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Atrocity Alert No. 413: Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory, DR Congo and Libya

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.

A YEAR OF UNFATHOMABLE ATROCITIES AND SUFFERING IN OCCUPIED PALESTINE AND ISRAEL

The past year in [Occupied Palestinian Territory \(OPT\)](#) has been defined by a horrifying scale and intensity of mass atrocity crimes and brazen disregard of international law. Both Hamas and other Palestinian armed groups have perpetrated war crimes and likely crimes against humanity, while the government of Israel has committed war crimes, crimes against humanity and at least three of the [constitutive acts of genocide](#) in Gaza. Reflecting upon the unfathomable horrors of the past year, Joyce Msuya, the Acting Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, said, “No statistics or words can fully convey the extent of the physical, mental and societal devastation that has taken place.”

Civilians have suffered the gravest consequences in the last twelve months as hostilities and besiegement continue without respite. It is believed that 97 out of the 251 people abducted by Palestinian armed groups in Israel last year remain hostage, and denied humanitarian visits. The continued holding of civilian hostages is a war crime. According to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Palestinian detainees have endured a significant increase in extrajudicial executions, mass detentions and enforced disappearances – with thousands held in detention in deplorable conditions without charge or trial – as well as [sexual violence](#) and ill-treatment, including waterboarding, that may amount to torture. The UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the OPT investigated Israel’s detention practices in 2023 and called on UN member states to intervene and the International Criminal Court to investigate what appeared to be “a consolidated crime against humanity.”

The extent of civilian harm in Gaza – already under an air, land and sea blockade since 2007 – is staggering. Israel has repeatedly used weapons with wide area and indiscriminate effects in densely populated areas, targeting and destroying civilian objects protected under International Humanitarian Law (IHL) in a manner widely characterized as collective punishment. According to the Ministry of Health in Gaza – the most reliable source for such figures – over 41,615 people have been killed and more than 96,000 injured. Over 70 percent of civilian infrastructure has been destroyed, leaving much of the enclave uninhabitable and reduced to rubble. An estimated 1.9 million Palestinians – 90 percent of the population – are displaced, with many experiencing [multiple forced displacements](#) and nowhere safe to shelter.

The International Court of Justice (ICJ) has [ordered](#) the government of Israel three times to prevent genocide against Palestinians and allow necessary aid to enter Gaza. Yet Israel has defied these orders by maintaining its unlawful blockade, as well as [repeatedly attacking](#) hospitals and humanitarian workers. According to the UN, at least 306 humanitarians and over 900 medical workers have been killed in Gaza.

Existing patterns of violence by Israeli settlers in the Occupied West Bank have also escalated. Palestinians are facing increasingly [lethal force and militarized operations](#) by Israeli forces, as well as settlement expansion, unlawful demolitions and forced displacement. An [advisory opinion](#) of the ICJ found that Israel's occupation is unlawful and that Israel has an obligation to end it as rapidly as possible.

For the past year the Global Centre has joined others around the world in calling for an immediate ceasefire. That call has gone unheeded for too long. Until a ceasefire is reached, and UN Security Council Resolution 2735 is implemented without delay, Palestinians will continue to endure war crimes, crimes against humanity and potential acts of genocide. All individuals taken hostage must be released and treated humanely. Israel must immediately implement all ICJ provisional measures orders and states parties to the Genocide Convention must help ensure its compliance. All states should cease arms exports to Israel, as well as apply other economic and political measures necessary to ensure respect for international law. The root causes of deadly cycles of violence and atrocities must be addressed, including ending Israel's blockade on Gaza, illegal occupation and settlement-related activity and apartheid policies.

ALARMING LEVELS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE CONTINUE IN DR CONGO

On 30 September Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) released a report on sexual violence in the [Democratic Republic of the Congo \(DRC\)](#), revealing that more than two victims and survivors were treated per hour in 2023. This alarming figure is based on data from 17 projects run by MSF, with support from the Ministry of Health, in five Congolese provinces – North Kivu, South Kivu, Ituri, Maniema and Central Kasai. Compared with 2020 through 2022, there was [a dramatic increase](#) in the number of admissions and victims of sexual violence in 2023, with MSF treating more than 25,000 survivors over the year. This trend has [accelerated in early 2024](#), with teams having treated nearly 70 percent of the 2023 total in the first five months of 2024 alone.

According to the data, 91 percent of victims treated with MSF assistance in 2023 were admitted in North Kivu, where recurrent clashes between the March 23 Movement armed group, the Congolese army and their respective allies continue. The significant escalations in the past two years have forcibly displaced millions of Congolese, with the majority of those displaced sheltering in overcrowded, makeshift sites and collective shelters outside the provincial capital, Goma, where protection measures are insufficient.

Displaced women and girls in North Kivu are at particularly heightened risk of sexual violence and assault while carrying out livelihood activities in and around displacement camps. According to the report, most of the victims were women living in displacement camps around Goma and were attacked while searching for food and water or while working in fields.

Sexual violence has historically been used as a deliberate weapon of war in the DRC, with tens of thousands of Congolese having survived systematic rape, sexual exploitation, sexual slavery and other forms of gender-based violence. Sexual violence is yet again being used as a weapon of war to terrorize and control communities.

Survivors need urgent protection, as well as psychosocial and medical support. The international community should scale up humanitarian efforts for displaced populations. Improving living conditions at displacement camps is critical, including ensuring safe access to sufficient food, water, safe sanitation and shelter. Government authorities should investigate, pursue and hold

accountable all perpetrators of sexual violence. Authorities must ensure security at displacement sites in accordance with their primary obligation to protect civilians under International Humanitarian Law and in a manner that respects International Human Rights Law.

ICC UNSEALS ARREST WARRANTS FOR SIX MEN LINKED TO ABUSIVE LIBYAN MILITIA

On 4 October the International Criminal Court (ICC)'s Pre-Trial Chamber I unsealed arrest warrants against six militia members who have allegedly committed war crimes in the town of Tarhunah, [Libya](#), since at least 2015. In a statement, ICC Chief Prosecutor Karim Khan said that the suspects were leaders or senior members of the Al-Kaniyat militia and Libyan security officials associated with the militia at the time of the alleged crimes. The Al-Kaniyat militia controlled Tarhunah from 2015 to mid-2020. The Court has received a wide range of credible information indicating that Tarhunah residents have been subjected to crimes amounting to war crimes, including murder, outrages upon personal dignity, cruel treatment, torture, sexual violence and rape.

Recalling a visit to Tarhunah in 2022, Chief Prosecutor Khan said, "I heard accounts of people kept in appalling and inhumane conditions, and saw farms and landfill sites that were turned into mass graves. I saw the courageous work of Libyan forensic experts seeking to excavate remains so that we can collectively deliver justice for victims. I heard from mothers who no longer wished to live in their homes due to the pain caused by the memories of their sons being taken from them before their eyes."

A UN-mandated Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) on Libya previously documented abuses in Tarhunah. In its 2022 report the FFM documented the discovery of mass graves containing hundreds of victims, who were mostly handcuffed, blindfolded and bore indications of torture. The FFM warned that there could be up to 100 more sites with remains of victims around the city. The Mission also documented evidence of Al-Kaniyat's torture methods, including at times keeping those they kidnapped in small oven-like structures, which were set alight during interrogations.

In addition to the abuses documented around Tarhunah, the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) has warned of continuing systematic and widespread violations across the country. In its August 2024 report UNSMIL documented ongoing arbitrary arrests and detentions of political opponents and civil society, as well as torture and abuse in custody. UNSMIL also reported that Al-Kaniyat's integration into the formal security forces has been an obstacle to both accountability and the safety and security of residents.

While justice has remained elusive in Libya, whether through international or domestic processes, the unsealing of the warrants is the first step in achieving accountability for these crimes. The international community must continue to support ending impunity in Libya, including through the ICC's investigations, and by transferring those with arrest warrants to the Court's custody.