humanitarian consequences. Military crackdowns targeting civilians and humanitarian workers cut the flow of necessary resources. Although this did not stop humanitarian workers from reaching more than 1.67 million people with necessary aid in 2021, the U.N. stated that an estimated 3 million people still required aid by November 2021 and the junta still served as a major barrier to greater assistance. Other sources of poverty, such as long-term displacement and the mistreatment of Rohingya Muslims and other ethnic minorities, also remain unresolved, though these issues affect hundreds of thousands of citizens.

People living in Myanmar have taken to social media to voice their demands and concerns. Nonprofit organizations, social media activists and outreach programs alike have spread awareness throughout platforms like Instagram and Twitter to galvanize support and aid for resistance groups.

However, the junta blocks internet access from ordinary citizens, creating blackouts throughout the country. In this form of digital autocracy, the interviewee explains, the junta tries to silence online activism in Myanmar and people only have access to "a total of [six]hours [of electricity]in the country: [three hours]in the afternoon and [three hours]at night." On top of this, the junta banned the use of large social media platforms along with the use of VPNs. This level of hostility deters democratic political mobilization and the fears aimed at activists bleed into the populace at large. The interviewee explained that "the military now has checkpoints across the cities and counties to check if your respective phones have VPN. If found, you are either fined or jailed. If you are jailed, you will be tortured."

Additionally, average citizens living elsewhere have given Myanmar less attention. The former Burmese resident expressed concerns to The Borgen Project that people have "strayed away" from online activism.

However, while people living outside of Myanmar “[move] on with their lives,” those in the country do not have that option.

Myanmar is in a state of civil war that extends past bloodied city streets into the digital sphere. The internet is a powerful tool for resistance and solidarity and the NUG and its allies are more than aware of that. Through the NUG’s official Facebook account, the NUG posts regularly, spreading messages of hope, resilience and open defiance across the platform.

Within the country, social media helps anti-junta individuals persuade others to join their cause and organize pro-democracy demonstrations. For example, online activists working for an organization called People’s Goal allegedly swayed hundreds of former junta soldiers to defect.

Additionally, non-government organizations similar to Mutual Aid Myanmar, offer ways to help sustain the pro-democracy movement by providing financial assistance as many people grapple without access to adequate food, housing or health care. As of March 31, 2022, Mutual Aid Myanmar has raised and distributed \$705,000 to support citizens including students, health care workers and civil servants.

Channeling public outrage into online activism in Myanmar and abroad can mobilize politicians and the public. Myanmar has a long history of popular resistance that circumvents inhumane and militaristic scare tactics, but the nation still needs support from external actors.

As the NUG has stated, “The military remains firm in its goal to kill or subjugate every human being within Myanmar.” As the humanitarian cost of the civil war grows, the populace should not have to shoulder this fight alone. Instead, international organizations, nonprofits and foreign states must work to return political power to Myanmar’s citizens. When discussing ways people could help Myanmar, the anonymous interviewee echoed these sentiments, stressing the importance of “condemning the coup with more sanctions that are targeted toward the military and helping out the resistance.”

The United States and its allies have already passed major sanctions against Myanmar. On March 25, 2022, the U.S. imposed “sanctions on five Burmese individuals and five entities” in condemnation of the junta’s atrocious crimes against humanity.

Major political challenges stand in the way of removing the junta from power. However, amid rising political instability and economic uncertainty, each victory counts, from major state sanctions to online activism in Myanmar.

Since seizing power, the junta has stripped countless people in Myanmar of their lives, their well-being and their dignity. It is more important than ever to speak out as Myanmar deserves to be a free country again. People can champion the nation’s freedom through major international statements or helpful donations or even lengthy Facebook posts, which serve as small but necessary steps toward democracy.

It is high time for the UK to take action on Myanmar at the UNSC (Al Jazeera)

By Chris Sidoti

April 18, 2022

Moments before voting in favour of a historic General Assembly resolution condemning Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, Myanmar’s Ambassador to the United Nations Kyaw Moe Tun told fellow delegates in New York “Myanmar understands and shares more than others the suffering that the people of Ukraine are encountering.”

For the past 14 months, the people of Myanmar have been under attack from a brutal military government led by deluded strongman Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, whose attempted coup on February 1, 2021, ended a decade of quasi-democracy in the country.

The generals have responded to nationwide civilian resistance to the coup with a systematic campaign of mass killings, torture, sexual violence and abuse. In resistance strongholds, military forces are burning entire towns to the ground and cutting access to food supplies in an attempt to starve people into submission.

For the first time in decades, state capitals and ethnic minority areas are being bombed, reflecting the fact that the generals have lost control on the ground. IDP camps are being targeted for air raids and artillery barrages, while in recent months massacres of unarmed civilians have become a hallmark of the generals’ increasing barbarity. And yet, in contrast to the decisive response by the international system to Putin’s aggression, the response to Min Aung Hlaing’s attack on the Myanmar people has been, at best, one of empty

rhetoric.

For this the UN Security Council, the international system's most powerful body, bears much responsibility. UNSC members took less than 24 hours to table a resolution condemning Russia's invasion of Ukraine. It was a timely and necessary response to the situation. By contrast, no UNSC member has ever tabled a resolution on Myanmar, in spite of decades of atrocities committed against ethnic minorities, including the genocidal "clearance operation" against Rohingya in 2016 and 2017, and more recently against the entire country by the Myanmar military.

Put simply, the UNSC has failed to uphold its legal responsibility under the UN Charter to act for international peace and security. It has failed in its responsibility to protect the people of Myanmar from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity.

This should be cause for deep unease for the United Kingdom's government and among its diplomats in New York. As Myanmar's former colonial occupier, the UK has taken principal responsibility for Myanmar among the Western states in the UN. It is historically the "penholder", that is, the lead drafter, of resolutions on Myanmar in the GA in New York and Human Rights Council in Geneva. In those forums, the UK has done well. But in the Security Council?

At the Security Council in New York, the UK's obsession with consensus and fear of failure have rendered it impotent in the face of one of the great humanitarian crises of this century. Its thinking is that it's better not to present a resolution than to present it and have it vetoed by another permanent member, Russia or China, that shares close ties with the illegal military government and sells it weapons.

The UK has instead focused its efforts on achieving consensus by settling for lesser options, including non-binding statements on Myanmar that amount to little more than fine words. This reasoning crumbles under scrutiny.

Consensus was not an issue to the US and Albania, the co-penholders on Ukraine, when they tabled a UNSC resolution denouncing Russian aggression, even though knowing it would be impossible to pass. Council members' overwhelming public opposition to Russia's invasion of Ukraine and Russia's forced defence of its actions, including exercising the veto, demonstrated Russia's growing isolation on the international stage.

Why then does the UK continue to shield the junta's allies Russia and China from accountability at the Security Council instead of upholding the Council's legal responsibility to act on behalf of the Myanmar people? Why then does the UK allow the treacherous generals to go about their brutal business unimpeded?

The UK has an opportunity to act at last having assumed the rotating monthly role of UNSC president at the start of April. This is an opportunity for leadership, if the UK is capable of it. Council Presidents are able to set the agenda for the month in many ways, including by indicating when taking office what the priorities will be and what they hope to accomplish.

First, the UK should work with another Council member to convene an Arria Formula, or informal, meeting on Myanmar to enable UNSC members to be briefed on the situation by well-informed civil society and other experts who cannot address formal sessions of the Council. Second, the Arria Formula meeting should be followed later in the month by an open meeting of the UNSC on Myanmar to enable a formal debate on Myanmar. The UK should propose a resolution on Myanmar in the UNSC and take it to a vote at that meeting. This would make it clear once and for all who sides with the Myanmar people and who sides with Min Aung Hlaing and his murderous generals.

This resolution should demand that Min Aung Hlaing's illegal military government stop its systematic campaign of violence against civilians. It should call for a comprehensive global arms embargo and targeted economic sanctions against the junta and its businesses, as well as the referral of Myanmar to the International Criminal Court where Min Aung Hlaing and military government leaders should stand trial for their decades of atrocity crimes against the Myanmar people. A Chinese or Russian veto of the resolution may be a likely outcome, but one for which they will face immediate condemnation and long-term consequences.

The UK's misguided obsession with consensus on Myanmar at the UNSC only serves to embolden Myanmar's genocidal generals and those member states that seek to profit from chaos. With its April presidency under way, the UK's principal responsibility is not the protection of China or Russia. It is the protection of the people of Myanmar. It's not yet too late for the UK to show some courage and exercise some leadership.

Almost but not yet too late.

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AMERICAS

North & Central America

Expanding the U.S. War Crimes Act: Lessons from the Administration's Proposals in 1996 (Just Security)

By Michael Matheson

April 13, 2022

Last week, Senator Dick Durbin (D-IL), Chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, proposed amending the U.S. War Crimes Act, the federal law that provides for the prosecution of war criminals in U.S. courts. The new legislation would allow the prosecution of any persons found in the United States for war crimes wherever their crimes had been committed. Senator Lindsey Graham (R-SC) said he is working with Sen. Durbin to pass the legislation. This is obviously of particular importance now in light of the very serious international crimes being committed by Russian forces in Ukraine.

I strongly support this effort. In 1996, Congress passed the War Crimes Act, after receiving testimony from the executive branch. As the Principal Deputy Legal Adviser of the U.S. State Department, I testified before Congress on behalf of the Administration in support of providing U.S. criminal jurisdiction over any persons found in the United States, regardless of their nationality, who had committed serious war crimes anywhere in the world.

I testified that this jurisdictional scope was important for several reasons. First, making such acts subject to prosecution was essential to counteracting and deterring them, and the United States could not rely for this entirely on international criminal tribunals, which typically have limited jurisdiction. Second, the jurisdictional scope was needed to ensure the ability of the United States to fulfill our obligations under the 1949 Geneva Conventions, which require parties to take action against any war criminals found within their jurisdiction. Third, such a law would serve as a diplomatic tool for the United States in urging other countries to take action against war criminals found in their jurisdiction, which would reduce the ability of such persons to hide elsewhere. And fourth, the law would help avoid the possibility that the United States might find itself a legal haven for war criminals, which would substantially harm our standing in the world and degrade our ability to stop such crimes and bring their perpetrators to justice.

Congress did act at that time to expand U.S. criminal jurisdiction over war crimes in some respects, but unfortunately was not prepared to give U.S. courts jurisdiction over any war criminal found in the United States, as we had proposed. The situation in Ukraine, where serious international crimes are being committed on a very large scale, gives Congress the opportunity to overcome that reluctance and expand the War Crimes Act in this respect. Of course, this should not be limited to Ukraine. The possibility of similar crimes elsewhere is obvious, and their prosecution should not be subject to a race to pass ad hoc legislation on each occasion. Amendment of our laws to expand the general jurisdiction of U.S. courts would clearly help to enhance our ability to take action to stop and remedy the serious crimes now being perpetrated in Ukraine. It will also help the United States call on other states to live up to their obligations under the Geneva Conventions as well, and bring such war criminals who are found in their territory to justice.

'Strikingly similar': Atrocities in Ukraine are echoes for ex-Mountie who probed Balkan war crimes (Calgary Herald)

By Bill Kaufmann

April 18, 2022

Steve Marissink is convinced he heard war crimes as they were being committed that day in September 1993.

But the then-Mountie said he didn't expect to be investigating those atrocities when he joined Canadian UN peacekeepers who confronted Croat troops attacking a Serb-held enclave near Croatia's Adriatic coast, at a place called Medak.

"We heard gunshots and found the remains later... people with gunshots to the heads, and ears removed," said Marissink, who now runs an Edmonton-based corporate investigative firm.

"They were making sure the survivors weren't able to speak to us."

Members of the 2nd Battalion of the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry who were determined to halt the killing of civilians then found themselves in a 15-hour firefight with Croatian forces, who are believed to have suffered more than two dozen killed to the Canadians' four wounded.

The Croats were trying to retake part of the Serbs' self-proclaimed republic carved out of Croatia - not unlike the two Donbas separatist entities in Ukraine recognized only by Moscow.

Marissink had gone there as part of a support team to assist the living, but soon found himself trying to tell the stories of the dead.

"We encountered 20 sites where civilians had been murdered," he said.

"They were no survivors to give blankets or food to, so it became an investigation . . . I called it a giant crime scene."

Nearly three decades later, Russian troops occupying parts of Ukraine have been accused of massacring civilians, and Canada's Mounties have once again been called on to investigate potential war crimes.

Last week, it was revealed RCMP were interviewing survivors of those atrocities to gather evidence for possible trials at the International Criminal Court.

For Marissink, it brings back memories of his own descent into the Balkan darkness, one that would also take him to the Bosnian city of Srebrenica, just before Serb troops massacred 8,000 of its men and boys.

In Srebrenica, he said he served as "the eyes and ears" preceding one of the grimmest chapters of the last time Europe was torn by major conflict.

"The photographs (from Ukraine) are certainly similar to what we experienced in the former Yugoslavia, in the Medak Pocket and Vukovar (Croatia), which had been bombed out of existence," he said.

"The images are strikingly similar and I can certainly appreciate the terror and hardship those (Ukrainian) people are facing on a daily basis."

Like those investigating alleged Russian war crimes today, Marissink and his colleagues probed possible gravesites and handled corpses that had been burned or mutilated.

The Edmontonian recalled two women left in a concrete chicken coop whose still smouldering bodies had been partly burned to hinder investigators.

"They tried to burn some of the bodies at Medak but couldn't do it because it wouldn't sustain heat," he said, noting Ukrainian officials insist Russian forces are employing mobile crematoriums to destroy evidence.

"I ended up pouring cold water on their bodies so the body bags wouldn't melt."

The Ukrainian military has accused retreating Russian troops of booby-trapping areas they've relinquished, including dead bodies.

The Canadians at Medak, said Marissink, suspected that withdrawing Croatian troops might have used the same tactic, but vigilant combat engineers found nothing.

Much of what the former RCMP constable and his team did was photograph or videotape victims and their immediate surroundings while recording dates and locations.

A physician accompanying them "identified the quadrants of injuries to the body, but we didn't have the ability to take fingerprints."

That information was handed over to UN war crimes investigators and, in 2008, Marissink journeyed to the Croatian capital of Zagreb to give testimony at a war-crimes tribunal.

One of the two Croatian Army generals on trial for the Medak affair was convicted.

Some of the documentation compiled by the former Mountie that contributed to that verdict is on display at the Canadian War Museum in Ottawa.

Marissink won't speculate whether anyone will be held accountable for the slaughter of civilians or prisoners of war in Ukraine, particularly while the war still rages.

But he said those who investigate the more recent atrocities are much better equipped than he was.

"We didn't have the DNA capability that exists now," said Marissink, now 63.

"The chances are a lot better now of holding people accountable because of satellite imagery and electronic data, and it only takes one survivor hiding in a building to video it."

He also noted incriminating audio communications between Russian soldiers discussing committing war crimes have apparently been captured.

Ukrainian authorities are also using digital face recognition technology to scan Russian troops captured in photos as they loot homes and shops, with hopes the approach might also deter war crimes.

One dynamic that hasn't changed since the early- to mid-1990s is the cycle of hatred and retribution that seems to inevitably lead to gruesome wartime excesses, said Marissink.

"When you experience that level of violence, is it any surprise it's one way of (combatants) coping and dealing with it?" he said.

"It shows how quickly you can lose your humanity and respect for the deceased."

In early March, weeks before the apparently executed and tortured bodies of civilians were found in towns north of Kyiv, a Ukrainian government lawyer spoke by video, beamed into his uncle's northwest Calgary home.

Alexander Gromadiuk said early rumours and unconfirmed reports of Russian atrocities had convinced him then that his work would shift direction, but in one still employing his legal skills.

"After the war, I'll be bringing those war criminals to justice," said Gromadiuk, days after he'd sent his two children from their Kyiv home to France for their safety.

"They're treating all Ukrainians as targets."

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Piracy

**Piracy Plummets in Gulf of Guinea (The Maritime Executive)
April 15, 2022**

Southeast Asian waters are replacing the Gulf of Guinea as the most dangerous for commercial shipping, accounting for nearly half of piracy incidents in the first quarter of this year.

The ICC International Maritime Bureau (IMB)'s quarterly piracy and armed robbery report shows a nearly flat top-line number for maritime piracy incidents, with 37 recorded in the first three months of 2022 compared to 38 incidents over the same period last year. However, nearly half (41 percent) occurred in Southeast Asian waters, particularly in the Singapore Straits.

The Gulf of Guinea, which accounted for nearly half (43 percent) of all reported piracy incidents in the first three months of 2021, recorded a significant decline in maritime piracy. Only seven incidents were reported in the first three months of the year.

"Sustained efforts are however needed to ensure the continued safety of seafarers in the West African region that remains dangerous as evidenced by the hijack of a product tanker off the coast of Ivory Coast on 24 January, during which all 17 crew were taken hostage. Reports of armed robberies have also been received within the anchorage waters of Angola and Ghana" said IMB.

IMB believes that concerted and sustained efforts to eliminate piracy in the volatile waters of the Gulf of Guinea are bearing fruits, with no reported crew kidnappings during the quarter compared to 40 crew kidnappings in the same period in 2021. The efforts of the regional and international navies have also resulted in a reduction of reported incidents from 16 in the first quarter of 2021 to seven over the same period in 2022.

Threat to seafarers remain and is best exemplified by the recent attack on the Panamax bulk carrier Arch Gabriel, which was boarded by pirates 260 NM off the coast of Ghana on April 3. Italian Navy warship Luigi Rizzo and its helicopter intervened, saving the crew and enabling the vessel to proceed to a safe port under escort.

Worldwide, this was the first quarter since 2010 where no crew kidnappings were reported, although violence against and threats to crews continued. 23 seafarers were taken hostage and a further four were threatened.

The Singapore Straits has become a dangerous sea route for commercial shipping accounting for almost 30 percent of all incidents during the period. Though the reported incidents are considered low-level opportunistic crimes and fall under the definition of armed robbery, they continue to pose risks to crews. In the 11 reported incidents in the Singapore Straits waters, two crew were threatened and one taken hostage for the duration of the incident. In at least one incident, a gun was used to threaten the crew.

"Perpetrators are armed in most incidents, putting crews at risk even in the low-level opportunistic incidents. Coastal states are urged to increase efforts to identify and apprehend these criminals to enhance maritime security and facilitate safer trade across these important and strategic" said Michael Howlett, IMB Director.

Outside the Singapore Straits, four incidents were reported off the coasts of Indonesia and Malaysia, compared to two over the same period in 2021.

According to IMB, Peruvian waters are an area of concern. The South American nation's ports accounted for 27 percent of global incidents, with 10 reported events. Six incidents were reported in the Callao anchorage compared to five incidents during the same period last year and only one in 2019.

Three incidents were also reported in Macapa anchorage off the coast of Brazil. In two of the incidents, seafarers were either threatened or taken hostage, threatened with knives, tied up with their face covered with burlap for the duration of the incident.

Although no incidents were reported in the Gulf of Aden, the threat of piracy still exists in the waters off the southern Red Sea and in the Gulf of Aden, including the Yemeni and Somali coasts. Despite a long-running lull, Somali pirates continue to possess the capability and capacity to carry out incidents, with merchant ships advised to remain alert while transiting in these waters.

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Gender-Based Violence

**Ukraine denounces over 300 cases of rape by Russian soldiers (i24 News)
April 7, 2022**

More than 300 cases of rape by Russian forces, including girls aged 12 to 16, have been reported in Ukraine, the Ukrainian Armed Forces said on Monday.

"Russia is violating Ukraine," the military said. &"They are bombing our cities, looting, murdering, raping women. Russian soldiers are rapists without moral limits."

On Sunday, a photo emerged on social media showing the bodies of three women and a man piled up under a blanket.

The three women were all naked and had been partially burned, photographer Mikhail Palinchak claimed, according to The Guardian, fueling allegations that Russian forces are committing sexual violence against Ukrainian women, which constitutes a war crime.

"We have received several calls on our hotline from women and girls asking for help," said Kateryna Cherepakha, president of the organization for gender equality and human rights at La Strada Ukraine.

"We couldn't reach them because of the fighting," she added.

UN political affairs chief Rosemary DiCarlo said the UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine was seeking to verify allegations of sexual violence by Russian forces.

"These include gang rapes and rapes in front of children," she said. "There are also allegations of sexual violence by Ukrainian forces and civil defense militias."

The list of reported abuses committed by Russian soldiers against Ukrainian civilians continues to grow after the withdrawal of Russian forces.

The discovery earlier this week of hundreds of bodies in Bucha, near Kyiv, sparked outrage and unanimous condemnation within the international community.

Justice critical to fighting sexual violence in conflict (UN News) April 13, 2022

Pramila Patten, the Secretary-General's Special Representative working to end rape as a weapon of war, was addressing a high-level debate on strengthening accountability as a means to deliver justice for survivors and prevent future violence.

War's oldest and least-condemned crime Recalling that the Council has passed 10 resolutions on Women, Peace and Security, five of which focus on preventing and addressing conflict-related sexual violence, Ms. Patten began by asking what those declarations mean right now for a woman in Ukraine, Afghanistan, Myanmar or Tigray in northern Ethiopia.

"Every new wave of warfare brings with it a rising tide of human tragedy, including new waves of war's oldest, most silenced, and least-condemned crime," she said.

Pramila Patten, Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, briefs UN Security Council meeting on women and peace and security. UN Photo/Loey Felipe Pramila Patten, Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, briefs UN Security Council meeting on women and peace and security. 'Significant increase' in cases Ms. Patten presented a handful of the horrifying cases of rape and other violations included in her latest report, revealing what she called 'the emboldening effects of impunity'.

The report covers some 18 country situations and documents 3,293 UN-verified cases committed last year -800 more than in 2020, representing 'significant increase'.

Most of those targeted - 97 per cent - were women and girls, while 83 cases concerned men and boys, mainly in detention centres. In 12 cases, lesbian, gay, trans, queer or intersex (LGBTQI) persons were targeted.

Prosecution as prevention Ms. Patten underscored how prosecution is critical, and a form of prevention, as it can help turn the culture of impunity for these crimes, towards a culture of deterrence.

"Whereas impunity normalizes violence, justice reinforces global norms. It is time to move from visibility to accountability, and to ensure that today's documentation translates into tomorrow's prosecutions," she said.

Regarding the way forward, her report calls for targeted action to reinforce prevention, such as through political and diplomatic engagement to address sexual violence in ceasefire and peace agreements.

Other recommended measures include use of early warning indicators of sexual violence as well as threat analysis, curtailing the flow of small arms, gender-responsive justice and security sector reform, together with amplifying the voices of survivors.

Justice and accountability Nobel laureate Nadia Murad was among thousands of women from the Yazidi

minority group in northern Iraq who were sold into sexual slavery and raped by ISIL terrorists, the group officially known now as Da'esh, in 2014.

Eight years on, some 2,800 women and children remain in the hands of the terrorist group, she said.

"The pursuit of justice is one of the most visible forms of accountability," she told the Council, citing the historic genocide conviction of an ISIL fighter by a German court last year. She wondered if the international community will do more.

Action, not pity "As survivors of sexual violence, it is not easy for us to tell our stories. But we do it to prevent what happened to us from happening to others," said Ms. Murad, who is also a Goodwill Ambassador with the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC).

"We are called brave, but the courage we really want to see is from leaders in a position to do something, whether they are Heads of State, Member States here at the UN, or corporate leaders. We need more than moral outrage; we need action."

Ms. Murad called for the Council to refer the ISIL case to the International Criminal Court, or to establish a hybrid court that will prosecute the group's crimes. She also urged other nations to follow Germany's example.

Survivors have found the strength to rebuild their lives and help their families, communities, and countries, she said, so surely the world can find the strength to take meaningful steps to end sexual violence in conflict.

"As survivors, we look to you, the leaders in this room, to act with the same courage we have shown. Survivors do not want pity; we want justice."

'Murad Code' launched During the debate, Ms. Murad announced the launch of a new initiative for collecting evidence of rape in war.

The Murad Code is a set of guidelines for journalists, investigators, and others documenting and investigating conflict-related sexual violence.

The guidelines were shaped by feedback from survivors around the globe, she said, and aim to promote greater respect, understanding, transparency, and healing.

The Murad Code was developed with funding from the United Kingdom, the Security Council president for April.

Lord Tariq Ahmad, the UK Minister of State who chaired the meeting, called for the code to become the "gold standard" for non-governmental organizations, government agencies and human rights groups.

"Putting survivors at the centre of investigations should not be an option. It should be done by everyone, everywhere," he said.

Voices of civil society Two civil society representatives from Syria and Ethiopia also briefed ambassadors.

Legal investigator Mariana Karkoutly said although the Syrian war has been on the Security Council agenda for more than a decade, no action has been taken to hold perpetrators accountable for violations of international human rights and humanitarian law.

She reported that at least 150,000 people are estimated to have been arbitrarily arrested, detained or disappeared since the war began. Nearly 10,000 women are among the scores of Syrians being held in detention centres, where sexual violence is used as a tool to humiliate, punish and force confessions.

No peace without justice Ms. Karkoutly, co-founder of an organization for women lawyers called Huquqyat, outlined a list of actions for the Council that included referring the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court, adopting a resolution on detainees and missing persons, investigating and prosecuting perpetrators of sexual violence, and ensuring women's rights are at the heart of accountability efforts.

"When people in Syria watch conflicts rage in Ukraine and other parts of the world today, we are reminded of our own suffering, and the abject failure of this body to stop the violence," she said.

"I join my voice with those of the millions of girls and women from Syria who are not here with me today and

call on you to take action. There can be no peace without justice."

Rape and reprisals in Tigray Hilina Berhanu from Ethiopia spoke of her visits to the Tigray region, where rape has been used as a tactic of war or means of reprisal.

This violence is ethnically motivated, she said, and used to humiliate survivors and their communities. Men and boys have also been victims, while women with disabilities, and those from minority and indigenous communities, have been particularly at risk.

Ms. Berhanu urged the Security Council to demand that all efforts towards documenting, investigating and preventing sexual violence in conflict are centred around survivors. Ambassadors must also demand that warring parties allow safe humanitarian access to people in need in Tigray and elsewhere, and that aid includes comprehensive sexual and reproductive healthcare.

"Lack of access to psychosocial support services also means that the mental health of survivors hangs in the balance. Many have already died by suicide," she said.

Ms. Berhanu had a special request for the three African countries on the Council – Gabon, Ghana and Kenya -- urging them to work both at the UN and in the Africa Union to drive forward action on women, peace and security.

These countries were also asked &l"to take a harder look at the prevailing view that supporting investigations of conflict - elated sexual violence in Ethiopia could somehow derail the proposed reform agenda of the current government."

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Commentary and Perspectives

US stands firm on sanctions on rights abusers in Bangladesh (Human Rights Watch)

By Kerry Kennedy

April 13, 2022

On April 4, the United States marked 50 years of diplomatic relations with Bangladesh. But the real fanfare around the anniversary was about the future of diplomatic relations between the countries in the wake of the US government's decision last December to impose sanctions against Bangladesh's special security force unit, the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB), which has been credibly implicated in extrajudicial killings, torture, and enforced disappearances.

Established in 2003 with the support of the US and UK as a counterterrorism force, over the years the RAB morphed into a political death squad. The unit's record of abuses grew so extensive that more than a decade ago the UK government withdrew its support and training for its members after criticism over human-rights violations, and the US extensively limited its support.

Since then, the RAB has been linked to hundreds more cases of disappearances and killings, typically of political opposition figures, dissidents, or others critical of the Bangladeshi government.

The US government has made clear in all its recent communication - including in meetings between Bangladeshi Foreign Minister A K Abdul Momen and US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, and statements by US Ambassador Peter Haas - that while diplomatic relations remain strong, the US has serious concerns about human rights and the future of democracy in Bangladesh.

The Bangladeshi government, however, appears to be ignoring the US concerns and instead taking a victory lap.

Information and Broadcasting Minister Hasan Mahmud, for instance, reportedly told the media that US President Joe Biden had praised the abusive Rapid Action Battalion in a private letter to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and that there were already discussions ongoing about withdrawing the sanctions. The US

government should make clear that there will be no retractions of human-rights sanctions until the Bangladeshi government carries out credible investigations into the reported abuses that led to sanctions in the first place and takes concrete steps toward accountability. Biden should clarify reports that he praised the very unit the US just sanctioned, and instead call for it to be disbanded.

In response to the US sanctions, the Bangladeshi government announced that it would investigate the dozens of enforced disappearances currently pending with the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances. Instead, Bangladeshi authorities have been harassing victims' families and activists in what appears to be an attempt to cover up allegations and smoke out whoever reported the abuses.

Victims' families have reported that the authorities raided their homes in the middle of the night, threatening them and forcing them either to sign blank sheets of paper or sign pre-written statements indicating that a family member was not forcibly disappeared and that they had deliberately misled the police. The authorities have also been showing up at the offices of Bangladeshi human-rights organizations, pressuring staff to reveal their sources and expose those who reported abuses.

Instead of responding to the numerous well-documented allegations made against the RAB over the past decade, the Bangladeshi government has continued to make implausible and outlandish denials.

After US sanctions were announced, Foreign Secretary Masud Bin Momen issued a statement that the sanctions were based on "fabricated and unfounded" allegations and even surmised that perhaps some of the reported victims of enforced disappearance were irregular immigrants who had actually drowned in the Mediterranean.

While ridiculous, Bangladeshi government denials about this unit's abuses have become predictable. In 2018, the prime minister's son, Sajeeb Wazed, wrote without evidence that many of the "disappeared" were in hiding because they were wanted for criminal questioning, concluding that the "world should reject the fairytale of Bangladesh disappearances as the lie that it is."

Bangladeshi human-rights organizations had recorded 97 enforced disappearances that year.

If the Bangladeshi government wants to get the Rapid Action Battalion sanctions lifted, it should stop ignoring US concerns and pretending well-documented abuses are just a "fairytale." Instead, the government should take concrete steps to hold those responsible for the RAB's abuses accountable and provide justice to victims and their families.

Here's where the government could start.

First, Bangladeshi officials, at the highest level, should make strong and repeated public statements that all harassment should stop and that anyone responsible for enforced disappearances, torture, and extrajudicial killings will be held accountable.

The government should create an independent commission of inquiry dedicated to investigating all allegations of enforced disappearances and custodial deaths, formed in consultation with independent experts, victims, and their families. The commission should regularly and publicly report on its findings without interference and be mandated to recommend cases for prosecution.

The government should allow UN experts to visit, investigate, and make appropriate recommendations to ensure justice and accountability, as well as to advise on the structure and mandate of the independent commission of inquiry.

Finally, it should follow through on the findings of the independent commission and the justice authorities should prosecute fully law-enforcement officers of all ranks, including those with superior authority, where there is evidence they are responsible for abuses.

The UN, the US, and other countries with human-rights sanctions regimes, including the UK, Canada, Australia and the European Union, may well be watching closely to see how the government responds. Inaction would only further demonstrate the government's lack of commitment to accountability.

For Putin to face justice, we must join the International Criminal Court (The Washington Post)

By Ilhan Omar

April 13, 2022

The world has been rightly shaken to the core by the atrocities being perpetrated by Vladimir Putin and his Russian forces in Ukraine. I have recoiled in horror seeing bodies of civilians - even children - strewn across city streets. Reports of massacres of civilians, mass graves and rapes by Russian forces are rampant, recalling some of the worst atrocities in history.

For me personally, it evokes a traumatic past. As an 8-year-old girl in Somalia, I remember watching armed militias go by my family's window, hearing bombs go off outside our doors and wondering if our house was next.

No child in Ukraine or anywhere in the world should have to witness what I witnessed as a little girl.

Accountability is the key to prevention. If there are no consequences for committing these atrocities, we will find ourselves in the same place in the future. Putin must be charged and held fully accountable for his crimes against humanity by the International Criminal Court (ICC). And anyone responsible for this illegal war of aggression must face justice.

Thankfully, there are already bipartisan calls for accountability, and President Biden himself has labeled Putin a "war criminal." But unfortunately, a glaring asterisk hangs over any calls for justice made by the United States. That's because, more than two decades after its creation, we have yet to ratify the Rome Statute - the treaty establishing the ICC. We are in the company of countries such as Iran, Sudan, China, and, yes, Russia as one of several nations that have refused to sign onto this bedrock of international law.

In fact, the Trump administration went so far as to approve sanctions on the staff members of the court for carrying out their jobs.

Biden thankfully lifted these sanctions. But Secretary of State Antony Blinken reiterated our country's "longstanding objection to the Court's efforts to assert jurisdiction over personnel of non-States Parties" last year. In other words: We're not joining, and don't investigate us or anyone that is not a member.

Sadly, it's this exact position that is now hamstringing the United States as we seek accountability for Putin. If we oppose investigations into countries, like our own, that haven't joined the ICC, how can we support an investigation into Russia, another country that hasn't joined the court?

Equality under the law is one of the core tenets of our legal system and the international legal system. If we truly believe in prioritizing human rights and enforcing international law, how can we not be part of the court that upholds that law?

Our absence also allows regimes to commit human rights abuses with impunity. If the most powerful country won't hold itself accountable to the rule of law, other countries feel emboldened to violate it. And indeed, we have turned a blind eye to wanton human rights violations by regimes in countries such as Saudi Arabia, Egypt, El Salvador and even India, in the name of political convenience. Even when war criminals are successfully convicted - as Malian terrorist Ahmad al-Faqi al-Mahdi was in 2016 - our absence only undermines the legitimacy of those verdicts.

It's also important to remember that the ICC is a court of last resort. It doesn't have jurisdiction over crimes unless the country in question - like Russia - is unable or unwilling to prosecute the perpetrators domestically. Because we aren't members of the ICC, we can't engage directly in the efforts to prosecute criminals. Imagine how much we could accomplish if we helped legitimize the ICC.

Many will argue that there are parts of the criminal court that need to be reformed. I agree. Let's work as a member state to improve it and make sure it lives up to the highest standards of impartiality.

The United States once led the world on international justice. In response to the horrors of the Holocaust, we spearheaded the Nuremberg trials to hold Nazi war criminals accountable and, for the first time, establish international criminal law. We intentionally created an impartial judicial process modeled on our own judiciary, rather than simply executing Nazi war criminals without trial. The last living Nuremberg prosecutor, Benjamin Ferencz, boiled this philosophy down to a simple axiom: "Law not war."

In this moment of horrifying violence, it's time to reclaim the mantle of leadership we seized after World War II. It's time to hold the perpetrators of crimes against humanity accountable for their actions and send a message to the whole world that true justice is blind, that no targeting of civilians, no use of chemical

weapons and no wars of aggression will ever be tolerated again. It's time for the United States to join the International Criminal Court.

If we believe Putin should be held accountable for violating international law, then we have to support international law. This week, I will be introducing a resolution to join the court, and I hope other members of Congress will join me in supporting it.

Experts call for accountability for war crimes and discuss what happens when health care infrastructure and workers become the targets of violence (Johns Hopkins)

By Saralyn Cruickshank

April 14, 2022

A civilian militia defending its territory from an invading force. Widespread atrocities and war crimes committed against women and children. Ongoing attacks against civilian targets including hospitals and health centers.

No, not Ukraine. Ethiopia.

The Tigray region of the East African nation has been engaged in a civil war since November 2020, and the Tigrayans have been the target of ethnic cleansing efforts by security forces from neighboring region Amhara, according to a joint report from Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch. Abuses include sexual violence, indiscriminate and extrajudicial killings, and torture, as well as tactics such as weaponized famine and targeted attacks on health facilities that deprive Tigrayans the ability to survive the conflict.

Yet western news outlets have largely ignored the humanitarian crisis unfolding in Ethiopia, especially when compared to their coverage of the conflict in Ukraine. While attention - and aid - is heaped on Ukraine, Tigrayans are struggling against communications blackouts to share the stories of what they have endured.

It's a disparity that Mulugeta Gebregziabher, a biostatistician and public health expert from the Medical University of South Carolina, hoped to highlight during his presentation as part of Wednesday's panel discussion, "The Vulnerability of Health Care in Conflict: Ukraine and Beyond." Gebregziabher's message: End the double standard.

"Whether it is Ukraine, Myanmar, Syria, or others, there needs to be equality," Gebregziabher said. "One life is precious enough. One health facility, one health care worker is precious enough that we always need to care."

And there's a great deal to care about. According to Leonard Rubenstein, professor of the practice at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, there are at least 20 ongoing regional conflicts around the world. In far too many cases, aggressors have committed the war crime tactic of attacking health care infrastructure, hindering the ability of civilians to receive health care and endangering the lives of health care workers.

A survey of global conflicts from 2016-2020 found that within that five-year period, there were 4,094 documented attacks against health care workers or facilities, Rubenstein said. More than 1,500 health workers were injured and 681 were killed; nearly 1,000 health care facilities were damaged or destroyed; and more than 400 health care workers were kidnapped.

Those numbers, Rubenstein said, meant that during that period, a health facility was attacked every other day and a health worker was killed every three days.

What's most striking about those numbers is that they only encompass documented attacks, Rubenstein said. In Tigray, where channels of communication have been shut down, no attacks on health care infrastructure have been officially documented. Yet according to Gebregziabher, none of the 1,007 fully functional health care facilities in Tigray were still operating at pre-war levels in June 2021, and 80% of the hospitals in the region have been destroyed.

The perpetrators of these acts of violence against health care infrastructure have not been brought to justice by the international order, according to Rubenstein. "It's been 30 years since any prosecution has taken place against any act of violence against health care in the entire world," he said.

But that may be changing precisely because of the international attention garnered by attacks in Ukraine. Harrowing footage of the March 9 missile attack on a maternity and children's hospital in Mariupol has been seared into the American consciousness, especially the image of a laboring mother who was evacuated on a

stretcher while bleeding heavily from a wound to her hip. (Both the mother and her baby died later as a result of the attack.) During his presentation, panelist Sergii Dvoriak, head of the board, founder, and senior scientist of the Ukrainian Institute for Public Health Practice, aired footage from the attack that showed women and children crying, a Ukrainian soldier rendering aid to a shocked teenager, and workers sifting through building debris strewn with destroyed medical supplies such as NICU incubators and hospital beds.

Rubenstein said he hoped the moment could be a "transformation" and "the beginning of the end of impunity" for war crimes—in Ukraine, and in all the other places where health care infrastructure and workers are under attack.

Gebregziabher said he hoped the violence in Tigray, where his elderly mother still lives, would receive the determination of genocide, a largely political designation that would nevertheless mobilize international efforts to support Tigrayans.

"The idea that some lives matter less is the root of all that is wrong with the world," he said.

Other speakers at the panel were Ghutai Sadeq Yaqubi, acting technical director for the USAID Urban Health Initiative Project and a member of Jhpiego, Afghanistan, and Chris Beyrer, professor and director of the Johns Hopkins Center for Public Health and Human Rights.

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Aiding and Abetting

US Assistance to Saudi-Led Coalition Risks Complicity in War Crimes (Human Rights Watch)

By Afrah Nasser

April 7, 2022

The protracted conflict in Yemen has killed almost a quarter of a million people directly or indirectly due to inadequate food, health care, and infrastructure. It has included unlawful attack after unlawful attack, with homes, hospitals, schools, and bridges among the civilian objects that the warring parties have targeted. Fighting has internally displaced more than 4 million people from their homes. Food insecurity is on the rise.

The conflict that began in 2014 between the Houthi armed group and the government of President Abdo Rabbu Mansour Hadi morphed in 2015 into a conflict between the Houthis and the US-backed coalition led by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Today the fighting includes nearly 50 other battlefronts.

The UN Security Council panel of experts has reported for several years that Iran continues to supply the Houthis with weapons. The US has also supported the Saudi and UAE-led coalition politically, particularly by shielding the coalition from criticism and enabling the United Nations Security Council to focus its scrutiny only on the Houthis, as seen in Resolution 2216, drafted by the United Kingdom in 2015.

Since 2015, the United States has supplied Saudi Arabia and the UAE with billions of dollars' worth of weapons, training and logistical support, including aerial refueling until 2018, as the coalition conducts its aerial bombing campaigns. Human Rights Watch has documented the coalition's use of US-manufactured weapons in at least 21 apparently unlawful attacks under the laws of war. These attacks include the March 15, 2016, attack on a market in the village of Mastaba in northwestern Yemen, which killed at least 97 civilians, and the attack on October 13, 2016, on a funeral ceremony in Yemen's capital, Sana'a, which killed at least 100 people and wounded more than 500, including children.

Mounting evidence shows that parties to the conflict, the coalition as well as the Houthi armed group, continue to commit serious violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law. On January 21, coalition warplanes struck a detention center in Sa'ada governorate, northern Yemen, resulting in dozens of casualties. According to a local nongovernmental group, Mwatana for Human Rights, some detainees who survived the strikes were then gunned down by Houthi forces on the ground while they tried to flee.

The Houthi armed group also continues to launch indiscriminate attacks into populated areas, including into internally displaced people's camps in Yemen's Marib governorate. Despite the ongoing toll on civilians, the US continues to sell weapons and provide training and logistical support to the coalition.

One recent sale approved by the Biden administration happened in December, when Raytheon, a leading US defense company, sold \$650 million of air-to-air missiles and associated equipment to Saudi Arabia. In response to a Human Rights Watch 2018 inquiry about the steps Raytheon takes to ensure protection of civilians, Raytheon's vice president, Timothy F. Schultz, wrote that "Raytheon sales of munitions to Saudi Arabia have been and remain in compliance with US law and do not violate US or international legal requirements applicable to the company."

Raytheon and other US companies operating in the weapons sector have responsibilities under the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises and the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights to assess the impacts of their operations, sales and services, based on international human rights requirements and the laws of war. While the United States government facilitates the company's weapons sales, the company says it complies with US law and policies. There are still serious concerns that Raytheon is not meeting its human rights responsibilities as its munitions continue to be used to commit violations of international humanitarian law.

Even though the US government is aware of credible allegations that US-made weapons are being used in violation of international humanitarian law, the US has possibly violated its own obligations by continuing arms sales to the coalition. Government officials could be legally liable for war crimes in Yemen, a consideration raised in a State Department Inspector General report in 2020.

The US condemns likely war crimes committed in other armed conflicts, such as those by Russia in Ukraine, but continues to support the coalition that is committing similar violations in Yemen. Yemeni civilians have also told Human Rights Watch that by supplying weapons used to target them, the US has contributed to antagonism, pain and resentment. Yemenis say that they are well aware that some of the bombs that fall on their homes and heads are made in the US, as weapon remnants found at strike sites by journalists, researchers and others have repeatedly shown.

The US continues to show an inadequate commitment to ensuring accountability for the possible crimes of its allies, Saudi Arabia and the UAE, and for its own role. After seven years of ignoring rights groups' warnings of potential US complicity in serious crimes in Yemen, Washington needs to reverse course and take concrete steps to end its complicity, including by suspending weapon sales to Saudi Arabia and the UAE until they curtail unlawful airstrikes. The US should also pursue credible investigations and prosecutions into previous alleged violations.

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WORTH READING

Ecocide: From the Vietnam War to International Criminal Jurisdiction? Procedural Issues In-Between Environmental Science, Climate Change, and Law

Giovanni Chiarini

April 13, 2022

The crime of 'ecocide' has been discussed for almost 50 years and is of increasing relevance. Starting as scientific and biological debates during the Vietnam War, ecocide arguments became foremost political and then juridical. Recently in 2021, the Stop Ecocide Foundation' proposed to add ecocide as a new crime to the International Criminal Court (ICC) Rome Statute (RS), recommending amendments regarding substantive law and the structure of the crime of ecocide. This paper does not argue against this proposal. On the contrary, following an examination of the history of the crime of ecocide, it puts forward an integrative proposal focused on procedural issues, suggesting seven macro-amendments involving jurisdiction *ratione temporis* and the

withdrawal process, standards of proof, issues of admissibility, the prosecutorial discretion and the UN Security Council powers, as well as a new definition of aggravated ecocide in case of Substantial Impact on Greenhouse Gas Emissions or Climate Change.

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