

Cambodia: UN experts call for immediate release of five human rights defenders

25 January 2017 – Two United Nations human rights experts today called on the Government of Cambodia for the immediate release of five human rights defenders detained in May 2016 on charges, which they see as politically motivated.

The use of criminal provisions as a pretext to suppress and prevent the legitimate exercise of the right to freedom of expression and to silence human rights defenders is incompatible with article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, (ICCPR), which has been signed by Cambodia, said the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Cambodia, Rhona Smith, in a news release issued by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).

Ms. Smith recalled that, on 11 May 2016, a group of UN human rights experts sent a follow-up joint urgent appeal to the Cambodian Government on the cases of the five detainees, but has not received any response to date.

The experts requested detailed information on the legal basis for the detention of four staff of human rights NGO Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association (ADHOC) – Lim Mony, Ny Vanda, Ny Sokha and Yi Soksan – as well as the Deputy Secretary General of the National Election Committee and former ADHOC staff member, Ny Chakrya.

As a party to the ICCPR, Cambodia is obliged to respect freedom of expression and the right to a fair trial, which entails a prompt and fair trial within a reasonable period of time or release, Ms. Smith stressed.

With so much effort and resources invested in improving the functioning of the judiciary, which had begun to see improvements in some respects, all that is lost with these cases, she cautioned. They have damaged even further the standing of the Cambodian judiciary, which according to studies commands the least respect of the public among all the State institutions.

The Special Rapporteur's call was also endorsed by human rights expert Sètonджи Roland Adjovi, who currently heads the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention.

Special Rapporteurs and independent experts are appointed by the Geneva-based UN Human Rights Council to examine and report back on a specific human rights theme or a country situation. The positions are honorary and the experts are not UN staff, nor are they paid for their work.

PHOTO FEATURE: Mosul under siege – 100 days on, and the UN's humanitarian response

24 January 2017 – Armed conflict in Iraq has caused the displacement of more than three million people since June 2014 – one million of those displaced may be as a direct result of the Iraqi military's efforts to liberate Mosul and surrounding areas from the control of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da'esh), according to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees.

One hundred days into the Iraqi military operation, people continue to be exposed to violence, human rights violations, restricted access to safety and freedom of movement, abduction and illegal detention, limited access to basic services. As well, many lack of the documentation necessary to enjoy their basic rights.

Before and after the start of the military operation, United Nations agencies rallied efforts to assist civilians with a range of targeted services, from distributing much-needed relief supplies, such as food and health care, to providing shelter and other humanitarian assistance.

Since 17 October 2016, when the Iraqi military operation to retake Mosul began, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) has tracked the movements of more than 26,873 displaced families – 161,238 individuals – the majority of whom desperately need life-saving humanitarian assistance.

Emergency supplies are desperately needed. The UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) is providing food, water and hygiene items to displaced families – these supplies include water purification tablets, high energy biscuits, jerry cans, baby hygiene kits and leaflets with information on child protection and basic mine awareness.

Knowing what is needed and when is crucial for helping those most in need in a timely fashion. The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) is monitoring the situation on the ground, and providing updates on funding and the humanitarian response – including gaps and constraints on camp coordination and management; shelter and non-food items; food security; health; water, sanitation and hygiene; education; logistics; and emergency telecommunications.

Providing those in need with the right sustenance to survive falls under the responsibility of the World Food Programme (WFP), which has been providing monthly food rations and ready-to-eat food to the affected people. These food rations contain items such as rice, lentils, wheat flour, bulgur wheat, beans and vegetable oil.

The need for impartial respect and protection of human rights is crucial in Iraq to ensure that, among other things, women and children are protected from sexual and gender-based violence and diverse ethnic and religious minorities and persons with disabilities are granted access to basic services without discrimination. The UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) has a human rights unit that works with the authorities and members of Iraqi civil society to support this requirement. The Mission's work includes tracking civilian deaths and injuries to tally casualty figures on a monthly basis. Shown here, the head of UNAMI's Human Rights Office, Francesco Motta, sits in a camp for displaced persons, hearing from a man whose children were abducted by ISIL (Da'esh).

Whether women live or die in a crisis often depends on their access to basic sexual and reproductive health services – often taking a back seat to other urgent needs, like food and shelter. The UN Population Fund (UNFPA) has been working with Iraq's Ministry of Health and civil society organizations to deliver these vital services to vulnerable populations. UNFPA has also been working hard in Mosul to provide immediate relief to women and girls affected by the conflict – including through the distribution of dignity kits, which contain hygiene supplies such as toothbrushes, toothpaste, shampoo, soap, sanitary pads and underclothes.

The World Health Organization (WHO) has been on the ground in Iraq since 1960. Through its various programmes, the UN health agency is currently work on revitalizing, strengthening and sustaining the Iraqi health system based on primary health care. For Mosul, in addition to delivering medicines and supplies to treat injuries and chronic conditions, WHO has conducted trauma management training for medical doctors in Erbil, Ninewa and Dohuk, and for paramedical teams engaged in managing civilian casualties from Mosul.

The fighting in Iraq has caused a massive displacement of people seeking safety – with some 3.1 million displaced inside Iraq, while another 220,000 are refugees in other countries. From Mosul, where, in early December 2016, the number of displaced people approached 100,000, UNHCR stepped up the distribution of winter material – providing thermal blankets and quilts to 11,200 people around Mosul.

UN rights expert 'deeply concerned' about reprisals against those she met on official visit to Myanmar

24 January 2017 – A United Nations expert warned today about possible reprisals against the people she met during her recent visit to the country, noting that she was particularly struck by the fear of some she spoke to “who

were afraid of what would happen to them after talking to me.”

“There is one word that has hung heavily on my mind during this visit – reprisals,” the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, Yanghee Lee, said in a press statement wrapping up her 9 to 21 January mission to the country.

She said she is deeply concerned about those with whom she met and spoke, “those critical of the Government, those defending and advocating for the rights of others, and those who expressed their thoughts and opinions which did not conform to the narrative of those in the position of power.” Moreover, she noted the increasing use of section 66 (d) of the Telecommunications Law against many, “merely for speaking their minds.”

“It is particularly alarming to learn that the security forces’ counter operations in the villages of Maungdaw north in Rakhine state have reportedly been resumed following a brief lull, with raids conducted in several villages including nearby the villages I visited,” Ms. Lee stressed.

There are further allegations of arbitrary arrests and detention in relation to these latest reported raids.

The expert was especially dismayed to note that during the visit, feelings of optimism and hope had appeared to be fading among the country’s ordinary people – just one year after nationwide elation over the last general elections.

The Special Rapporteur regretted that due to security reasons, she was only allowed to go to Myitkyina, and not Laiza and Hpakant in Kachin, stating that the situation “at the northern borders is deteriorating.”

“Those in Kachin state tell me that the situation is now worse than at any point in the past few years. Whilst I was not able to travel to the areas most severely affected, the situation is now such that even in Myitkyina, the capital of the state and home to over 300,000 people, residents are afraid – and now stay home after dark,” the UN expert explained.

In visiting a hard labour camp in Mon state, Ms. Lee was concerned over prisoners’ living conditions, pointing to the use of shackles as a form of additional punishment and the lack of transparency regarding their transfer to the hard labour camp. Without an individual complaint system in prisons she was “struck by the fear of those prisoners who were afraid of what would happen to them after speaking to me.”

A report from the visit will be presented in March to the UN Human Rights Council, the largest body of independent experts in the UN Human Rights system. Ms. Lee’s position is honorary and she does not receive a salary for her work.

[UN rights chief urges probe into Askarov case despite Kyrgyz decision to uphold life sentence](#)

24 January 2017 – The United Nations human rights chief today voiced deep concern about a decision by a Kyrgyz court to uphold a life sentence against human rights defender Azimjan Askarov, saying it highlights “serious shortcomings” in the country’s judicial system.

“The decision by the national court clearly had not taken into account the views of the UN Human Rights Committee which had found in March 2016 that Askarov had been arbitrarily detained, held in inhumane conditions, tortured and prevented from adequately preparing his defence,” UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein said in a statement.

“Despite the repeated commitment of the Kyrgyz authorities to uphold international fair trial standards and to resolutely investigate torture allegations, this trial vividly displayed the deficiencies in the country’s judicial and law enforcement system,” the High Commissioner added.

Reading the statement to reporters in Geneva, spokesperson for the High Commissioner’s Office (OHCHR) Ravina Shamdasani noted that the hearing allegedly relied on the same witness testimonies as in the first trial, and that the court-appointed interpreter for Mr. Askarov was repeatedly absent.

Ms. Shamdasani reiterated OHCHR’s call for Askarov’s conviction and sentence to be quashed and urged Kyrgyzstan to conduct “impartial, objective and thorough investigations and judicial proceedings in order to ensure justice for all.”

Mr. Askarov was sentenced to life imprisonment and confiscation of his private property in November 2010 for the murder of a police officer, participation and organization of mass riots and incitement to inter-ethnic hatred.

His arrest is believed to be related to his peaceful activities as a human rights defender, particularly his documentation of inter-ethnic violence in the Jalal-Abad region in June 2010, OHCHR had said at the time of his original sentencing.

[Mali: UN mission condemns attack on](#)

Kidal base that kills one 'blue helmet'

24 January 2017 – The United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) today condemned the attack on its camp in the country's restive northern region of Kidal, which left one 'blue helmet' dead and two others seriously wounded.

According to the UN, several mortar shots hit the MINUSMA camp in Aguelhok on Monday afternoon, killing a UN peacekeeper from Chad.

MINUSMA interim chief Koen Davidse strongly condemned the attack and expressed sincere condolences to the family of the deceased and wished a speedy and full recovery to the wounded.

Mr. Davidse reiterated that the attacks on MINUSMA will not weaken the mission's determination to fully implement its mandate to support the efforts of the Malian Government, the signatories of the Peace Agreement and the Malian people to achieve lasting peace and stability.

"This attack marks a dark and violent period in Mali. The criminal and bloody attacks of the last few days show that terrorism targets, without discrimination, the peace camp. I wish to express our gratitude and solidarity to the families of the many victims," he stated.