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Atrocity Alert No. 425: Democratic Republic of the Congo, Afghanistan and Holocaust

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Atrocity Alert is a weekly publication by the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect highlighting situations where populations are at risk of, or are enduring, mass atrocity crimes.

M23 SEIZES CONTROL OF GOMA IN THE DR CONGO, ESCALATING RISKS OF REGIONAL CONFLICT

On 27 January rebels from the March 23 Movement (M23) armed group seized control of Goma, the provincial capital of North Kivu, in eastern **Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)**. Home to nearly 2 million people, including 1 million displaced by previous violence, Goma is now the epicenter of heavy fighting and escalating conflict. The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs has raised alarm, with reports of gender-based violence, looting and indiscriminate attacks impacting healthcare facilities, personnel and patients. According to the UN Refugee Agency, displacement sites have been targeted with

heavy artillery, destroying shelters and killing civilians. While some people are fleeing, many remain trapped amid these life-threatening conditions. The World Food Programme has also warned of a deepening food crisis in Goma, where blocked roads and closed ports are cutting off vital supplies.

On Saturday the UN reported that M23's offensive had already claimed the lives of North Kivu's military governor, as well as 13 UN Peacekeepers and soldiers from South Africa, Malawi and Uruguay. The escalation over the weekend prompted an emergency session of the UN Security Council (UNSC), during which Bintou Keita, Head of the UN peacekeeping mission (MONUSCO), described the mission as "trapped." The UNSC issued a Press Statement emphasizing that attacks on peacekeepers may constitute war crimes.

Following the [collapse of a peace summit](#) in mid-December, M23 – which the UN has confirmed is backed by Rwanda – has rapidly advanced and gained territorial control of strategic areas in North Kivu, including Masisi and Sake. More than 400,000 people have already been displaced in North and South Kivu by conflict so far this year. The capture of Goma threatens to deepen an already dire human rights and humanitarian catastrophe. M23 has a history and pattern of committing widespread abuses against civilians, including unlawful killings, rape and other possible war crimes.

Vivian van de Perre, Deputy Head of MONUSCO, stressed, "Let us please draw on our humanity and do our utmost to bring an immediate end to such levels of violence and suffering." Urgent action is needed to protect populations and prevent the crisis in Goma from spiraling further. All armed actors must take precautions to spare civilians, restrict the use of explosive weapons with wide area effects in populated areas and facilitate humanitarian access. Leaders from the DRC, Rwanda, Angola and other stakeholders must prioritize agreements to halt hostilities and establish humanitarian corridors. Rwanda should end its military support for M23, while M23 should immediately and fully withdraw from occupied areas. All parties to the conflict must agree on a lasting ceasefire agreement.

ICC CHIEF PROSECUTOR SEEKS ARREST WARRANTS FOR TALIBAN LEADERS IN AFGHANISTAN

On 23 January the Chief Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC), Karim Khan, announced that his Office filed two applications for arrest warrants in the situation in [Afghanistan](#), concluding there are reasonable grounds to believe that the Supreme Leader of the Taliban, Haibatullah Akhundzada, and the Chief Justice of the "Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan," Abdul Hakim Haqqani, bear criminal responsibility for the crime against

humanity of gender-based persecution. Various UN human rights experts welcomed this as a “critical step forward in the pursuit of justice for crimes against humanity committed against Afghans” and further stated, “The Prosecutor is sending a clear message to the rest of the world that the discriminatory and misogynistic policies being enforced in Afghanistan are not only unacceptable but may constitute serious crimes under international law.”

The Prosecutor’s request marks the first time the Court has pursued charges specifically for gender-based persecution. In the three years since the Taliban seized power, they have implemented **restrictive policies** targeting women and girls, perpetuating extreme forms of gender-based discrimination and flagrantly violating the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). According to the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan and the Working Group on Discrimination Against Women and Girls, the Taliban are likely perpetrating **gender persecution and gender apartheid** as they appear to be governing through systematic discrimination with the intent to subject women and girls to total domination. Women and girls are enduring repressive edicts that have resulted in the erasure of women from public life by severely limiting their freedom of movement, freedom of opinion and expression, employment opportunities, political and public representation and access to education and healthcare. The Taliban’s rule has created an enabling environment for normalizing violence against women and heightens risks for further atrocities.

Recognizing the gravity of the situation, the international community has pursued various avenues to ensure justice for the crimes committed by the Taliban. In September 2023 the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect and Open Society Justice Initiative, with 13 UN member states, **co-hosted** a ministerial meeting to explore avenues for achieving justice for the systematic gender-based persecution in Afghanistan. A year later, Australia, Canada, Germany and the Netherlands announced plans to bring Afghanistan before the International Court of Justice (ICJ) for violations of CEDAW.

These efforts reflect the growing recognition that justice for Afghan women and girls is not only a moral imperative but a critical step toward reaffirming the fundamental principles of international law and human rights. The international community should cooperate with and lend their support to the ICC and ICJ in their pursuit of justice in Afghanistan.

INTERNATIONAL HOLOCAUST REMEMBRANCE DAY 2025

On Monday, 27 January, the international community commemorated International Holocaust Remembrance Day, honoring the millions of victims of the Holocaust, and the 80th anniversary of the liberation of the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp. The systematic persecution and extermination of more than six million Jews, including more than a million murdered within the confines of Auschwitz, remains one of the darkest chapters in human history.

Genocide is a crime that diminishes us all and challenges our very sense of what makes us human. The theme of this year's commemoration, "Holocaust Remembrance for Dignity and Human Rights," reflects the critical importance that memorialization and commemoration of genocide has for providing recognition, recourse and healing to victims, survivors, their families and communities, as well as ensuring dignity and respect for human rights. It also highlights the importance of the body of international law that protects both, including the Genocide Convention and Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which emerged in response to the horrors of World War II and the Holocaust.

This year also holds particular significance as we observe the 20th anniversary of the adoption of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P). R2P reaffirms the international community's commitment to protect populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity.

Despite this, we are once again witnessing a worrying global resurgence of hatred, antisemitism, dehumanization and Holocaust denial. During the commemoration, UN Secretary-General António Guterres said, "we must condemn antisemitism wherever and whenever it appears – as we must condemn all forms of racism, prejudice and religious bigotry which we see proliferating today. Because we know these evils wither our morality, corrode our compassion, and seek to blind us to suffering – opening the door to atrocities." Despite the Holocaust being one of the most well documented mass atrocities in history, Holocaust denial and distortion has been amplified on social media platforms with ease. By systematically negating the facts of history, genocide deniers manufacture doubt, seed discord and mistrust and strengthen contested narratives about the past, present and future. Genocide denial is not only an attempt to minimize or redefine the scale and severity of the crimes committed, but it also often contributes to the dehumanization of survivors and victims.

On this Holocaust Remembrance Day, we are at a critical threshold, witnessing a deliberate undermining of the collective commitment to fulfill the promise of "never again." The international community has an obligation to preserve the memory of the victims and

survivors and respect their memory by taking appropriate action when confronted by risks today. The human suffering caused by the failure to prevent genocide and halt other atrocity crimes must compel us to redouble our efforts to prevent, protect and generate the will to respond more effectively.

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