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Amid 'political impasse' in Burundi, Security Council urges all parties to cease violence

Thousands of people fleeing fear of violence in Burundi have arrived in Mahama Refugee Camp, Rwanda. Photo: UNHCR/Kate Holt (file)

2 August – The United Nations Security Council today expressed “deep concern” over the political situation in Burundi – including increasing numbers of refugees and reports of torture, forced disappearances and extrajudicial killings – and strongly urged the Government and all parties to immediately cease and reject such violence.

In a statement read out by Ambassador Amr Abdellatif Aboulatta of Egypt, which holds the Council presidency for August, the 15-nation body underscored deep concern regarding the continued worsening humanitarian situation, “marked by nearly 202,000 internally displaced persons, three million people in need and more than 416,000 Burundians seeking refuge in neighbouring countries [...] resulting from the country's persisting political impasse.”

The Council commended the host countries for their efforts, and regional governments “to respect their international obligations relating to the status of refugees, and to ensure that their return is voluntary, based on informed decisions and in safety and dignity.”

It also strongly condemned all public statements inciting violence or hatred towards different groups, “including calls for forced impregnation of women and girls” and urged the Government and all parties to cease all violence and to condemn any hate speech.

The Security Council stressed that the prevailing situation has “seriously undermined” the gains achieved through the 2000 Arusha Agreement, with “devastating consequences for Burundi and the region as a whole.”

The Council reiterated its intention to pursue targeted measures against all actors, both inside and outside of the country, who threaten the peace and security of Burundi and underlined “the utmost importance of respecting the letter and the spirit of the Arusha Agreement” that has helped to sustain a decade of peace in in the nation.

“The Security Council urges the Government of Burundi to reengage with international partners, especially the United Nations, in a constructive manner based on mutual trust,” the statement said.

In that regard, the Council reiterated its concern over significant delays in the deployment of African Union human rights observers and military experts, noting that only 40 of the former and eight of the latter had been deployed to Burundi so far.

Reaffirming the Government's primary responsibility for ensuring security in its territory and protecting its population, with respect for the rule of law, human rights and international humanitarian law, it also called on States in the region to contribute to a solution to the crisis in Burundi and to refrain from supporting the activities of armed movements in any way.

Adopting new resolution, UN Security Council moves to thwart terrorists' access to weapons



The UN Security Council unanimously adopts resolution on preventing terrorists from acquiring weapons. UN Photo/Kim Haughton

2 August – The United Nations Security Council today unanimously adopted a resolution aimed at preventing terrorists from acquiring weapons, particularly small arms and light weapons, the “destabilizing accumulation and misuse” of which the 15-member body said “continue to pose threats to international peace and security and cause significant loss of life.”

The Council “strongly condemned” the continued flow of weapons, military equipment, unmanned aircraft systems (UASs) and their components, and improvised explosive device (IED) components to and between the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da'esh), Al-Qaida, their affiliates, and associated groups, illegal armed groups and criminals.

UN Member States were encouraged to prevent and disrupt procurement networks for weapons, systems and components between and among such groups and entities. Member States were specifically urged to ensure the ability to take appropriate legal actions against those who are knowingly engaged in providing terrorists with weapons and to ensure proper physical security and management for stockpiles of small arms and light weapons.

It also encouraged the implementation of marking and tracing procedures of small arms and light weapons to improve traceability of such weapons which could be provided to terrorists through illicit trafficking.

UN Member States were also urged to strengthen their judicial, law enforcement and border-control capacities, and develop their capabilities to investigate arms-trafficking networks in order to address the link between transnational organized crime and terrorism.

The Council also called on all States to consider becoming party to the related international and regional instruments, with a view to help eliminate the supply of weapons to terrorists, and to fully implement their respective obligations under those to which they are a party.

Before the adoption of the text, three leading UN officials involved in counter-terrorism, briefed the Council on the complex efforts being undertaken by multiple agencies and committees to fulfil the Organization's promise to take an “all-of-UN” approach to tackle terrorism and prevent terrorists from acquiring weapons.

Jehangir Khan, the Officer-in-Charge of the newly created UN Counter-Terrorism Office, told Council members that “the spectre of terrorists acquiring lethal technologies and new weapons, including weapons of mass destruction, poses a serious threat to international peace and security.”

Welcoming the consideration of the resolution before the Council today, he said “this initiative goes to the heart of the Secretary-General's efforts to make prevention the core mission of the United Nations.”

For his part, the Deputy Director of the UN Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED),

Weixiong Chen, explained how the resolution would add further tasks to CTED's mandate.

Citing a wide range of vulnerabilities in the mechanism to prevent terrorists' access to weapons, he stressed the need for further efforts, such as reviewing and strengthening national legislation on countering the supply and trafficking of weapons to terrorists and preventing the flow of weapons to conflict-affected regions and conflict zones.

“Preventing and eliminating the supply of weapons to terrorists is a complex task,” he said. “But please rest assured that CTED will continue to strengthen its engagement with its UN and international and regional partners, in accordance with the relevant Council resolutions, to assist Member States to deny terrorists access to weapons.”

Speaking via video-teleconference from Vienna, Austria, Yury Fedotov, the Executive Director of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), stressed the importance of cross-border partnerships.

He cited many challenges with preventing, detecting, investigating and successfully prosecuting illicit trafficking in weapons, including inadequate regulatory environments and data collection; lack of specialized skills and equipment; and lack of coordination within and between countries and regions.

“Looking ahead, we need to further strengthen cross-border partnerships and operational responses, promote the involvement of diverse stakeholders, including the private sector, and step up tailored assistance to address gaps in capacity,” he said.

UNODC remains fully engaged in providing comprehensive support through its integrated country, regional and global programmes and network of field offices, in coordination with UN partners as well as partners such as the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL).

Emmanuel Roux, Special Representative of INTERPOL to the United Nations, also delivered a statement on behalf of the body's Secretary-General, Jürgen Stock.

Mr. Roux highlighted the importance of tracing weapons back to their sources. “Traditionally, investigations would end at this point, with the seizure of a firearm. INTERPOL suggests that the recovery of a weapon is just the beginning,” he explained, stressing the need to strengthen and integrate border management to prevent the mobility of the individuals using weapons, such as foreign terrorist fighters.

“The capabilities I have described hold enormous potential in assisting law enforcement officers to prevent terrorist access to weapons,” he said, asking delegations to reach back to their respective capitals and national security services, to “inquire whether this potential is being maximized, at a time of unprecedented threat.”

In South Sudan, UN peacekeeping chief says regional engagement 'good thing' for peace process



The UN Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, Jean-Pierre Lacroix, (left) and the President of South Sudan, Salva Kiir. (right) Photo: UNMISS

2 August – The United Nations peacekeeping chief said today the involvement of eastern African countries in revitalizing the peace process in South Sudan was among the main topics he discussed with that nation's President, describing such regional engagement “a good thing.”

“We discussed the initiative of IGAD towards the revitalization of the peace process,” said Jean-Pierre Lacroix, the UN Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, in the South Sudanese capital, Juba, following a meeting with President Salva Kiir.

Mr. Lacroix, on his first official visit to South Sudan, added there was a convergence of opinion that it was “a good thing” that the countries forming the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) are

more engaged in helping South Sudan and its people.

These countries are Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, Sudan and Uganda.

The conflict in South Sudan began in December 2013 as a result of political face-off between President Salva Kiir and then First Vice-President Riek Machar. Despite the August 2015 peace agreement, violence has continued. To date, the crisis has left more than 5.5 million people in need of aid and some 1.7 million refugees have also fled to neighbouring countries.

Last month, the IGAD agreed to set up a high-level forum to work across the region to get the South Sudanese peace process back on track.

According to the UN Mission, known as UNMISS, South Sudan's Minister of Cabinet Affairs, Martin Lomuro told the press that “the President sent very clear message on what he would like the UN to do,” noting that the President would like the IGAD, UNMISS or the UN to “reach out to those rebels who are holding citizens hostages and to engage them and to bring them to the table to talk to one another in order to bring peace.”

Mr. Lacroix met with senior Government officials including the First Vice-President Taban Deng, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Deng Alor.

The peacekeeping chief said that there was a “shared understanding” with the government that “actions and initiatives to advance peace are important” and that they have to be put in place “to accelerate the implementation of the Peace Agreement and bring sustainable peace” to the world's youngest nation.

Mr. Lacroix underlined that the peace process could not move forward if fighting continued. He pledged the continued support of the UN towards providing aid for the most vulnerable people in South Sudan.

“UN humanitarian agencies are doing their best to help South Sudanese and we look forward to further cooperation with the Government so that we can access populations in distress wherever the needs are.”

Afghanistan: UN condemns killing of civilians in Herat mosque attack



Aerial view of the western province of Herat, Afghanistan. Photo: UNAMA/Fardin Waezi

2 August – United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres and the UN political mission in Afghanistan have denounced last night's attack against worshippers gathered in a mosque in the city of Herat which killed at least 31 civilians and injured many more.

“The Secretary-General strongly condemns the attack,” said his spokesman, Stéphane Dujarric, in a statement issued overnight.

“Attacks that deliberately target civilians are clear violations of fundamental human rights and international humanitarian law,” he added.

The UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) joined in the condemnation of the attack at the Jawadia mosque.

According to the Mission, two attackers entered the Shia mosque during the evening prayer time when several hundred worshippers were present, opening fire and detonating two suicide improvised explosive devices against the congregation.

“This attack deliberately targeting civilians at prayer can have no justification whatsoever,” said Tadamichi Yamamoto, the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Afghanistan. “Fanning terror and sectarian violence against a specific community is abhorrent and those responsible must be brought to account.”

The Secretary-General and UNAMA expressed condolences to the victims' families and wished a speedy recovery to the injured.

According to UNAMA, the attack is the fifth this year targeting Shia mosques, killing a total of at least 44 civilians and injuring at least 88. Four of the attacks occurred in Herat and the other in Kabul. Islamic State-Khorasan province claimed responsibility for two of these attacks.

In 2016, UNAMA recorded four separate attacks against Shia mosques and religious gatherings. Islamic State-Khorasan province claimed responsibility for two of those attacks.

Yesterday's attack took place one day after the assault against the Embassy of Iraq in Kabul, where two Afghan civilians lost their lives and one was injured.

The United Nations recalls international humanitarian law that prohibits deliberate attacks against civilians and civilian objects, including places of worship, as well as the cardinal principle of the inviolability of diplomatic premises.

Conflict-affected rural families in Iraq to benefit from mobile cash-transfer technology – UN

2 August – Many vulnerable rural families in Iraq will now be able to safely receive income thanks to a newly adopted mobile money transfer technology that is part of a cash-for-work programme to rehabilitate farming infrastructure, according to the United Nations agriculture agency.

“The use of mobile technology will streamline the safe delivery of cash transfers to participants, who are some of the most vulnerable people in the country,” said Fadel El-Zubi, the UN Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) Representative in Iraq.

Participants, who are from households with no other income source, include women – often the sole breadwinners for their families – and people with a disability. The workers and their families are people who either remained in their villages during conflict or returned home after being displaced by the fighting.

“Providing income opportunities is critical in rural areas affected by conflict, where competition for employment is high, jobs are scarce and people are struggling to support their families,” he elaborated.

The programme, which is funded by the Belgian Government, will support 12,000 conflict-affected people in 30 villages in Kirkuk, Anbar, Salah al-Din and Ninewa governorates. It will benefit local farmers by enabling them to restart or expand farming activities with rehabilitated infrastructure and provides agricultural livelihoods opportunities for displaced people returning home.

The nuts and bolts

To facilitate payments, FAO has partnered with Zain, a mobile and data services operator with a commercial footprint in eight Middle Eastern and African countries.

Participant names and identity numbers are pre-registered with the company, and they receive a free SIM card. Once each person completes a certain number of days of work, they receive a text message containing a personalised security code. They can then collect their wages from any certified money mobile transfer agent, provided their code and identity number match those registered.



Local farmers in Erbil and rural areas of Iraq will be able to restart farming activities with rehabilitated irrigation and other infrastructure. Photo: FAO/Cengiz Yar

“As well as providing much-needed income for participants, the programme will improve agricultural production in the surrounding communities, through activities including rehabilitating canals for irrigation to grow crops and preparing farmland for planting,” said Mr. El-Zubi.

“This, in turn, will encourage community members still displaced by conflict to return home and begin farming again. FAO’s aim is to support people to get back on their feet as quickly as possible, and reduce their reliance on food assistance,” he added.

Around 12 million Iraqis reside in rural areas and depend on agriculture for their livelihoods. Years of conflict have destroyed or damaged harvests, equipment, infrastructure, livestock, seeds, crops and stored food – and left 3.2 million Iraqis food insecure.

As of 15 July, more than 3.3 million people remained displaced within Iraq, while about 2 million had returned home.

Support needed for scaled-up efforts

While the FAO cash-for-work programme encourages displaced people to return home, a major effort is needed to rehabilitate critical infrastructure so that agricultural production can resume and livelihoods can be restored.

FAO is seeking urgent funding of \$74.5 million to assist 1.39 million people this year, through rehabilitating damaged agricultural infrastructure, supporting farmers to vaccinate and feed their livestock, and expanding cash-for-work and other income-generating opportunities.

In coordination with the Iraqi government, FAO’s work supports returning and internally displaced families, host communities and Syrian refugees.

DR Congo: UN envoy expresses concern over arbitrary arrests, urges restraint

2 August – The United Nations envoy for the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) today expressed his concern over arbitrary arrests and detentions across the country, following civil society’s call for the holding of elections before year-end and their peaceful protests against delays in the publication of the electoral calendar.

“I am concerned by the restrictions imposed on peaceful assembly and arrests of those who seek to express their political views, as well as by the targeting of journalists and the confiscation of their materials,” said Maman Sidikou, the Secretary-General’s Special Representative for the country and head of the UN stabilization mission in the country, known by its French acronym, MONUSCO.

On 31 July, the UN documented over 120 arrests or detentions in Kinshasa, Goma, Lubumbashi, Beni, Butembo, Bukavu and Mbandaka.

Among those detained were eight media representatives, including a journalist from radio Okapi and two members of the international press, who were released following the UN Mission’s intervention.

Mr. Sidikou called on the national and local authorities to fully uphold fundamental rights and freedoms as enshrined in the Constitution of the country, as well as for all political actors to refrain from any statement or action that could heighten tensions and further polarize the political landscape.



Maman Sambo Sidikou, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Head of MONUSCO. UN Photo/Manuel Elias (file)