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Security Council condemns use of sexual violence as ‘tactic of war’ in Iraq and Syria

28 August - The United Nations Security Council today condemned the use of sexual violence, in particular sexual enslavement and sexual violence “related to or resulting from forced marriage, committee, including as a tactic of war, in Syria and Iraq,” and urged all parties to armed conflict to take all feasible steps to protect civilians from such “abhorrent” acts.

In a statement to the press issued this evening, the Security Council announce that it had been briefed by UN Special Representative for Sexual Violence in Conflict Zainab Bangura on her visit to the Middle East and expressed concern over and condemned all forms of sexual violence in Syria and Iraq.

Council members recalled in their statement that rape and other forms of serious sexual violence in armed conflict are war crimes and constitute grave breaches of the Geneva Conventions. They urged the international community to remain united in the goal of holding those responsible for such crimes accountable.

Underscoring the need for all relevant parties in the region, while implementing counter-terrorism, peacebuilding and conflict resolution activities to take into account the importance of women's empowerment and the protection of women and girls at risk of sexual violence, the Council also expressed the need to bring conflicts in the region to an end in order to reduce the opportunity for sexual violence to be committed.

Members of the Security Council acknowledged the efforts of neighbouring countries in protecting refugees, including from sexual violence, and called on the international community to contribute to the United Nations humanitarian appeals for Syria and Iraq.
**After bodies found in truck near Austrian border, Ban urges governments to expand safe, legal channels of migration**

**28 August** - In the wake of the grim discovery of the bodies of more than 70 people inside a truck abandoned near Austria’s border with Hungary, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today urged the world to come together to provide comprehensive responses to migration issues, including tackling smugglers and resolving ongoing conflicts, among other root causes.

“I am horrified and heartbroken at the latest loss of lives of refugees and migrants in the Mediterranean and Europe, declared the Secretary-General today following the discovery of the bodies in the abandoned vehicle, and upon hearing reports that many of the victims were Syrian asylum seekers – including children.

“Recent days have brought yet more news of hundreds of refugees and migrants drowning in perilous journeys on the sea,” he continued and noted that despite the concerted and commendable efforts of the joint European search and rescue operation – which has saved tens of thousands of lives – the Mediterranean Sea continues to be a death trap for refugees and migrants.

Further, such repeated tragedies underscore the ruthlessness of people smugglers and traffickers whose criminal activities extend from the Andaman Sea to the Mediterranean to the highways of Europe. It also highlights the desperation of people seeking protection or a new life.

The UN refugee agency expressed deep shock and sadness over yesterday’s grim discovery of some 70 dead asylum-seekers inside a truck abandoned near the Austrian border with Hungary – stressing the ruthlessness of people smugglers who have expanded their business from the Mediterranean Sea to the highways of Europe.

“I appeal to all governments involved to provide comprehensive responses, expand safe and legal channels of migration and act with humanity, compassion and in accordance with their international obligations,” said Mr. Ban

Meanwhile in Geneva, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) spokesperson Melissa Fleming said, “this tragedy shows people smugglers have no regard for human life and are only after profit. It also underscores the desperation of people seeking protection or a new life in Europe.”

Austrian police say that they believe the truck came from Hungary and entered Austria on Wednesday night or early Thursday morning, and that the victims might have been dead for one or two days. Their identity is still unknown but it is presumed that they were being transported by smugglers.

After establishing that there were no survivors, the police closed the truck and moved it to another location for further investigations.

UNHCR expressed its hope that this incident will result in strong cooperation among European police forces, intelligence agencies and international organisations to crack down on the smuggling trade while putting in place measures to protect and care for victims.

Ms. Fleming reiterated UNHCR’s call to European countries to approach the refugee crisis “in a spirit of solidarity and cooperation and to provide those seeking safety in Europe with safe legal alternatives – including resettlement or humanitarian admission programmes, flexible visa policies and family reunification – to dangerous irregular voyages.”

Every day this week, the Hungarian border police intercepted more than 2,000 people crossing the border from Serbia. On
Wednesday, police reported 3,241 new arrivals, including 700 children – the highest number in a single day so far this year.

Syrian refugees constitute the majority of the asylum-seekers, many of whom are women and children. They travel in large groups of over 200 – walking along rail tracks or crawling under barbed wire – as work continues on a 175 kilometres long wall at the Hungarian-Serbian border.

“Fear of police detection makes many of them rush through the razor wires, sustaining cuts and injuries in the process. UNHCR staff at the border report that many people are arriving on wheelchairs pushed by relatives, while others are in need of urgent medical assistance,” Ms. Fleming elaborated.

New arrivals are taken by the authorities to a pre-registration centre in Röszke – near the Serbian border, some 184 kilometres away from the capital, Budapest – where the police search and record their details, before sending them further inland to registration centres. The exhausted, hungry and thirsty people who have spent many days on the road are kept in mandatory detention between 12 and 36 hours, and then handed over to the Office of Immigration and Nationality to process their asylum claims.

With a maximum capacity of 5,000 people, Hungary's four reception centres are overcrowded, causing long waits and further exacerbating asylum-seekers’ angst. The Hungarian police do not have social workers or enough interpreters in Arabic, Dari, Pashto and Urdu, which makes communication difficult.

According to the latest official statistics, so far this year more than 140,000 people have sought asylum in Hungary, compared to 42,000 people last year. Most of those lodging asylum applications are from Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq and Pakistan, and they include some 7,000 unaccompanied children.

“Many refugees and migrants choose to leave Hungary for other countries in Europe,” Ms. Fleming explained. “Every day up to 500 people sleep at the two main train stations in Budapest where volunteers look after their basic needs, including food, clothing and urgent medical attention, and where the city authorities give them access to sanitation facilities.

To provide more adequate accommodation, UNHCR is offering technical advice to city authorities who plan to open a transit facility.

**Fresh peace deal ‘first step’ in resolving South Sudan crisis – Security Council**

28 August - Welcoming the recent signature by President Salva Kiir, SPLM/SPLA-IO Chairman Riek Machar and others of the Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan, the Security Council today called on all the parties, with the help of the United Nations, to implement the accord and adhere to the permanent ceasefire.

“The Security Council acknowledges that this Agreement is the first step in reversing the difficult political and economic situation, and humanitarian, and security catastrophe resulting from this crisis, calls upon the parties, with support from the United Nations and international community, to fully implement the Agreement,” the 15-member body declared in a press statement.

The deal towards ending the months-long crisis was signed by President Kiir two days ago and the Council expressed its concern with any statement by any party suggesting a lack of commitment to implement it.

Confirming its intention to move swiftly to update the mandate of the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) to support implementation of key tasks in the Agreement, the Council also expressed its readiness to consider “appropriate measures to ensure full implementation of the Agreement…and address any violations or failures of any party to implement its provisions, including through the imposition of an arms embargo and additional targeted sanctions.”

Through its statement, the Council expressed deep appreciation for the work of the Intergovernmental Authority on
Development (IGAD) in leading the mediation since the onset of the crisis, and commended the recently expanded efforts of the “IGAD-Plus” configuration involving 19 countries and organizations including the United Nations “to develop and achieve a comprehensive solution that has now established a foundation to deliver a peace to South Sudan.

“The Security Council urges the continued close engagement of IGAD and IGAD-Plus partners in the critical period ahead,” continued the statement.

Underscoring the pressing need to ensure accountability for serious violations and abuses of human rights and serious violations of international humanitarian law, the Security Council takes note in this regard of Chapter V of the Agreement. It also further recognizes the work of the African Union Commission of Inquiry in independent and public human rights monitoring, investigation and reporting, and anticipates with interest its findings and recommendations and encourages the public release of the final report as soon as possible on South Sudan.

At Security Council, UN officials warn political turbulence in Guinea-Bissau puts past gains at risk

28 August - With Guinea-Bissau facing political turbulence barely a year after the re-establishment of constitutional order, the top United Nations official there expressed hope today that political leaders would rise to their “historic responsibility” to preserve the gains made so far in the interest of the country and people.

Briefing the Security Council, Miguel Trovoada, Special Representative and head of the UN Integrated Peacebuilding Support Office in that country (UNIOGBIS), introduced the Secretary-General’s latest report on the activities of the Office and recalled that previous reports to the Council had always underscored how Guinea-Bissau’s fragility was rooted in failure to address the underlying causes.

“...the lack of dialogue has opened the door to further distrust and deepened antagonisms, which has led to the current situation,” he told the 15 member body in a meeting that also included a briefing on the UN Peacebuilding Commission’s response to the crisis, by Antonio de Aguiar Patriota, of Brazil.

Mr. Trovoada said that before dismissing Prime Minister Domingos Simões Pereira, President Vaz had, in a message to the nation, explained the sequence of events leading up to an emerging constitutional crisis, he said. The public pronouncement by other prominent leaders was a harbinger of what was to come. The dismissed Government was broad-based and had comfortable support in Parliament, while the new Prime Minister, Baciro Dja, was not the official nominee of the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde.

Mr. Trovoada said he had been maintaining frequent contacts with senior leaders of the Government and civil society with a view to fostering dialogue. On the positive side, all those who had a role to play had proclaimed their firm determination to respect the Constitution and popular demonstrations were being conducted peacefully.

During his meeting with leaders of the Armed Forces, they strongly affirmed their commitment to stay out of the crisis and submit to the democratic process. Given the recurrent crises and absence of lasting peace and stability in Guinea-Bissau, the international community must ensure that its support helped bring about the desired results.

For his part, Mr. Patriota said he had chaired a meeting of the Guinea-Bissau configuration on 17 August, following which the Commission issued a statement expressing concern that recent political developments might undermine progress achieved so far, risk destabilizing the fragile political situation in the country and compromise economic progress. The Commission also called for the resumption of political dialogue in order to address the current tensions.

Mr. Patriota offered three comments. First, the current crisis carried the risk of having a negative impact on the already fragile economic situation, on the stability of the country and on its democratic gains. Guinea-Bissau was making good progress towards stabilization and development since the elections of 2014 and the round table held in Brussels in March 2015. The main goal should be to prevent the escalation of the political crisis from undermining the progress achieved so
Second, the nature of the crisis illustrated that there might be space for debates on better delineating the spheres of competence of the President and the Prime Minister, so as to avoid it from becoming a source of instability and fragility in an otherwise promising environment. Third, different partners of Guinea-Bissau had been consistent in their engagement over the crisis. The role being played by the region, as well as the coherence demonstrated by international partners, would remain a key element to achieve any sustainable solution. Nevertheless, the political deadlock could only be overcome by Bissau-Guineans themselves through a constructive dialogue based on the full respect for constitutional provisions and the rule of law.

**UNICEF announces release of 163 more children by armed group in Central African Republic**

The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) announced today that 163 children have been released by an armed group in the Central African Republic, where thousands of other boys and girls are still serving as combatants, cooks and messengers for the country’s militant factions.

“This release is a sign that the process of implementing the commitment made by the leaders of these groups, as a part of the peace and reconciliation process, is on track,” UNICEF Representative in the Central African Republic (CAR) Mohamed Malick Fall said in a press release.

“We fully expect to see hundreds more children released before the end of this year,” Mr. Fall said.

The 163 children, five of the girls, were released today in a ceremony in the town of Batangafo where the handover was facilitated by UNICEF and the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA).

The children received medical care and spoke to social workers before they were taken to a transition centre where they will be supported in either going back to school or enrolling in vocational training. UNICEF and partners will also trace and reunify the children with their families.

“MINUSCA is resolved with all partners to ensure the protection of children and I herewith reaffirm its determination to multiply efforts to identify and separate children who are waiting to return to normal life,” said Diane Corner, the deputy special representative of the UN peacekeeping mission in CAR.

According to UNICEF, between 6,000 and 10,000 children have been associated with armed factions in the Central African Republic since 2013 including those serving as combatants, as well as those working as cooks, messengers and in other roles.

Smaller release ceremonies also took place in the capital Bangui last week, and earlier in August in other districts, bringing to 645 the number of children liberated since a May agreement by the country’s 10 armed groups to release all children from their ranks.

The agreement also commits the groups to ending additional recruitment of children and gives UNICEF and its partners immediate and unrestricted access to the areas under the groups’ control in order to identify and verify the number of affected children and to secure their release.
More than 300,000 make perilous Mediterranean crossing in 2015 – UN refugee agency

28 August - The United Nations refugee agency said today that the number of refugees and migrants crossing the Mediterranean to reach Europe has surpassed 300,000 this year, up from 219,000 during the whole of 2014.

“Some 2,500 refugees and migrants are estimated to have died or gone missing this year while attempting the crossing to Europe – compared to 3,500 who died or went missing in the Mediterranean in 2014” said Melissa Fleming, spokesperson for the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), at a press briefing.

This number, which includes almost 200,000 people landing in Greece and 110,000 in Italy, represents a substantial increase from last year.

“In the last few days,” Ms. Fleming continued, “more people have lost their lives in three separate incidents.”

The Libyan Coast Guard carried out two rescue operations on Thursday morning, seven miles off the port town of Zwara. Two boats carrying approximately 500 refugees and migrants were intercepted and survivors taken to shore. With an estimated 200 people still missing – and feared dead – a still undetermined number of bodies were recovered and taken to shore. The Libyan Red Crescent has been helping with the collection of the bodies.

On Wednesday, a rubber dinghy carrying some 145 refugees and migrants ran into trouble when the operator tilted the skiff dangerously to one side. Panic followed as some people fell into the sea and two men jumped into to rescue them. Amidst jostling and shoving, three women on the dinghy were crushed to death. Of those who fell into the water, 18 remain missing and believed to have drowned.

According to UNHCR, the survivors were rescued and taken to Lampedusa, including the two-month old baby of one of the dead women. Most of the survivors are in critical condition, suffering from shock, cuts and bruises.

That same day rescuers aiding a boat off the Libyan coast found 51 people suffocated to death in the cargo hold. According to survivors, smugglers were charging people money for allowing them to come out in order to breathe.

Last week, in a similar incident, the bodies of 49 persons were found in the hold of another boat. They are thought to have died after inhaling poisonous fumes.

Despite the concerted efforts of the joint European search and rescue operation under FRONTEX (Frontières extérieures), which has saved tens of thousands of lives this year, the Mediterranean Sea continues to be the deadliest route for refugees and migrants.

“Many of the people arriving by sea in southern Europe, particularly in Greece, come from countries affected by violence and conflict, such as Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan; they are in need of international protection and they are often physically exhausted and psychologically traumatized,” said Ms. Fleming.

While these numbers are overwhelming for the already overstretched capacity of single countries, such as Greece, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Hungary, Serbia or Germany, they are manageable through collaborative and coordinated responses at the European level.
All European countries and the European Union must act together in response to the growing emergency and demonstrate responsibility and solidarity.

“UNHCR appeals to all governments involved to provide comprehensive responses and act with humanity and in accordance with their international obligations,” Ms. Fleming concluded.

**Ban urges all parties in Burundi to ‘look beyond political differences,’ revive spirit of landmark peace accord**

**28 August** - Fifteen years after the signing of a landmark Burundi peace accord, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today called on all the country’s political leaders, including those in exile, to find common cause and commit to build on the stability that was ushered in by the Arusha Agreement.

“Today, Burundi marks the fifteenth anniversary of the initial signing of the Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement in Tanzania. This process gave birth to the first generation of Burundians with no direct experience of war since independence, said Mr. Ban in a statement issued by his spokesperson.

“Never has the spirit of Arusha been as sorely tested as in the past five months,” the statement continued, with the Secretary-General encouraging the Burundian people to reconnect with the spirit of dialogue, consensus, democracy and peaceful resolution of disputes embodied by the Arusha Agreement.

Just last week, the UN chief, noting the inauguration of Pierre Nkurunziza for his third term as President of Burundi, urged him to “pursue a path of inclusivity and reconciliation,” and reiterated his call on all Burundian stakeholders to undertake a broad and transparent political dialogue.

In the statement issued today, Mr. Ban called on all leaders from across the political spectrum to show the courage and vision to resume dialogue with their rivals and look beyond their political differences.

“No matter how great these differences may seem, they are smaller than the price of returning to violence,” he declared.

The Secretary-General recalled that a month after the signing of the Arusha Agreement, the Facilitator of the Burundi peace process, the late President of South Africa, Nelson Mandela, told the UN Security Council: "Burundi stands at the threshold of a completely new chapter in its history. That history will judge very harshly those that deliberately choose to obstruct the road to peace and progress.”

Echoing that message, Mr. Ban expressed the hope that all Burundian political leaders, including those in exile, could find common ground and demonstrate their commitment to consolidate peace and stability that the Arusha Agreement brought the country.

Burundi has been in the grips of a political crisis since late April, when Mr. Nkurunziza was put on the ballot for a controversial third term. Tensions intensified when he won the July 21 election. More than 100,000 people have fled to neighbouring countries in the weeks ahead of and following the polls.

Tensions remain high – just two weeks ago, the UN human rights office warned that the situation is spiralling out of control amid a spate of deadly election related violence – and Mr. Ban has repeatedly appealed for an end to politically – motivated violence and urged all Burundians to peacefully settle their differences without delay.

During a phone call with Mr. Nkurunziza on 6 August, the Secretary-General urged him to resume the political dialogue, which had been suspended since 19 July. He also encouraged the Burundian authorities to work closely with the Ugandan-led facilitation on behalf of the East African Community.
Hurricane Katrina’s ‘true legacy’ was to spur disaster risk management – senior UN official

28 August - The top United Nations disaster resilience official today said on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of Hurricane Katrina that the ‘true legacy’ of the costliest United States hurricane disaster, which devastated New Orleans and claimed more than 1,800 lives, was to raise the bar for disaster risk management worldwide.

“Hurricane Katrina exposed weaknesses in disaster risk management which are common to many hazard prone locations around the world,” said the head of the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR), Margareta Wahlström.

“We can learn a lot from New Orleans if we are to achieve substantial reductions in disaster losses as called for in the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction which was adopted by governments earlier this year,” she said.

The Sendai Framework, named after the Japanese city in which it was adopted by Governments earlier this year, is a 15-year, voluntary, non-binding agreement – and the first major agreement of the new UN sustainable development agenda – with seven targets and four priorities for action.

Ms. Wahlström said: “New Orleans has transformed itself into a role model for disaster resilience.”

“It continues to invest heavily in improving flood defences and major efforts have been made to engage citizens in the renewal of the city,” she continued. “There is better mapping of the city’s hazards and there is greater awareness among the population about the importance of disaster risk management in ensuring the sustainable social and economic development of the city.”

She also said “many lessons learned from New Orleans have been incorporated into the Sendai Framework including the need to engage the elderly and other potentially vulnerable groups in disaster planning and to make adequate provision for their safety when a disaster strikes.”

“Hurricane Katrina has taught us that disaster risk reduction must be people-centred and engage all sectors of society,” she said.

Ms. Wahlström’s Office is dedicated to disaster risk reduction and supports implementation of the Sendai Framework which seeks “the substantial reduction of disaster risk and losses, in lives, livelihoods and health and in the economic, physical, social, cultural and environmental assets of persons, businesses, communities and countries.”
UN urges all States to sign, ratify Nuclear Test Ban as ‘critical step on road to nuclear-free world’

28 August - For the fifth International Day against Nuclear Tests, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has welcomed voluntary moratoria on testing imposed by nuclear-armed states but stressed that these cannot substitute for a legally-binding treaty.

“The Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) is essential for the elimination of nuclear weapons,” Mr. Ban said in a message. “It is a legally-binding, verifiable means by which to constrain the quantitative and qualitative development of nuclear weapons.”

The UN General Assembly declared 29 August the International Day against Nuclear Tests in December 2009, adopting a unanimous resolution that calls for increasing awareness and education “about the effects of nuclear weapon test explosions or any other nuclear explosions and the need for their cessation as one of the means of achieving the goal of a nuclear-weapon-free world.” 2010 marked the inaugural commemoration of the International Day against Nuclear Tests.

Reminding the world that this year marks the 70th anniversary of the dawn of the nuclear age, the UN chief said 70 years ago in 1945, “the Trinity Test unleashed the power of more than 20,000 tons of TNT and precipitated over 2,000 additional nuclear tests.”

“Pristine environments and populated communities in Central Asia, North Africa, North America and the South Pacific were hit,” he said. “Many have never recovered from the resulting environmental, health and economic damage. Poisoned groundwater, cancer, leukaemia, radioactive fallout – these are among the poisonous legacies of nuclear testing.”

“The best way to honour the victims of past tests is to prevent any in the future,” he said, noting that two decades after the CTBT was negotiated, “the time has long past for its entry-into-force.”

“I welcome the voluntary moratoria on testing imposed by nuclear-armed States,” Mr. Ban said “At the same time, I stress that these cannot substitute for a legally-binding Treaty.”

“On this International Day, I repeat my longstanding call on all remaining States to sign and ratify the Treaty – especially the eight necessary for its entry-into-force – as a critical step on the road to a nuclear-weapon-free world,” he said.

The General Assembly resolution that established the world day was initiated by Kazakhstan, together with a large number of sponsors and cosponsors with a view to commemorate the closure of the Semipalatinsk Nuclear Test site on 29 August 1991.

In his remarks, Assembly President Sam Kutesa said the recently held 2015 Review Conference of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) had highlighted the stark reality of the increasing divisions between the States parties over the future of nuclear disarmament.

“It is now time to bridge the gap and work with more resolute political will to ensure that the NPT continues to remain the cornerstone of global security,” he declared.

Mr. Kutesa applauded the efforts of the Government of Kazakhstan, not only for initiating the International Day, but also for its continuing leadership in efforts to end nuclear weapons testing and to promote a world free of nuclear weapons.

He also commend the recent announcement of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) on Iran’s nuclear programme, reached in Vienna between the international negotiators and Iran as an important step forward on this critical
issue.

“I hope this agreement will benefit the non-proliferation regime and will lead to greater mutual understanding and cooperation on the many serious security challenges in the Middle East and beyond,” he said.

He also announced that on 10 September, he plans to convene an informal meeting of the General Assembly to mark the International Day under the overall theme ‘Towards Zero: Resolving the Contradictions.’

UN human rights office calls on Colombia and Venezuela to resolve border situation through dialogue

28 August - Concerned over the situation at the border between Colombia and Venezuela, particularly reports of human rights violations occurring in the context of deportations of Colombians, the United Nations human rights office called today on the authorities in both countries to ensure the situation is resolved through “calm discussion and dialogue, firmly grounded in their obligations under international human rights law and refugee law.”

According to news reports, tensions have heightened between the two countries due to the closure of major border crossings and the reported deportations of Colombian migrants.

“[We] are also concerned about the declaration of a ‘state of emergency’ in six border municipalities, in the Táchira State in Venezuela, Ravina Shamdasani, spokesperson for the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) told the regular bi-weekly press briefing in Geneva.

“OHCHR calls on the authorities in both countries to ensure the resolution of the situation through calm discussion and dialogue…” she said, adding that the office also urged the Venezuelan authorities to ensure that the human rights of all affected individuals are fully respected, particularly in the context of any deportations.

Ms. Shamdasani said the Office will continue to closely monitor the situation and that it stands ready to engage with and advise the Venezuelan and Colombian authorities.

UN experts urge Sudan to overturn ‘outrageous conviction’ for indecent dressing

28 August - A group of independent United Nations human rights experts have voiced alarm after a female Sudanese student was sentenced to public flogging and a heavy fine for charges of “indecent dressing,” while another received a hefty fine for the same charges, and urged that the convictions be overturned immediately.

“Public flogging of women is a continuing practice in the country, and the offence of modesty and the penalty of flogging are disproportionately used to punish women,” noted the experts, who all report to the United Nations Human Rights Council.

“This outrageous conviction must be overturned and the girls must be immediately released,” the experts urged in a news release. “We also call upon the Government of Sudan to repeal all legislation that discriminates on the grounds of gender and to comply with international standards.”

Ferdous Al Toum, 19, was sentenced on 16 August to be flogged 20 lashes and a fine of 500 Sudanese pounds ($83), while Rehab Omer was fined the same amount for the same charges on 14 July. Both girls have filed appeals, but no date has yet been given for the appeal trials.

The cases began on 25 June 2015, when the Public Order Police arrested 12 female students between the ages of 17 and 23 who are originally from the war-torn Nuba Mountains in South Kordofan state, according to the UN human rights office
They were taken by the police in front of the Evangelical Baptist Church in Khartoum North, where they had attended a ceremony, and were brought to a local police station. At the time of their arrest, some were wearing trousers and others skirts. It was reported that the police subjected the students to degrading treatment and humiliating verbal abuse during their detention.

Two of the students were released about four hours after their arrest, OHCHR noted. The ten others were released on bail on 27 June 2015 but charged with “indecent dressing” under Article 152 of Sudan’s 1991 Criminal Act, which gives the police extensive powers to arrest any person on such grounds. The punishment, if they were to be found guilty, would be 40 lashes, or a fine, or both. In practice, the law has been reported to be used exclusively against women.

These 10 women were taken to court on 28 June 2015 where the charges against them were confirmed and court dates set. Ms. Al Toum appeared in court on 6 July 2015, wearing another dress deemed indecent by the judge who, disregarding any due process, immediately sentenced her to a fine of 500 Sudanese pounds ($83) or a month in prison. Her fine was paid by human rights defenders and she will appear in court again in relation to the original charge.

The cases against the eight other female Christian students charged with “indecent dressing” have concluded with either a not guilty verdict or a fine being imposed.

The rights experts have officially expressed concern to the Sudanese authorities about current legislation that allows corporal punishment of women, and the devastating consequences that such violence has on their physical and psychological integrity and well-being.

“There is a pressing need to address the pattern of discrimination, abuse and torture as well as the oppression and denigration of women in the country,” they said. “We urge the Government of Sudan to put an end to these grave violations of women’s human rights.”

The experts voicing their concern are Eleonora Zielinska, Chairperson-Rapporteur of the UN Working Group on the issue of discrimination against women in law and in practice; Dubravka Simonovic, UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women; Aristide Nononsi, UN Independent Expert on the situation of human rights in the Sudan; and Juan E. Méndez, UN Special Rapporteur on torture.

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