

# UN warns of 'horrific' human trafficking

Author:

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NEW YORK: Human trafficking is becoming more "horrific" in conflict zones, where armed groups keep women as sex slaves and use child soldiers to spread fear, the UN said on Monday, warning of widespread impunity.

From girls forced to wed to boys made to cook and clean, militants are using trafficking as a tool to boost their control in areas where the rule of law is weak, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) said in a report.

The use of children as soldiers and suicide bombers in nations such as Colombia and Nigeria, and the sexual enslavement of Yazidi women by Daesh in Iraq and Syria, have grabbed headlines and sparked global anger in recent years.

Yet police and prosecutors are often not equipped to deal with the recruitment and exploitation of children by extremist groups – while global convictions of traffickers remain very low – according to the UNODC's annual report on human trafficking.

"Trafficking is found in connection with most armed conflicts," said Yury Fedotov, executive director of the UNODC. "In situations characterized by violence, brutality and coercion, traffickers can operate with even greater impunity."

"Child soldiers, forced labor, sexual slavery – human trafficking has taken on horrific dimensions as armed groups and terrorists use it to spread fear and gain victims to offer as incentives to recruit new fighters," he said in a statement.

Fedotov said the award of the 2018 Nobel Peace Prize to Nadia Murad – a former Daesh sex slave turned Yazidi activist and UN ambassador – was an "important recognition" and urged the world to stop the use of rape as a weapon of war.

The UNODC's report said that while countries are finding more victims – mostly women trafficked for sex – and convicting more traffickers, the total number of convictions remained very low in many nations – especially in Africa and the Middle East.

"In some countries ... there appears to be hardly any risk for traffickers to face justice," the report said.

About 40 million people worldwide are living as slaves – trapped in forced labor or forced marriages – according to a landmark estimate by Australian rights group the Walk Free Foundation and the UN International Labour

Organization (ILO).

Yet campaigners say more and better data is needed to track progress in pursuit of a UN target of ending modern slavery and human trafficking by 2030 as many victims around the world – including child soldiers – are going uncounted.

“Sound information and a solid base of evidence for our policies are two of the most important things to fight this disgusting crime in the most efficient way possible,” Karin Kneissl, Austria’s foreign minister, said at the report launch.

“We simply need to know what it actually is we are dealing with,” she added.



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UN investigation delves into Daesh’s crimes against Yazidis  
Yazidi mothers of children by Daesh face heartbreaking choices

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# Top US officials visit Ankara amid tensions on Syria

Author:

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ANKARA: A delegation of top US officials will visit Turkey on Tuesday to discuss joint plans after the US withdraws from Syria.

US National Security Advisor John Bolton, Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Joseph F. Dunford Jr. and James Jeffrey, a US special representative for Syria and the anti-Daesh coalition, will hold talks with Turkish officials in Ankara.

The latest meeting comes amid rebuke over recent comments made by Secretary of State Mike Pompeo in which he said that the US hoped to stop Turkey from "slaughtering" Kurds in Syria.

Meanwhile, new remarks made by Bolton revealed that the US would put some conditions on its pullout process, meaning the 2,000 American troops slated to leave the country could remain for months.

During a visit to Israel, Bolton said American forces would stay in Syria until Daesh remnants were defeated and Ankara guaranteed the security of the Peoples' Protection Units (YPG), the Syrian-Kurdish militia that has spearheaded the US-allied Syrian Democratic Forces in the fight against Daesh.

Despite a US pledge to bring American soldiers back home quickly, major disagreements between Turkey and the US over the alliance with the Kurdish militia will likely slow down the process.

"We don't think the Turks ought to undertake military action that's not fully coordinated with and agreed to by the US," Bolton said regarding the concerns that Turkey may launch a military offensive against the YPG once the American forces pull out.

But Ankara insists that Turkey only targets Daesh and the YPG, which it sees as the offshoot of outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK).

Since 2015, Turkey has already launched two military operations in northern Syria against the YPG, while before the US pullout announcement, Turkey was planning a new attack on YPG-held areas in the eastern bank of the Euphrates River.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan told US President Donald Trump that Turkey pledged to continue fighting Daesh in Syria.

Turkey reportedly demands US air support for any efforts against Daesh in areas along Syria's border with Iraq.

Ziya Meral, senior resident fellow at the British Army's Centre for

Historical Analysis and Conflict Research, said the priorities of the US and Turkey over northern Syria are difficult to reconcile, not least because it is not clear what it is that the Trump administration actually want to see in the long term.

“For Turkey, this is a question of national security and risks that are posed by a militant group it has been fighting for decades assuming long term territorial control on its borders,” he told Arab News.

“For the US, it is about Daesh and not leaving behind a vacuum and there is the elusive talk of containing Iranian reach. If taken to its logical outcome, this means indefinite US presence in northern Syria.”

According to Meral, what the US can hope to achieve at best is a short-term commitment from Turkey not to launch a new operation.

“But this would mean a YPG pullout from certain areas, which is not clear, especially given both Turkish talks with Russia, but also YPG talks with Assad regime,” he said.

In December, some Syrian Kurdish representatives reportedly met with senior Russian officials to discuss a Russian-mediated political deal with the Syrian Assad regime.

Meral noted that, while it is clear it will never accept a PKK dominated landscape on its borders, Turkey too needs an exit strategy from Syria, at the moment it is deepening its presence to problematic long-term outcomes.

“The US could use this pull-out process creatively for a long-term strategy as it has leverage on both PKK and Turkey, but at the moment Trump administration is wanting on such long-term thinking,” he said.

Yusuf Erim, a prominent political expert, expects this visit at least set down in the framework of what Turkish operations will look like, whether the United States is on board with that,

According to Erim, if Turkey doesn't see Bolton's requests as feasible, then it will go back to square one, meaning Turkey will conduct a military operation despite US military presence in Syria.

In this case, there would be complexities to the scope of the military operation, which means it should be better coordinated, he added.

Erim said there were red lines for both parties and that officials would hopefully reach a deal over them.

“The red line for the Americans is obviously Kurdish civilians in the area and the minority groups,” he said.

“Turkey's red line is the YPG, which the Americans view as allies. Turkey would not accept any US demand to allow the YPG to freely roam the region.”

The US will give a green light to some type of Turkish operation in Syria,

just maybe not to the extent that Turkey wants, according to Erim, who reiterated recent debates about a 40-mile buffer zone into Syria.

“This buffer zone will address Turkey’s security concerns and it also might be feasible for the Americans as well,” he said.

“I’m expecting the buffer zone idea to come to the forefront during these meetings in Ankara. If fighting Daesh is back on the table, we have to realize that it just 300 kilometers away from the Turkish borders, which will totally change the scope of the operation and add new complexities, which the Turkish army can deal with.”



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## [Netanyahu rejects corruption allegations in live address to Israel](#)

Author:

By ILAN BEN ZION | AP

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1546886276309638600

Mon, 2019-01-07 (All day)

JERUSALEM: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, contesting an April election under the shadow of possible corruption charges, demanded on Monday to confront the state's witnesses against him.

Announcing on Twitter, three hours beforehand, that he would make a "special announcement" on Israeli TV, Netanyahu – now in his fourth term – touched off a wave of social media speculation that he might resign or even launch legal action of his own to try to stay any indictment.

Instead, he kicked off Israel's main TV evening news programs with an anticlimactic speech in which he again professed his innocence in a series of corruption cases. He contended he was a victim of a political witchhunt and said he was being denied the chance to challenge his accusers face-to-face. "I demand a confrontation with the state's witnesses now. What are they afraid of? What do they have to hide? I am not afraid and I have nothing to hide...As far as I am concerned it can be broadcast live, so the public can see and hear it."

In response, Israel's Justice Ministry said the investigations against Netanyahu – who is now in his fourth term – have been carried out professionally and thoroughly.

Netanyahu's calling of the snap election, ahead of a national ballot due by November, was widely seen as a direct appeal to voters for a fresh political mandate that could help him weather a potential indictment.

Netanyahu, who heads the right-wing Likud party, said investigators had twice turned down his requests to confront the witnesses. At least three ex-Netanyahu confidants have agreed to provide evidence against him, Israeli media reports said.

Netanyahu is enmeshed in three graft cases. He has said he would not bow out of the election race if Israel's attorney-general announces his intention to accept police recommendations to indict him.

Should he decide on an indictment, the attorney-general would, under Israeli law, then hold a hearing with Netanyahu in which the prime minister and his lawyers could make their case against filing charges in court.

There has been mounting speculation in Israel that an indictment decision will be announced in the next few weeks, before election day.

Police have alleged that Netanyahu granted regulatory favors to Israel's leading telecommunications company, Bezeq Telecom Israel, in return for more positive coverage on a news website belonging to the firm's owner.

In a second case, police contend that Netanyahu received expensive gifts from wealthy friends. A third investigation focuses on suspicions that Netanyahu negotiated a deal with one newspaper for better coverage in return for promises to back legislation that would have limited the circulation of a rival.



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Netanyahu takes aim at graft probes ahead of Israel polls  
Israeli PM Netanyahu rules out resignation if prosecutors move to indict him

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## [Visits to Israel by Iraqi officials stir controversy](#)

Author:

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1546875012178820300

Mon, 2019-01-07 15:17

BAGHDAD: Visits by Iraqi officials to Israel announced by the Jewish state stirred controversy Monday in Iraq, where the deputy parliamentary speaker demanded a probe to identify those who crossed a “red line.”

Israel’s foreign ministry said on Twitter on Sunday that three Iraqi delegations visited Israel in 2018, and details were also later released by media.

Baghdad does not recognize Israel, and is technically in a state of war with

it.

First deputy speaker of parliament Hassan Karim Al-Kaabi called in a statement for “an investigation... to identify those who went to the occupied territory, particularly if they are lawmakers.”

“To go to the occupied territory is a red line and an extremely sensitive issue for all Muslims,” the statement said.

Kaabi is close to Shiite leader Moqtada Sadr, whose bloc won the largest number of seats in Iraq’s legislative election last year.

Israel’s foreign ministry said on Twitter that the 15 Iraqi visitors were “influential Shiite and Sunni personalities in the country,” but did not give names.

The ministry said the Iraqi travelers had visited “Israeli officials and universities,” as well as the Holocaust memorial in Jerusalem.

A spokesman for the memorial told AFP that “a group of 10 Iraqis” had “undertaken a guided tour in late December.”

He said he was not able to give details on the identity and roles of the Iraqis.

Private Israeli TV station Hadashot, which described the Iraqis as “local leaders,” said Sunday that they had stressed they were not taking part in an official visit and that secrecy was paramount.

A significant Iraqi Jewish community lives in Israel and regularly calls for a normalization of ties between Baghdad and the Jewish state.

But the question remains sensitive and Israel’s support for an independence referendum in Iraqi Kurdistan in late 2017 provoked Iraqi officials’ ire.

Israel was the only country to back the vote, which Baghdad deemed illegal.

In 2017, a former Miss Iraq sparked a storm when she took a selfie with Miss Israel.



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Israeli military strikes Gaza after overnight rocket fire Israel arrests Jewish students over Palestinian woman's death

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## [Hamas says Egypt to close Gaza crossing to Palestinians leaving the territory](#)

Author:

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1546874161158775400

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RAFAH: Egypt will bar Gazans from crossing into its territory from Tuesday, after the Palestinian Authority withdrew staff from the border point over alleged abuses.

The partial closure will raise fears over the impact on Gaza's two million residents, for whom a rare opening of the crossing in recent months has provided an opportunity to leave the strip, controlled by Hamas.

A statement late Monday from the Hamas-run interior ministry said Egyptian authorities had informed them the crossing "will be limited to only the arrival of individuals and the entry of goods".

It did not say for how long it was expected to be closed for those leaving, and there was no immediate comment from Egypt.

Rafah – the only way for Gazans to leave the Palestinian enclave that bypasses Israel – was closed Monday due to the Orthodox Christmas holiday but had been expected to reopen both directions Tuesday.

The PA's civil affairs authority on Sunday announced its staff would no longer man the crossing, accusing Hamas of "summoning, arresting and abusing our employees", according to official Palestinian news agency WAFA.

Earlier on Monday Hamas employees retook the post in what they said was an attempt to maintain border control after the shock PA withdrawal.

An AFP journalist saw Hamas officials at the border crossing's main gate and inside accompanying offices in southern Gaza.

Hamas' interior ministry spokesman Iyad al-Bozum said his organisation aimed to "protect the interests of our people."

Hamas seized control of Gaza in 2007 in a near civil war with Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas' Fatah party.

But the PA took control of Rafah in November 2017, as part of a deal for Egypt to reopen a border that had been entirely shut from August that year and largely sealed for years before that.

The PA's takeover of Rafah in 2017 was seen as a first step towards implementing a reconciliation agreement between it and Hamas. The deal has subsequently broken down and Abbas' PA has taken a series of measures against Gaza. Egypt has allowed the border to open regularly since August 2018, providing a lifeline to the enclave's residents. Israel has maintained a crippling blockade of Gaza for more than a decade, in a bid to isolate Hamas and keep it from obtaining weapons. Critics say the policy amounts to collective punishment. Israel and Hamas have fought three wars since 2008. A planned event commemorating the anniversary of the founding of Fatah – due to take place in Gaza on Monday – was cancelled on Sunday, as organisers said they faced threats.



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Israeli military strikes Gaza after overnight rocket fire  
Fatah withdraws officers from Gaza-Egypt crossing