

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.

Responses to global ills must integrate peace and sustainable development, UN Member States told

24 January 2017 – United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres today highlighted the importance of recognizing the links between sustainable development and sustaining peace amid such intertwined global challenges as rising inequality, protracted conflicts and climate change.

“We need a global response that addresses the root causes of conflict, and integrates peace, sustainable development and human rights in a holistic way – from conception to execution,” Mr. Guterres told the UN General Assembly high-level dialogue, on ‘Building sustainable peace for all: synergies between the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and sustaining peace.’

The universal nature of the 2030 Agenda – adopted by the Assembly in September 2015 as a plan to tackle poverty, inequality and other global challenges – and its pledge to leave no one behind ties it to sustaining peace, he explained.

“Our priority is prevention – prevention of conflict, of the worst effects of natural disasters, and of other manmade threats to the cohesion and wellbeing of societies,” Mr. Guterres stressed, noting that the best means of prevention, and of sustaining peace, is inclusive and sustainable development.

Investing in sustaining peace means investing in basic services, bringing humanitarian and development agencies together, building more effective and accountable institutions, protecting human rights, promoting social cohesion and diversity, ensuring the meaningful participation of women and girls in all areas of society and moving to sustainable energy, he said.



A wide view of the Trusteeship Council Chamber during the General Assembly high-level dialogue on building sustainable peace for all. UN Photo/Manuel Elias

The Secretary-General cited two overriding challenges.

“First, education; education is a prerequisite for both peace and economic development. Good quality education systems can help transform societies, especially those affected by conflict [...] Second, youth unemployment deprives millions of young people of the opportunity to fulfil their potential, and plays a part in violent conflict and the rise of global terrorism.”

To tackle these global challenges, the United Nations must also be ready to reform, in particular in three major areas, including its strategy and approach to peace. Indeed, he said, while peacekeeping missions consume about 70 per cent of the Organization’s regular budget, many of them are deployed where there is no peace to maintain.

“We must prioritize the prevention of violent conflicts and the perpetuation of peace,” he continued, also underscoring the need to reform the UN development system, as well as its administration.

Together with these reforms, it is crucial to build a new generation of partnerships, with governments, civil society, regional organizations, international financial institutions, academia and the business community and to implement the Addis Ababa Action Agenda on financing for development, he said.

In his remarks, General Assembly President Peter Thomson said that the history of the United Nations has been punctuated by both notable successes and some truly regrettable failures.

AUDIO: UN Secretary-General António Guterres says investing in education, finding decent jobs for young people and promoting social cohesion are just some of things that can be done to make the world safer, more resilient and sustainable. *Credit: UN News*

In April of last year, the General Assembly and the Security Council decided to advance a new approach to peace by adopting the so-called 'sustaining peace' resolutions in their respective chambers, thereby signalling a new cross-sectoral, comprehensive, and integrated approach to the maintenance of international peace and security.

He explained that those texts emphasize the importance of sustainable development to sustaining peace, and give special place to conflict prevention, gender equality, addressing root causes of conflict and protecting human rights.

"Taken in tandem, the 2030 Agenda and the [resolutions] make it clear that Member States regard sustainable development and sustaining peace are two agendas that stand or fall together," Mr. Thomson said, noting that today's dialogue is a tangible step to mutually reinforce commitment to that end.

[With international agreement on ceasefire monitoring, UN envoy praises Syrian delegations in Astana](#)

24 January 2017 – The talks to strengthen the ceasefire in war-torn Syria ended today in Astana, Kazakhstan, with agreement on how to monitor the effort started last month and praise from the United Nations Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura.

"Let me commend Russia, Turkey and Iran for their decision to establish a trilateral mechanism to observe and ensure full compliance with the ceasefire," Mr. de Mistura said, adding that the agreement is a "concrete step" towards implementation of Security Council resolutions on the issue.

In addition to representatives from the three countries, the two-day talks were the first time that Syrian opposition participated in the discussions alongside representatives of the Syrian Government.

Mr. de Mistura, who was a conduit for many of the discussions, praised the delegations noting that “it has required political courage from them to sit in the same room and listen to their respective demands.”

He added that both Syrian parties had told him that “their immediate priority was and remains to strengthen the ceasefire.”

With more than 650,000 people in besieged areas in Syria, according to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the ceasefire is expected to allow greater humanitarian aid to areas previously cut off by the fighting.

“The ceasefire can additionally help the fight of the international community against terrorism in Syria and the wider region,” Mr. de Mistura said.

In addition, the ceasefire is expected to help create “a supportive environment” for engagement between the Syrian parties ahead of the 8 February talks in Geneva, the UN Special Envoy noted, adding that he will head to New York to consult with the Secretary-General and brief the Security Council ahead of those talks.

The discussions in Switzerland will be held under the auspices of the UN and include issues of governance, constitution and elections in the context of Security Council resolution 2254 (2015), which endorsed a road map for a peace process in Syria.

“We cannot allow another ceasefire to dissolve because of a lack of a political process. Now is the time for the international community in all its dimensions to come together and support one integrated political negotiating process, as provided for in SCR 2254,” he said.