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OCTOBER 2024

SUDAN

SUDANESE PEOPLE LIVING THROUGH ‘NIGHTMARE OF VIOLENCE, HUNGER’: UN CHIEF ANTONIO GUTERRES SAYS MILLIONS GOING HUNGRY AND OTHERS FACE ATROCITIES AMID ESCALATING ATTACKS BY RIVAL FORCES.

28TH OCTOBER 2024

The Sudanese people are living through a “nightmare of violence, hunger and displacement”, and countless others are facing “unspeakable atrocities”, including widespread rapes, United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres told the UN Security Council on Monday.

He singled out “shocking reports of mass killings and sexual violence” in villages in east-central Gezira province. The UN and a doctors’ group noted that paramilitary fighters wreaked havoc in the region in a multi-day attack that killed more than 120 people in one town.

The UN chief said the country’s warring military and paramilitary forces are escalating attacks with outside powers “fueling the fire” and intensifying the nightmare of hunger and disease for millions.

Guterres warned that the 18-month war faces the serious possibility of “igniting regional instability from the Sahel to the Horn of Africa to the Red Sea.”

War erupted in Sudan in mid-April 2023 from a power struggle between the Sudanese army and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) ahead of a planned transition to civilian rule, triggering the world’s largest displacement crisis. More than 11 million people have fled their homes, including three million to neighboring countries.

The war has killed more than 24,000 people so far, according to Armed Conflict Location and

Event Data, a group monitoring the conflict since it started.

“Sudan is, once again, rapidly becoming a nightmare of mass ethnic violence,” Guterres said, referring to a conflict in Sudan’s Darfur region about 20 years ago that led to the International Criminal Court charging former Sudanese leaders with genocide and crimes against humanity.

Up to 750,000 people are facing “catastrophic food insecurity” and famine conditions in North Darfur displacement sites, he said.

The UN chief urged both sides to agree to a cessation of hostilities immediately, ensure the protection of civilians for which they bear primary responsibility, and enable humanitarian aid to flow to millions in need.

Guterres added that he is “horrified” by reports that the paramilitary RSF continues to attack civilians in North Darfur’s capital, El Fasher, and surrounding areas, including displacement sites where famine has been confirmed.

He said those who violate international humanitarian law must be held accountable.

INSUFFICIENT AID?

Moreover, the UN noted that nearly 25 million people – half of Sudan's population – need aid as famine has taken hold in displacement camps, and 11 million people have fled their homes. Nearly three million of those people have left for other countries.

"This is not just a matter of insufficient funding. Millions are going hungry because of access," US Ambassador to the UN Linda Thomas-Greenfield told the council.

Thomas-Greenfield said Washington was alarmed that instead of facilitating aid, the Sudanese authorities

"continue to undermine, intimidate, and target humanitarian officials." She said they need to expand and streamline humanitarian movements.

The Sudanese army-backed government is committed to facilitating aid deliveries across the country, including in areas controlled by the RSF, according to Sudan's UN Ambassador Al-Harith Idriss Al-Harith Mohamed. He said 10 border crossings and seven airports had been opened for aid deliveries.

Source: [https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/10/28/sudanese-people-living-through-nightmare-ofviolence-hunger-un-chief](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/10/28/sudanese-people-living-through-nightmare-of-violence-hunger-un-chief).

A three-month approval given by Sudanese authorities for the UN and aid groups to use the Adre border crossing with Chad to reach Darfur is due to expire in mid-November.

"There are 30 trucks that went through the Adre border crossing loaded with advanced weaponry and ammunition, and this led to serious escalation in al-Fashir and in other places," Mohamed said. "We noticed that thousands of mercenaries from Africa and Sahel entered the country ... through Adre. The border crossing Adre is really a threat to national security."

Russia's UN Ambassador Vassily Nebenzia told the UN Security Council it was up to the Sudanese government to decide whether the Adre crossing would remain open beyond mid-November and that it would be "inappropriate to put pressure on" the government.

"We're categorically opposed to the politicization of humanitarian assistance," he said. "We believe that any humanitarian assistance should be conducted and delivered solely with the central authorities in the loop."

'IT IS TIME FOR DECISIVE ACTION FOR PEACE' IN SUDAN, SECRETARY-GENERAL STRESSES TO SECURITY COUNCIL, OUTLINING 'ON-THE-GROUND-RECOMMENDATIONS.

28TH OCTOBER 2024

Following are UN Secretary-General António Guterres' remarks to the Security Council meeting on Sudan, in New York today:

I thank the Council for the opportunity to discuss the utter humanitarian catastrophe

engulfing Sudan. Eighteen months have passed since brutal fighting erupted between

the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Rapid Support Forces.

The suffering is growing by the day, with almost 25 million people now requiring assistance. The people of Sudan are living through a nightmare of violence – with thousands of civilians killed, and countless others facing unspeakable atrocities, including widespread rape and sexual assaults. In recent days, we have heard shocking reports of mass killings and sexual violence in villages in Aj Jazirah State in the east of the country.

They are also enduring a nightmare of hunger – as more than 750,000 people face catastrophic food insecurity and famine conditions take hold in displacement sites in North Darfur, while millions struggle to feed themselves every day.

They are confronting a nightmare of disease – with cholera, malaria, dengue fever, measles and rubella spreading fast. A nightmare of collapsed infrastructure – with vital health systems, transportation networks, water and sanitation systems, supply routes and agricultural production grinding to a halt.

A nightmare of displacement – the largest displacement crisis in the world, with more than 11 million people fleeing since April last year, including nearly 3 million who have crossed into neighboring countries. A nightmare of extreme weather – with nearly 600,000 people affected by heavy rains and floods this summer. And Sudan is, once again, rapidly becoming a nightmare of mass ethnic violence, in particular with the dramatic escalation of fighting in El Fasher.

We have consistently appealed to both sides to end the fighting and come to the negotiating table. But, instead of lowering tensions, they are escalating military action. Meanwhile, outside powers are fueling the fire. We face the serious possibility of the conflict igniting regional instability from the Sahel to the Horn of Africa to the Red Sea.

Resolution 2736 (2024) adopted earlier this year sent a strong signal. But we need action on the ground. The resolution requested me to make recommendations to protect civilians in Sudan, which I submitted to this Council last week.

Allow me to outline three key priorities. First – both sides must immediately agree to a cessation of hostilities. Such an agreement should be translated into local ceasefires and humanitarian pauses – creating new avenues of dialogue and laying the ground for a comprehensive ceasefire.

At the same time, diplomatic efforts must be intensified to finally bring an end to the conflict – including support to implement the commitments in the Jeddah Declaration. My Personal Envoy, Ramtane Lamamra, is working around the clock with that objective. He convened the parties in Geneva to enhance humanitarian access and strengthen the protection of civilians in Sudan. And he supported the coordination of mediation initiatives, in collaboration with regional partners – in particular, the African Union's High-Level Panel.

I urge this Council to continue supporting his efforts and encourage effective engagement with regional partners like the African Union, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), the League of Arab States and other key ones.

And I salute the efforts of the African Union and IGAD towards an inclusive Sudanese political dialogue, which would provide an important platform for civilians – including women – to speak out about the importance of ending the war and lend their voices towards a peaceful and democratic future.

Which brings me to my second point – civilians must be protected. We need this Council's support to help protect civilians in line with human rights and international humanitarian law – including the parties' own commitments in the Jeddah Declaration. The parties to the

conflict bear the primary responsibility to ensure the protection of civilians and come to the negotiation table.

I am horrified by the Rapid Support Forces' continued attacks against civilians in El Fasher and surrounding areas, which include displacement sites where famine conditions have been confirmed. And I am also horrified by reports of attacks against civilians perpetrated by forces affiliated with the Sudanese Armed Forces in Khartoum and by continuing mass civilian casualties due to apparently indiscriminate airstrikes in populated areas. The perpetrators of serious violations of international humanitarian law must be held accountable.

And domestic and international human rights monitoring and investigation mechanisms must have space for documenting what is happening on the ground. Civil society and journalists must be able to do their jobs safely, without fear of persecution and attacks.

The direct or indirect flow of weapons and ammunitions into Sudan, which continue to fuel this conflict, must cease immediately. Diverse Sudanese voices, human rights organizations and others have called for stepped-up measures – including some form of impartial force – to protect civilians. These calls are a reflection of the gravity and urgency of the situation facing civilians in the country.

At present, the conditions do not exist for the successful deployment of a United Nations force to protect civilians in Sudan. The Secretariat stands ready to engage with the Council and others on the range of operational modalities that can meaningfully contribute to the reduction in violence and the protection of civilians. This may require new approaches that are adapted to the challenging

circumstances of the conflict.

Third – humanitarian aid must flow. Despite continued access and funding challenges, the United Nations and our partners reached about 12 million people with humanitarian assistance between January and September of this year. From water, sanitation and shelter to healthcare, education and emergency nutrition.

But huge gaps remain. Many of those reached have been assisted just once. Some of the areas of most severe needs remain cut off entirely. Rapid, safe and unhindered humanitarian access must be ensured through all necessary cross-border and cross-line routes. The re-opening of the border crossing at Adre was an important step – and it must remain open. I urge the parties to allow more life-saving aid to flow into areas of greatest need through the most efficient routes.

We need humanitarian workers moving around the country rapidly and safely. And we need funding. Our humanitarian funding appeal of \$2.7 billion is only about 56 per cent funded, and coverage of the Regional Refugee Response Plan is even lower. I urge donors to step up with additional flexible funding.

At the same time, I pay tribute to the heroism of the leaders of the many Sudanese-led initiatives providing vital and lifesaving assistance on the ground. Sudan's over 700 Emergency Response Rooms are an inspiring example of grassroots humanitarian action. Through their work, they are showing us another side of Sudan – the best of humanity in a country enduring the worst of it. We can all draw inspiration from their example.

As outlined in my report to this Council, it is time for action – decisive action – for peace for the people of Sudan. Thank you.

Source: <https://reliefweb.int/report/sudan/it-time-decisive-action-peace-sudan-secretary-general-stresses-security-council-outlining-ground-recommendations>.

HUNDREDS KILLED IN DAYS AS WAR IN SUDAN SURGES

PARAMILITARY FORCES RANSACKED VILLAGES AND KILLED HUNDREDS OF PEOPLE, ACTIVISTS SAID, HASTENING CALLS FOR THE UNITED NATIONS TO DEPLOY A MISSION TO PROTECT CIVILIANS.

ABDI LATIF DAHIR REPORTED FROM DAKAR, SENEGAL; DECLAN WALSH FROM JUBA, SOUTH SUDAN; AND ABDALRAHMAN ALTAYEB FROM PORT SUDAN, SUDAN.

OCT 26 2024

A major surge in fighting in Sudan has taken a searing toll on civilians, killing hundreds of people in aerial bombings and revenge attacks in the past week, as Africa's largest war shifts into a higher gear after the end of seasonal rains.

Territory has changed hands, a prominent commander has switched sides and retreating fighters have sexually assaulted, kidnapped and killed villagers as they have moved through contested countryside, according to activists, democracy groups and accounts on social media.

A military cargo plane slammed into the desert in the western region of Darfur, with at least two Russian crew members on board, offering direct evidence of the growing role of foreign contractors in the fighting.

And Sudan's military, after losing control of vast areas of Sudan, has finally seemed to regain the advantage over the Rapid Support Forces, the powerful paramilitary group that it has been battling for the past 18 months. Both sides face a barrage of war crimes accusations from the United States and rights groups, although only the R.S.F. has been accused of ethnic cleansing.

"The fighting season has just restarted, and both sides want to jostle for an early advantage," said Kholood Khair, the founding director of Confluence Advisory, a policy think tank.

The escalating violence comes against a vast

tableau of suffering. Over 10 million have been forced from their homes, famine is raging and diseases like cholera and dengue fever are rapidly spreading.

Diplomatic efforts to end the war have stalled, with neither side showing much willingness to compromise on anything, much less reach a cease-fire. Support is growing among activists, peacekeeping experts and human rights groups for the United Nations to deploy a mission to protect civilians, but many are skeptical such a force could be mustered.

"We fear it is on the road to becoming a repeat of the 1994 Rwanda genocide," Roméo Dallaire, who led the U.N. mission in Rwanda during the genocide, wrote in *Foreign Policy* on Friday.

In the past week, the army, led by Gen. Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, captured territory in the breadbasket states of El Gezira and Sennar, which the paramilitary forces seized starting last December. Those gains came in part thanks to the defection of Abu Aqla Kaykal, a local militia leader in El Gezira State who, until recently, was fighting with the Rapid Support Forces. Experts said his defection gave the military a political boost and would cut off the paramilitary group's ability to recruit from

the large Shukria tribe.

By publicizing the defection, Ms. Khair said, “the military are trying to assert their claim that they are on the right side” and that their wins are “a victory for the people of Sudan.”

The paramilitaries, who are led by Lt. Gen. Mohamed Hamdan, launched retaliatory attacks in villages across El Gezira, local activists reported. At least 300 civilians were killed when fighters rampaged through Tambul village, Elmubir Mahmoud, the secretary general of the Al Jazeera Conference, a volunteer group in the state, said in an interview. Gunmen looted homes, took hostages and sexually assaulted women, he said.

Fifty more civilians were killed in a nearby village on Friday morning, he said, and 200 were wounded. Entire families fled with nothing but their clothes, he said. Others posted handwritten lists of the dead. The New York Times could not independently verify the lists or the figures.

Video footage and photographs from the area that were shared on social media showed villagers standing over dozens of bodies wrapped in funeral shrouds. The footage and photographs could not be immediately verified.

“The situation is very tragic,” Mr. Mahmoud said.

The R.S.F. denied killing civilians, saying those killed had been fighting alongside the military. “Immediately you carry a gun and raise it, then your civilian status ends,” Omran Abdullah, a senior adviser to General Hamdan, said this past week in an interview with the Arabic-language broadcaster Al Jazeera.

Clashes continued in Khartoum, the capital, where the army recently recaptured several

bridges along the Nile. Shelling in the city killed at least 24 people this past week, according to the Emergency Response Rooms, a youth-led volunteer group that was among the favorites for this year’s Nobel Peace Prize, which was awarded this month to a Japanese group of atomic bomb survivors.

Fighting also raged in the western region of Darfur, both around the besieged city of El Fasher in North Darfur and in the deserts to the north, along the border with Libya and Chad. Dozens of people were killed in the state in attacks on displacement camps, hospitals and markets, according to the Yale School of Public Health’s Humanitarian Research Lab. It said the damage was consistent with aerial bombardment, artillery and arson.

On Monday, a Sudanese military plane crashed about 90 miles north of El Fasher, killing two Russian crew members and several Sudanese fighters, according to Sudanese media reports.

The paramilitaries, who claimed to have shot down the plane, posted a video of the burning wreckage, with jubilant fighters holding aloft two Russian passports and other identifying documents said to be found amid the debris.

An aviation official with knowledge of Sudanese military operations said the plane was one of two Ilyushin76 planes bought last year by the Sudanese military, which has claimed that it was delivering supplies to besieged troops in El Fasher when it crashed.

But the official said the plane had also been used to carry out “barrel bomb” raids against the R.S.F., flinging crude improvised bombs, as part of the military’s escalating campaign of aerial bombardment.

The aviation official spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive military

details. A spokesman with Sudan's military did not respond to questions for comment.

In a statement, the Russian Embassy in Sudan said it was investigating whether its citizens were on board the plane, which only last year belonged to a company that had been supplying the other side in the war.

Documentation found in the plane wreckage indicated that its tail number, EX-76011, corresponded with a plane that was previously operated by New Way Cargo, a cargo airline based in the United Arab Emirates. Only last January, the same airline delivered support to the Rapid Support Forces through a base at Amdjarass in eastern Chad, according to a recent report by the Sudan Conflict Observatory, a research body funded by the State Department.

The Emirates has been running an extensive covert operation to supply the R.S.F. through the Amdjarass base, under the guise of providing humanitarian aid, The New York Times and U.N. inspectors have reported. The

Red Cross says it is investigating whether its emblem was misused as part of the operation. The Emirates denies supporting the R.S.F.

Documents found on the plane identified one of the Russians as Anton Selivanetz, who appears to have previously worked with the United Nations in Africa, according to a U.N. official and photographs posted to his personal Instagram account. The other man, Viktor Granov, was previously linked to arms trafficking in Africa by Amnesty International, as well as to the famous arms dealer Viktor A. Bout. Mr. Granov's South African driver's license was among the debris from the downed cargo plane.

The plane crash highlighted the outsize role of foreign contractors in the worsening conflict, pushing both local and global leaders to call for the United Nations to deploy a mission to protect civilians.

"This is very much a multiregional war of different actors," Ms. Khair said. By no means, she added, "can it be resolved locally."

Source: <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/10/26/world/africa/sudan-war-killings.html>.

ETHIOPIA

NURSE WHO INSPIRED LIVE AID MARKS KEY MILESTONE.

29TH OCTOBER 2024

A nurse is marking 40 years since the moment her work in Ethiopia became the inspiration for a worldwide musical fundraising drive.

Dame Claire Bertschinger, who lives in Crewkerne, Somerset, appeared in a BBC news report in 1985 while caring for starving children. It prompted musicians Bob Geldof, George Michael and Sting to record the charity single *Do They Know It's Christmas?*

The number one record was followed in 1985 by the Live Aid concerts at London's Wembley Stadium and in the US, which raised more than £114m for famine relief.

But it was not until 20 years after the report first aired that Dame Claire realised the role she had played.

While working in Ethiopia, she was faced with "heartbreaking" choices, where she had to pick 70 children out of 1,000 and decide who would be offered food.

"It was a horrendous situation. People were starving, not just children. They were skin and bones," she said.

"They needed food and there was insufficient food to go around."

Dame Claire, who studied medical anthropology, said she had not been accepted to go abroad at first because she was "highly dyslexic".

"On the contrary, I think it helped because I'm very practical. I don't really get phased by challenges in life," she said.

She joined the international committee of the

Red Cross in the 1980s and spent a year in conflict war zones in Lebanon, before she was asked to go to Ethiopia.

"I'd never been to Africa before and I thought 'why not'. I'd no idea what was going to hit me, what I was going to find," she said.

Dame Claire was sent to a feeding centre that had space for 500 children.

They gave children three meals a day, but Dame Claire said there were always thousands more who needed to be fed.

She said: "I thought, 'How are we going to choose? How are we going to do that?'"

"I'd walk up and down the rows and choose not the worst, but those with a spark. Because the worst ones were going to die within 24 to 48 hours.

"It was such a horrendous situation."

She said feeding 500 children three meals a day was "a lot of effort". "It's so intensive you couldn't think of the bigger picture," she added. 'Breaks my heart'

One day, a film crew arrived at the gate to ask Dame Claire questions.

She said: "One question in particular I remember was, 'How does it make you feel having to choose who can come in and who doesn't?'"

"I thought, 'What a stupid question'. I said, 'What do you expect? It breaks my heart'."

She added: "I couldn't get rid of them fast enough. I had no idea what effect that film would have around the world."

The BBC news report by Michael Buerke ended up inspiring famous musicians to come together to raise money for the famine relief.

"A few weeks later I was told a plane would arrive," Dame Claire said.

"They opened the doors and it was full of food, sacks of food.

"I thought, 'Wow, this is amazing. We're saved.'"

Source: <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c5yrlddzj2wo>.

Dame Claire said she had not known the part she had played in the fundraiser for 20 years, until the BBC asked if she would go back to Ethiopia to commemorate the anniversary.

"I felt it was my fault all these people had died. I didn't want to go back to Ethiopia, I thought I'd be hated," she said.

"To my tremendous surprise, I was welcomed with open arms.

"A lot had changed, there were new roads, schools, a hospital. I even met children who remembered me from the feeding centre and had gotten an education and become doctors and one was a lawyer."

HOW TIGRAY WAR RAPE VICTIMS TURNED TO RWANDAN GENOCIDE SURVIVORS TO HEAL

WOMEN-TO-WOMEN LISTENING CIRCLES HELP HEAL TRAUMA AFTER BRUTAL WAR LEFT MANY WITH DEEP PHYSICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SCARS.

22ND OCT 2024

Tigray, Ethiopia – "I was angry all the time," says Bezunesh, spinning wool in her small mud house in Bora, a remote district of deep valleys, sloping mountains and small terraced farms in Ethiopia's northern region of Tigray.

It has been a few years since the mother of eight, whose real name we are not using to protect her privacy, suffered the worst attack of her life – and the trauma of what happened still haunts her.

Tigray was under brutal siege by both the Ethiopian and Eritrean armies between November 2020 and November 2022. According to the African Union, more than 600,000 civilians were killed, and millions were displaced. At least 120,000 women and girls were raped during what regional health authorities say was a systematic campaign of

sexual violence used as a weapon of war.

A survey-based study by Mekelle University in Tigray found that at least 570 women had been raped in Bora alone. Of them, 34 are HIV-positive, two died by suicide, and several are permanently disabled.

However, the number of sexual assaults is believed to be much higher as the stigma against victims in this religious and conservative district is so strong that many women preferred not to report them for fear of being ostracised by their families.

Bezunesh too – who describes experiencing trauma that experts say is common among sexual violence survivors – never directly says she was raped, instead talking in general terms about the last few years.

“Before the war, we had a good life. My husband was a farmer, and I was taking care of the household and our eight children. But then the war started,” she told Al Jazeera.

“My husband was killed on the eve of [the Ethiopian] Christmas in January 2021, when 175 of our people were massacred [by the Ethiopian army]. They went house-to-house and indiscriminately killed people.” After the attack, Bezunesh said, the trauma was so great that “some women couldn’t sleep, they felt like their head was about to explode”.

Others, likely struggling from post-traumatic stress, “were getting lost, thinking they were going to the church or to visit a friend and suddenly finding themselves in another place”.

“Myself, I was extremely stressed, quarrelling with my children, people and even animals,” Bezunesh added.

A few months after the Ethiopian army ransacked the village, it was the turn of Eritrean soldiers.

Blen, a mother of four and teacher whose full name we are not using, was among those attacked. She can no longer bear children as a result. Like Bezunesh, she also does not speak directly about her assault, focusing instead on friends and neighbours.

“They robbed, raped, beat us, and killed more than 30 people. They slaughtered our cows and ate them, and took our donkeys for loads. They came back three times to rape my neighbour. Now she sits at home all day long, alone. She is quiet and all her hair has fallen off. She looks

barely human,” said Blen.

“Women never thought that something like that would happen to them,” explained Elizabeth Kidane, a Tigrayan medical student who is helping support survivors.

“They feel so ashamed that they cannot talk with their children, their parents, their husbands.”

Though they were disassociating and experiencing trauma after their attacks, many of the victims “feared they were going mad or being cursed, or punished for some terrible sins”, she said.

Women-to-women circles

The women needed help. But in the absence of psychological support during the war – as the health service had collapsed and even essential humanitarian aid barely trickled in – a small group of women in and outside Tigray tried to come up with a plan.

This core group included a nurse, a social worker, a medical student, an aid worker and the head of the Daughters of Charity, a well-respected charity with deep roots in the communities.

Some of these women had heard of a grassroots approach, called HAL (helpful active listening) circles, which had helped Rwandan genocide survivors to heal, and thought that this method might help Tigrayan women as well.

HAL is an easy and cheap approach that does not require any professional expertise and can quickly reach a large number of survivors. It involves training some women from the community, who seem more resilient, to provide basic psychosocial support to other survivors in women-to-women circles. It was developed immediately after the genocide in Rwanda by the

late Professor Sydney Brandon, a then-retired psychiatrist who worked for many years in the United Kingdom's Royal Air Force.

The core group contacted two Rwandan women who were involved in the Rwandan HAL project. Over the following months, they learned from them how the HAL circles worked, how to develop the programme and training material, and how to adapt the Rwandan model to the Tigrayan context. They first shared knowledge online and then in person when it was safer to travel.

"I shared my experience with women in Tigray and thought about how we could adapt the programme to their situation," said one of the two women, Adelite Mukamana, a Rwandan genocide survivor and psychologist. "For example, in Rwanda, women couldn't speak publicly about what had happened to them, but they used to do it privately; in Tigray, the shame was so overwhelming, that women couldn't even talk in private."

In Rwanda, the women-to-women groups

have helped survivors regain their humanity and self-esteem, Mukamana said. "One of the signs of sexual violence is a feeling of shame and guilt. But if women can manage to talk and see that the shame belongs to the persecutor, it really helps them. The perpetrator wanted to dehumanise them, but the group helps them to reclaim their humanity, to feel understood, validated and respected," she explained.

With Mukamana's help, the core group developed guidance for the survivors who would facilitate the HAL circles. In Bora, this guidance was used to train 48 facilitators over five days in supportive communication skills, the effect of trauma on bodies and minds, signs of psychological distress, identifying triggers and healthy ways of coping with the effects of trauma.

"The material is easy to understand and culturally appropriate. Being a facilitator doesn't require any educational background, just to be a survivor, have empathy, be known in the community, be strong and trustworthy," said Kidane, who is part of the core group.

A SAFE PLACE

To fund the first HAL programme in Tigray, the core group lobbied foreign embassies in Addis Ababa.

With support from the French Embassy, and then the Irish Embassy, the project was piloted from December 2021 to December 2022 in a safe house and a refugee camp in Mekelle, the capital of Tigray. An expansion phase with UK funding has been under way in Bora since February 2023.

In Bora, the circles are open to women who were raped, but also those traumatised by the war after having lost their homes or families – so that coming to the circles does not necessarily identify a woman as a victim of sexual violence.

Each facilitator leads a group of 10 women during six three-hour sessions over three months. During the sessions, women are not expected to share their stories of sexual assault and violence, but rather how they experience the resulting trauma.

They are told by the facilitator what trauma does to one's mind and body, using metaphors of things that are familiar to them. For example, they explain how the mind "breaks" when women try to act as if nothing has happened: "It's like when you bend a thin stick further and further, and it breaks." They are then told about possible ways

they can try to cope, using metaphors as well.

The Daughters of Charity has prepared a safe place for the women in a fenced compound in Fire Sewuat, the main administrative village at the centre of the Bora district.

There are a few papaya and guava trees, a UNHCR tent serving as a handicraft centre and several small rooms on three sides of a small courtyard, three of which are for HAL groups. The HAL rooms are made to look like a typical living room with mattresses, chairs and sets for the traditional coffee ceremony.

"It is culturally how women deal with sad news: they come together to talk to their sisters, drink coffee and comfort each other," said Kidane.

"I attended the HAL circle sessions and this really changed me. It is what gave me strength and hope," said Bezunesh. "The sessions helped first because of the listening, sharing and knowing we were not alone. At the beginning, I was shy and not sure about going to the meetings, but later on, I was very eager," she added with a smile.

"The changes are very visible – in the ways we interact with our family, how we handle our children properly. It is even visible in our walking. We don't get lost any more, and we walk more confidently. We also like these sessions because they are like our coffee ceremonies, and there is music if we want, and often we end a session by dancing."

'NEEDS ARE BEYOND OUR CAPACITY'

The HAL Bora project has now reached 1,320 survivors and will close down in March 2025, unless more support can be found after funding from the UK ends.

Still, many women are continuing their circles on their own.

"After our HAL group completed the six sessions, we now get together to meet and help each other to face new challenges using what we learned from the session," said Sarah, a mother of five whose full name we are not using. "We also save money together and loan it to each other on rotation to help build our businesses."

Like Sarah's, many of the HAL circles are now evolving into long-term self-help cooperatives and microfinance groups, some of which have been recognised by the local government, which now consults them on some decisions affecting women. "That way, they get to participate in decisions that affect them. This is something unprecedented, but impactful," Kidane said.

Interviews with survivors done at the end of the pilot phase in Mekelle by the Daughters of Charity showed that women found the HAL approach helpful in reducing post-traumatic stress and in stopping self-blame, shame and guilt. They also felt they had become more resilient and better able to seek solutions to other pressing needs.

The pilot project highlighted the importance of addressing other concerns the women have, including access to food, physical health, safety and family issues. With that insight, the Daughters of Charity has been providing participants with some food and emergency cash support, hygiene items and handicraft material, and also linking some with small business support initiatives.

An independent assessment done by consultants for the French Embassy, which funded the pilot

phase, also praised the project for “breaking down the stigma and taboo surrounding sexual violence and promoting the creation of new links of solidarity between victims”.

Yet, in spite of these tangible achievements, the project is far from meeting the huge needs in the region. “We need food ... Kids are stunted. We are in the middle of a famine caused by drought and the devastation of war,” Kidane said, listing out some of the challenges.

Locals in Bora need help to recover and Kidane says the core group has been meeting with the district administration to find ways to scale up their outreach programme.

“The needs are well beyond our capacity to

Source: <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2024/10/22/how-tigray-war-rape-victims-turned-to-rwandangeno-cide-survivors-to-heal>.

help,” she said.

Where women are concerned, the toll of the last few years has been particularly heavy, and more needs to be done, she feels.

“In our culture, women are considered as less,” Kidane said. “It is expected that the husbands would leave their wives if they have been raped.”

To help change attitudes, “community-based healing sessions, creating awareness on mental health ... [working] with service providers, teachers and religious leaders” is needed.

“We need to work with the whole community and understand the healing process,” she said, “but it will take years.”

ERITREA, EGYPT AND SOMALIA CEMENT ‘AXIS AGAINST ETHIOPIA’

10TH OCTOBER 2024

The leaders of Egypt, Somalia and Eritrea – countries which all have strained relations with Ethiopia – have been meeting in the Eritrean capital, Asmara.

An Eritrean statement wrapping up the summit made reference to “respect for the sovereignty... and territorial integrity of the countries in the region”.

This could be taken as a pointed reference to landlocked Ethiopia’s ambitions for access to a sea port, but the country was not specifically mentioned.

A recent diplomatic disagreement has pushed Somalia into closer ties with Egypt and Eritrea, both of which have long-standing disputes with Ethiopia.

There have been fears that the growing tension could spill over into some sort of conflict.

“This is an axis against [Ethiopian capital] Addis Ababa,” Hassan Khannenje, director of the Horn International Institute for Strategic Studies, told the BBC’s Focus on Africa programme. “I think it’s an attempt to bring the hate together in trying to increase pressure against Addis Ababa.”

But Somalia’s Information Minister Daud Aweis denied this saying that the meeting was only about co-operation between the three countries.

"We are not determined to instigate anything against Addis Ababa," he told Focus on Africa.

"Addis Ababa is our neighbour we have been co-operating together for a long time, although later on their leadership came up with a factor of instability in the region. But still, we stand for peace and we don't think that such a meeting in Asmara has anything to do with Ethiopia."

A photograph released by Eritrea in the wake of the meeting shows President Isaias Afwerki clasping hands with his counterparts from Egypt, Abdul Fattah al-Sisi, and Somalia, Hassan Sheikh Mohamud.

- Why Ethiopia is so alarmed by an Egypt-Somalia alliance

A statement said the three men had "agreed to... enhance the Somali state institutions to confront various internal and external challenges and to enable the Somali National Federal Army to confront terrorism in all its forms". This was Sisi's first visit to Asmara, while the Somali president had already been three times this year.

Ethiopia has for years been a staunch backer of the government in Mogadishu in its fight against al-Qaeda-linked militant group al-Shabab.

But Somalia is furious that Ethiopia signed a preliminary deal at the beginning of this year with the self-declared republic of Somaliland to lease a section of its coastline. Somalia sees

Somaliland as part of its territory.

Meanwhile, Addis Ababa and Cairo have been at loggerheads for more than a decade over Ethiopia's construction of a vast hydroelectric dam on the River Nile. Egypt sees this as a possible threat to the volume of water flowing down the river, which it relies on.

Last month, an Egyptian ship delivered a significant consignment of military equipment to Somalia. This came after two Egyptian military planes landed in the Somalia capital with arms and ammunition in August.

In 2018, it was hoped that the fractious relations between Ethiopia and Eritrea, which followed the bloody border war two decades earlier, were over.

It was then that Ethiopia's Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed signed a "declaration of peace and friendship" with Eritrea. The agreement won him the Nobel Peace Prize the following year.

But ties between the Horn of Africa neighbours again deteriorated following the end of the two-year civil war in Ethiopia's northern Tigray region, which borders Eritrea.

Asmara had been an ally of the Ethiopian government in that conflict but has been lukewarm about the accord that ended the fighting in November 2022.

Relations were further aggravated by Abiy's pronouncement last year that his country wanted to secure access to a port on the Red Sea.

Source: <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cdje7pkv1zxo>.

ETHIOPIA PRESIDENT REPLACED AFTER FALLING OUT WITH PM

7TH OCTOBER 2024

Ethiopia's parliament has approved the appointment of a new president to replace the country's first female head of state, Sahle-Work Zewde.

Taye Astike Selassie, foreign minister since February, has taken up the largely ceremonial role. In Ethiopia, political power lies with the prime minister - currently Abiy Ahmed.

Sahle-Work had reportedly fallen out with Abiy in recent years.

The prime minister's backing of her initial appointment in 2018 was hailed as a breakthrough for gender equality in Ethiopian politics.

On Saturday, Sahle-Work posted a brief and somewhat cryptic message on X, implying she was unhappy as a result of staying silent for the past year.

Sources close to the 74-year-old told BBC Amharic she had not been happy for some time and was eagerly awaiting the end of her term, due later this month.

Source: <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c4g401e086no>.

During her presidency, she made several calls for peace across the country, though she was criticised for not talking more about the gender-based violence during the two-year civil war in Tigray. But it is believed she was concerned about the current conflicts in Oromia and Amhara regions.

In Amhara, federal forces have been fighting a local militia, which has led to hundreds of deaths and security forces being accused of committing crimes against humanity.

President Taye, 68, an experienced diplomat having served at the UN and in Egypt, is considered close to Abiy. He was sworn in in front of MPs on Monday.

The replacement of Sahle-Work means that Tanzania's President Samia Suluhu Hassan is currently Africa's only female head of state.

KENYA

KENYA'S RUTO NOMINATES INTERIOR MINISTER AS NEW DEPUTY PRESIDENT, KITHURE KINDIKI IS CHOSEN TO REPLACE RIGATHI GACHAGUA, BUT THE HIGH COURT STAYS HIS APPOINTMENT UNTIL NEXT WEEK.

18TH OCTOBER 2024

Kenya's president has nominated Interior Minister Kithure Kindiki as his new deputy, a day after the Senate voted to impeach Rigathi Gachagua.

President William Ruto nominated Kindiki on Friday, and parliament unanimously approved him. However, the High Court in the capital Nairobi then issued an order stopping Gachagua's replacement until next week.

In an order, the court said Kindiki's appointment as deputy president and the Senate's resolution upholding impeachment charges against Gachagua were suspended until October 24, when a bench of judges appointed by the chief justice will debate the issue.

A second court order said Kindiki cannot assume office until the case is heard.

Gachagua was impeached while he was in hospital late on Thursday.

The former deputy president's supporters have criticised the impeachment process as rushed after senators voted against allowing additional days to give Gachagua time to recover and appear before the Senate.

His impeachment highlighted divisions within the ruling party and friction between Ruto and Gachagua over government policy.

Kindiki, 52, had been a frontrunner for deputy president during the 2022 elections. Like Gachagua, he hails from the vote-rich Mount Kenya region.

Kindiki is a close ally of the president and has held the interior ministry post through Ruto's two years as leader. He previously served as senator for Tharaka-Nithi County.

Gachagua had filed a court application on Friday seeking to stop his replacement, the Reuters news agency reported, citing court documents.

Historic move

In an unprecedented move, a majority of lawmakers in the National Assembly last week voted to impeach Gachagua on 11 charges, which included corruption, undermining the government and stirring ethnic hatred. As a result, he lost retirement benefits and cannot hold public office again.

The Senate voted to remove him on Thursday despite Gachagua's absence from the proceedings as a result of illness.

His lawyer Paul Muite said Gachagua had been hospitalised with “intense chest pains” and had urged the Senate to pause proceedings for a few days.

Gachagua, who has maintained he is not guilty, had launched a legal challenge against the impeachment proceedings in the High Court, but Judge Eric Ogola said the process could go ahead.

He had backed Ruto in his 2022 election win

Source: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/10/18/kenya-parliament-approves-new-deputy-president-after-gachagua-sacked>.

and helped secure a large block of votes from populous central Kenya. He has spoken of being sidelined amid widespread reports in local media that he has fallen out with Ruto as political alliances have shifted.

Ruto sacked most of his cabinet in July and appointed members of the opposition to what he called a unity government after nationwide protests against tax increases in which more than 50 people were killed.

KENYA DEPUTY PRESIDENT RIGATHI GACHAGUA IMPEACHED: WHY IT MATTERS

TWO YEARS AFTER TAKING OFFICE, GACHAGUA FELL OUT WITH PRESIDENT RUTO, LEADING TO HIS OUSTER FROM OFFICE. RUTO HAS NOW NOMINATED HIS INTERIOR MINISTER FOR THE POST.

18TH OCTOBER 2024

Kenya’s Deputy President Rigathi Gachagua has been removed from office after he was impeached in a historic vote in the country’s Senate on Thursday night.

Gachagua becomes the first deputy president to be removed from office in this way since impeachment was introduced in Kenya’s 2010 constitution.

The 59-year-old, who was once a close ally of President William Ruto, faced 11 charges including insubordination to the president, inciting ethnic violence, corruption, undermining government and money laundering, among others.

Gachagua rejected the charges against him as being politically motivated.

But the Senate – which only had to find him guilty of one charge to remove him – decided he was guilty of five of the 11 that Gachagua faced.

Thursday’s vote came at the end of a two-day Senate trial hearing, during which the now former deputy president and the National Assembly both argued their cases.

Gachagua, who previously served as a member of parliament, was elected into office to serve alongside President Ruto in August 2022. The two defied the odds to win the election, but their relations have since sputtered, even as Ruto has warmed to opposition leader Raila Odinga, his main rival in the elections.

Here’s all you need to know about the unfolding situation:

What happened?

“Not guilty,” Gachagua said in response to each of the 11 charges against him as they were

read by Senate Clerk Jeremiah Nyegenye on the first day of his Senate trial on Wednesday.

On Thursday, Gachagua was expected to appear in the Senate as a witness, but did not show up. His lawyers said he fell ill with “intense chest pains” and was taken to hospital. Despite his absence, senators voted to proceed with the impeachment hearing, forcing his lawyers to withdraw from the process.

At the end of the night, senators found him guilty of five counts of “gross violation” of the constitution including practising ethnically divisive politics and threatening judges. He was, however, cleared of six charges, including corruption.

Last week, the lower house of parliament, the National Assembly, voted 282-44 to impeach the deputy president. The motion was then forwarded to the Senate, which required a two-thirds majority to remove Gachagua – something they secured during Thursday’s vote.

Appearing before the National Assembly on October 8, Gachagua denied all charges against him, saying they were politically motivated and lacked legal merit. This Wednesday, one of his lawyers, Elisha Ongoya, said the allegations against him were false.

How did it come to this?

Gachagua, a multimillionaire from central Kenya, helped President Ruto secure critical votes from the region – where he wields significant influence among the Kikuyu, Kenya’s largest tribe to which the ousted vice president belongs. That support in turn helped Ruto win the national election two years ago.

Source: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/10/18/kenya-deputy-president-rigathi-gachaguas-impeachment-why-it-matters>.

However, the two have since fallen out, with Gachagua complaining of being sidelined by the president and being kept in the dark about important events.

Gachagua has faced accusations from critics that he supported the youth-led antigovernment protests in June and July, which ended in the president withdrawing a controversial plan to raise taxes. This further exposed the rift between the two.

In June, Gachagua also blamed the director-general of the National Intelligence Service for not adequately briefing Ruto on the severity of the protests. After those comments, parliamentarians critical of Gachagua accused him of undermining the state security services, and therefore the president, which only increased tensions.

Gachagua pointed out that Ruto, too, had in 2022 criticised then-Inspector General of Police Hillary Mutyambai, calling him incompetent, without facing any consequences.

“President William Ruto and I have been calling out senior government officials when they fall short of expectations. The director-general is no exception; he is not above the law and is accountable to the people of Kenya for his performance,” he said on October 8, before the National Assembly.

After withdrawing the tax bill, Ruto also reshuffled his cabinet and appointed several allies of main opposition leader Odinga as ministers, a move seen as weakening Gachagua’s influence.

KENYA IMPEACHES DEPUTY PRESIDENT OVER ‘CORRUPTION, UNDERMINING GOVERNMENT’

RIGATHI GACHAGUA, WHO HAS FALLEN OUT WITH PRESIDENT RUTO, WAS TOO ILL TO ATTEND PROCEEDINGS, HIS LAWYERS SAID.

17TH OCT 2024

The Kenyan Senate has voted to oust Deputy President Rigathi Gachagua in a historic impeachment vote.

The upper house has so far voted on Thursday to impeach the 59-year-old on five charges out of a total of 11 against him, following two days of hearings.

The Senate only had to find him guilty of one charge to remove him from office.

He is the first deputy president to be removed in this manner since impeachment was introduced in Kenya's revised 2010 constitution.

A similar motion against President William Ruto's number two was overwhelmingly approved by the lower house National Assembly last week.

The Senate session had plunged into disarray earlier Thursday after Gachagua was admitted to hospital with severe chest pains and failed to testify in his defence.

The 11 charges – which Gachagua had vigorously denied – included corruption, insubordination, moneylaundering, undermining the government, practising ethnically divisive politics, bullying public officers and threatening a judge. Last-minute illness

The Senate proceeded with the vote despite Gachagua's absence from proceedings as a result of illness.

He was due to defend himself against the allegations, which he denies, after allies of President Ruto said he was disloyal.

But after Gachagua failed to appear, his lawyer Paul Muite said the deputy president had been hospitalised with intense chest pains, urging the Senate to pause proceedings for a couple of days.

"The sad reality is that the deputy president of the republic of Kenya has been taken sick, very sick," Muite said.

Speaker Amason Kingi put forward a motion to adjourn the hearing until Saturday but senators voted against the move.

"The nays have it," Kingi said, as Gachagua's legal team left the chambers in protest.

Ruto, who has fallen out with Gachagua in recent months, has not commented on proceedings.

Many Kenyans view the impeachment process as politically motivated, and a distraction from the aftermath of the deadly anti-tax protests in June and July that exposed deep discontent with government policies and alleged corruption.

The hearings, which have involved in-depth scrutiny of Gachagua's finances, could boomerang back at Ruto, according to Karuti Kanyinga, a professor at the University of Nairobi's Institute for Development Studies.

"We are going to hear people demanding that the same thing that has been done to Gachagua be done to the president," Kanyinga said.

Gachagua has previously called the impeachment process a political lynching based on falsehoods.

Source: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/10/17/kenya-impeaches-deputy-president-over-corruption-undermining-government>.

KENYA RELOCATES 50 ELEPHANTS TO A LARGER PARK AS POPULATION THRIVES

TOURISM MINISTER REBECCA MIANO OVERSAW THE TRANSLOCATION OF FIVE ELEPHANTS TO THE EXPANSIVE ABERDARE NATIONAL PARK.

14TH OCT 2024

Kenya is suffering from a problem, albeit a good one: the elephant population in the 42-square-kilometre (16-square-mile) Mwea National Reserve, east of the capital Nairobi, has flourished from its maximum capacity of 50 to a whopping 156, overwhelming the ecosystem and requiring the relocation of about 100 of the largest land animals. It hosted 49 elephants in 1979, and their population has grown.

On Monday, Tourism Minister Rebecca Miano oversaw the translocation of five elephants to the expansive Aberdare National Park, located in central Kenya. Fifty other elephants are set to be relocated, but a date hasn't been announced.

According to Kenya Wildlife Service Director General Erustus Kanga, the overpopulation in Mwea highlighted the success of conservation efforts over the last three decades.

"This shows that poaching has been low and the elephants have been able to thrive," Kanga said.

Experts started relocating 50 elephants last week to the expansive 780-square-kilometre (301-square-mile) Aberdare National Park in central Kenya. As of Monday, 44 elephants had been moved from Mwea to Aberdare, with six others scheduled for Tuesday.

The process started at dawn and involved a team of more than 100 wildlife specialists, with equipment ranging from specially fitted

trucks to aircraft and cruisers. A fixed-wing aircraft conducted aerial surveillance to track down herds of elephants, which naturally move in small families of about five. The craft was in constant communication with two helicopters used to herd and separate the elephants to ensure they were relocated with their family units.

Aboard one of the helicopters is a spotter, on the lookout for elephants, and a veterinarian with a tranquiliser gun.

Once an elephant is sedated, a ground team of veterinary specialists and rangers rushes to find it and clear thickets to make way for transport crews. The animal's vitals are monitored as another group of rangers works on lifting the massive creature, weighing hundreds of kilogrammes, onto specialised trucks, to be driven 120km (74 miles) to a new home.

Kanga, the wildlife service director, said the relocation also aimed at curbing human-wildlife conflict.

Boniface Mbau, a resident of the area, said: "We are very happy that the government has decided to reduce the number of elephants from the area. Due to their high numbers, they did not have enough food in the reserve, and they ended up invading our farms."

The project has cost at least 12 million Kenyan

Source: <https://www.aljazeera.com/gallery/2024/10/14/kenya-relocates-50-elephants-to-a-larger-park-as-population-thrives>.

KENYA'S RUTH CHEPNGETICH BREAKS WOMEN'S WORLD RECORD AT CHICAGO MARATHON

CHEPNGETICH WINS THE CHICAGO MARATHON IN 2:09:56, DEDICATING THE RECORD TO KELVIN KIPTUM, WHO DIED IN A CAR CRASH.

14TH OCT 2024

Kenya's Ruth Chepngetich has put on a performance for the ages as she obliterated the women's marathon world record in Chicago, taking nearly two minutes off the previous best to win in two hours, nine minutes and 56 seconds.

Chepngetich ditched the competition by the halfway mark and ran through a chorus of cheers through the final straight as she claimed her third title in Chicago on Sunday.

The 30-year-old, who became the first three-time women's winner of the Chicago race, broke the previous world record of 2:11:53 set by Ethiopia's Tigst Assefa last year in Berlin.

Ethiopia's Sutume Kebede crossed the line seven minutes and 36 seconds later while Kenyan Irine Cheptai (2:17:51) was third.

"This is my dream that has come true," Chepngetich said.

Chepngetich, who also won in Chicago in 2021 and 2022, dedicated her latest victory to Kelvin Kiptum, who set the men's world record at last year's race just four months before he died in a car accident at the age of 24.

shillings (\$93,000), the wildlife agency said.

Kenya's national parks and reserves are home to a variety of wildlife species and attract millions of visitors annually, making the country a tourism hot spot.

"The world record has come back to Kenya, and I dedicate this world record to Kelvin Kiptum," Chepngetich said.

"I've fought a lot, thinking about the world record and I have fulfilled it."

Runners remember Kiptum

Runners observed a moment's silence on the start line in honour of Kiptum. Organisers also handed out stickers displaying Kiptum's record-breaking time of 2:00:35 for the 50,000 participants to put on their race bibs.

In the absence of Olympic champion Sifan Hassan, the 2023 Chicago winner, Chepngetich set a blazing early pace and reached the halfway point in 1:04:16, the fifth-quickest time in history for a half marathon by a woman.

"The weather was perfect and I was well-prepared. The world record was in my mind," Chepngetich, who was runner-up to Hassan 12 months ago,

told reporters after the race.

Chepngetich ran the first 5km (3.1 miles) in 15 minutes flat and by the halfway mark she had built a 14second cushion between herself and Kebede.

Television commentators were astonished as she ground through the course, comparing her attempt at a sub-2:10 marathon to the moon landing, and she only seemed to gain momentum as she sprinted through the final 2 miles (3.2km).

Chepngetich, the 2019 world champion, hunched over in utter exhaustion after breaking the tape but later said "Chicago is like home".

Her compatriot John Korir won on the men's side in 2:02:44.

The 27-year-old Korir finished ahead of Ethiopia's Mohamed Esa (2:04:39) and another Kenyan, Amos Kipruto (2:04:50).

Korir was part of a seven-man group at the head of the course 30km (18.6 miles) before he hit the accelerator and shed his rivals following a relatively conservative start.

Four of the top five were Kenyans, with Vincent Ngetich and Daniel Ebenyo finishing off the podium.

"It was really nice to run my PB and win in Chicago," Korir said, adding that he too used the memory of Kiptum as a source of motivation.

"Today I was thinking about Kiptum and I said, 'Last year if he could run under 2:01, why not me?' So, I had to believe in myself and try to do my best." Korir's time was the second-fastest-ever run in Chicago.

Source: <https://www.aljazeera.com/sports/2024/10/14/kenyas-ruth-chepngetich-smashes-womensmarathon-world-record-in-chicago>.

UGANDA

WHY COULD A SILENT ASTHMA EPIDEMIC BE SWEEPING AFRICA?

MILLIONS OF ADOLESCENTS IN AFRICA COULD BE LIVING UNKNOWINGLY WITH ASTHMA AS CASES GO UNDIAGNOSED, RESEARCHERS FIND.

28TH OCT 2024

Millions of adolescents across Africa may unknowingly be battling asthma because they have not received a diagnosis from a clinician and, therefore, are not receiving the necessary treatments, a new study has found.

Published last week in the research journal *The Lancet*, the study's findings are critical for a continent that has produced little data about the scale of asthma despite the condition being one of the most common causes of chronic respiratory deaths on the continent.

Asthma, which affects the lungs and causes difficulties in breathing, often starts in childhood or adolescence. It is a condition that affects many adolescents worldwide with an estimated 76 million young adults suffering from it in 2019, according to the National Library of Medicine, part of the United States government.

There is no outright cure for asthma that develops in childhood, but treatment can relieve symptoms, which often continue well into adulthood, according to scientists.

Here is what we know about why a silent asthma epidemic could be harming children in some African countries:

What did the study find?

A team of researchers led by investigators at Queen Mary University of London (QMUL) discovered that 12 percent of adolescents in six

African countries had severe asthma symptoms but the vast majority of them – 80 percent – had not been diagnosed by a health expert.

The study, which was conducted from 2018 to 2021, focused on 20,000 children aged 12 to 14 in schools located in urban areas: Blantyre in Malawi, Durban in South Africa, Harare in Zimbabwe, Kampala in Uganda, Kumasi in Ghana and Lagos in Nigeria. Durban had the highest number of pupils with asthma symptoms while Blantyre had the lowest.

One-third of students who already had an asthma diagnosis and were presenting with severe symptoms were not using any medication to control the condition because they did not view their condition as serious and had poor knowledge of asthma therapies, the study also found.

"Adolescence is a particularly interesting age to look at," Gioia Mosler of QMUL, who acted as research manager of the study, told Al Jazeera. "It is the time of life with the highest prevalence of asthma. It is also the time when we all form many of our perceptions of health and our body that we then carry into adulthood."

It was not possible to generalise the results because of the different conditions in each African city, the researchers said. However, if their results are extrapolated, it could mean about 15 million adolescents have undiagnosed asthma symptoms in sub-Saharan Africa, Mosler noted.

Researchers used questionnaires in the initial phase and later conducted more rigorous lung function tests usually used for clinical diagnosis of asthma to determine which children likely had the disease.

What is asthma and why is it afflicting African cities?

Asthma is a chronic, often lifelong respiratory disease characterised by acute inflammation of the airways and airflow obstruction that affects 262 million people worldwide, according to the World Health Organization (WHO).

About half of those affected may be in Africa. The most recent estimate is from 2010 when 119 million were projected to be suffering from asthma on the continent, according to a 2013 study in the archives of the US National Library of Medicine.

Asthma can be triggered by pollen, dust, or particles from burning waste or other material. Symptoms often include difficulty breathing, wheezing, tightness in the chest and coughing.

Although rare, severe asthma can lead to death. About 455,000 people died from the condition in 2019, according to the WHO, mostly in low- to middle-income countries. Mortality rates in Africa are not clear although country-level studies have been conducted. In Uganda, for example, asthma deaths have been estimated at 19 deaths per 1,000 people per year. In contrast, Mexico records 10.41 deaths per 100,000 people, according to studies.

The exact causes of asthma are unknown, but asthma can be genetic. Environmental factors like changes in weather and air pollution are also common triggers linked to developing asthma.

In African cities, the high number of asthma cases has been linked to the continent's rapid urbanisation and rise in pollution.

At least two-thirds of the world's people live in cities. However, Africa has the fastest urbanisation rate in the world (3.5 percent growth per year compared with 1.8 percent on average) with big cities expanding and small towns growing.

While this provides economic opportunities, expanding urban centres also mean more polluted air caused by concentrated energy use, exhaust from cars, uncollected waste and a host of other factors that can trigger asthma.

A higher incidence of asthma in South Africa is likely linked to high cases of bronchitis, according to the

Clean Air Fund. The country, which is reliant on polluting coal plants for electricity, has one of Africa's worst air pollution levels.

The climate crisis is causing more asthma cases as well, researchers say. Increased exposure of vulnerable children to dust and wildfires that are intensifying globally because of global warming could occur, according to experts.

How prevalent is asthma in Africa?

Total asthma cases on the continent went from 94 million in 2000 to 119 million in 2010, according to the 2013 study.

Adolescents make up about 14 percent of the asthma cases in Africa although the numbers vary widely: In Nigeria, children make up about 13 percent of the cases while in South

Africa, they make up about 20 percent.

Some studies showed there are disproportionately higher numbers of premature deaths and severe cases of asthma in African and other low-income countries largely because of inadequate healthcare systems, resulting in underdiagnosis and undertreatment.

How is asthma treated?

Asthma is ideally managed via two approaches: short-acting inhalers or tablets that expand the air passageways and allow more air into the lungs during an attack. There are also longer-term therapies that can also come in the form of preventive inhalers or tablets and that are used daily to prevent attacks from occurring.

In most African countries, however, asthma cases are treated on a crisis-by-crisis basis rather than being controlled over the longer term, researchers said.

The costs of treatment, even for short-term relief, are high. In Nigeria, which is in the grips of one of the worst economic crises in a generation, inhaler costs have nearly tripled in the past year alone from about 2,800 naira (\$1.70) to 7,500 naira (\$4.57). During the recession, pharmaceutical giant GlaxoSmithKline has exited the country, causing a scarcity of its highly sought-after brand of inhalers.

Why are cases going undetected?

Many asthma cases are undiagnosed because there is generally poor knowledge of the severity of the condition or how it can be effectively managed, researchers said.

In the QMUL-led study, researchers found that among adolescents who had previously

been diagnosed with asthma, only half knew that young people die from asthma in their country. More than half of them did not realise that using a spacer – a simple plastic breathing tube with a valve – attached to their inhalers would allow the medication to get to the lungs much more easily.

Furthermore, despite the economic growth linked to rapid urbanisation, poverty and economic inequality remain problems across Africa, meaning many do not have access to healthcare.

About 60 percent of urban dwellers in Africa live in slums, according to UNICEF. Many adolescents in these settings do not have access to regular health checkups or even emergency care, researchers said.

Delayed diagnosis means children and young people risk more severe lung complications as a result of lack of care, Rebecca Nantanda, a senior research fellow at the Makerere University Lung Institute (MLI) who led the study in Uganda, told Al Jazeera.

One severe condition that can be triggered by untreated asthma is chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), which causes daily wheezing and a mucus-filled cough. Untreated asthma can also cause more than just physical symptoms, Nantanda added, and can negatively impact the way children connect with their peers because they tend to miss school often.

"[Asthma] affect their education and other activities like sport and play. It also affects their mental and psychological wellbeing due to stigma, chronic illness, stress, worries and anxiety," she said.

What is the solution?

In the longer term, the WHO says controlling

air quality in cities is imperative to drive down the number of people with asthma.

Researchers, meanwhile, are calling on African governments to increase investment in asthma treatments: both in long-term and short-term relief medication rather than push funds only into quick relievers.

"Most hospitals might focus on treating the asthma attacks and exacerbations, but these are more costly to the patient and health systems," Nantanda of MLI said. "Governments need to invest in proper long-term care for asthma patients because, in the long run, it is cheaper and, therefore, more affordable."

Working with drug manufacturers and other key players to negotiate subsidies for

asthma medicines and diagnostics is also crucial, she added.

One way to fight under detection in particular is to ramp up asthma awareness among students in schools, Mosler of QMUL said.

"Mobile clinics that visit schools could be a very effective way to screen," Mosler said, referring to a method she noted has been tested in low-healthcare areas in the US with some success.

"The mobile clinic could then provide diagnosis and treatment directly at schools to those who have symptoms. Most African cities have good school attendance at the start of secondary schools. ... [That] could provide an excellent way to address the problem," she said.

Source: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/10/28/why-could-a-silent-asthma-epidemic-be-sweepingafrica>.

UGANDA SENTENCES LRA COMMANDER THOMAS KWOYELO TO 40 YEARS FOR WAR CRIMES

LANDMARK TRIAL IS FIRST TIME A LORD'S RESISTANCE ARMY MEMBER HAS BEEN BROUGHT TO JUSTICE IN THE EAST AFRICAN COUNTRY.

25TH OCT 2024

A court in Uganda has sentenced Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) commander Thomas Kwoyelo to 40 years in prison after a landmark war crimes trial over his role in the group's two-decade reign of violence.

The sentence was announced on Friday by Michael Elubu, the lead judge in the case, at a court in the northern city of Gulu.

Justice Duncan Gasagwa, one of four judges on the case, said "the convict played a prominent role in the planning, strategy and actual execution of the offences of extreme gravity".

He added that "the victims have been left with lasting physical and mental pain and suffering".

Kwoyelo was found guilty in August of 44 offences, including murder and rape, and not guilty of three counts of murder. Thirty-one alternate offences were dismissed.

Landmark trial

The trial marked the first time a member of the LRA had been tried by Uganda's judiciary. It was also the first atrocity case to be tried under a special division of the high court that focuses on international crimes.

Founded in the late 1980s with the aim of overthrowing the government of Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni, the LRA brutalised Ugandans under the leadership of Joseph Kony for nearly 20 years as it battled the military from bases in northern Uganda.

The fighters were notorious for horrific acts of cruelty, including hacking off victims' limbs and lips and using crude instruments to bludgeon people to death.

Kwoyelo, believed to be in his fifties, was a low-level commander of the LRA, tasked with caring for the group's injured members, according to his testimony.

He says he was forced to join the LRA in 1987, after the group's members abducted him on his way to school at age 12, at the peak of the rebel conflict. He went on to become a senior commander, using the alias Latoni, and overseeing the treatment of wounded fighters.

In 2009, Kwoyelo was captured in neighbouring Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) during a raid by regional forces. The LRA rebels had been forced out of northern Uganda into DRC and other neighbouring countries a few years earlier because of the Ugandan military's offensives on the group.

Kwoyelo was brought back to Uganda, having suffered a bullet wound to his stomach.

He spent the next 14 years in prison as the prosecution put the case against him together.

Due to his long pre-trial detention by the Ugandan authorities, some had advocated for Kwoyelo's release. "Our children are innocent because they were forcefully conscripted into

combat," Okello Okuna, a spokesperson for Ker Kwaro Acholi, a traditional kingdom in Gulu, told Al Jazeera in February.

Rights groups, such as Avocats Sans Frontieres, pointed out that holding Kwoyelo in detention for more than a decade muddled the case for the prosecution.

But others, including victims, said Kwoyelo was involved in killings and torture, and should therefore face justice.

"He was a rude person and a fighter," a victim who was born in LRA captivity and identified only as Jaqueline told Al Jazeera in February, adding that Kwoyelo killed her father for failing to follow orders.

Defence lead lawyer Caleb Akala had consistently pleaded Kwoyelo's innocence, arguing that he was himself a child victim of the LRA.

However, witnesses maintained Kwoyelo led several LRA incursions and was involved in killings.

Judge Gasagwa said Kwoyelo avoided the death sentence because he was recruited by the LRA at a young age, was not one of the top-ranking commanders, and has expressed remorse and a willingness to reconcile with the victims.

Thousands of children were abducted by the group and used as sex slaves or child soldiers.

The LRA is designated as a terror group by the United Nations, the United States, the United Kingdom and the European Union.

Source: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/10/25/uganda-sentences-lra-commander-thomas-kwoyeloto-40-years-for-war-crimes>, .

‘WILL I BE NEXT?’: FEAR HAUNTS KENYAN WOMEN ATHLETES AFTER CHEPTEGEI MURDER

AT LEAST FOUR PROFESSIONAL FEMALE RUNNERS HAVE BEEN MURDERED BY THEIR INTIMATE MALE PARTNERS SINCE 2021.0

10TH OCT 2024

It was a sun-baked August day on the streets of the French capital, Paris, when Rebecca Cheptegei rushed across the finish line of the women's marathon at the 2024 Summer Olympics.

The 33-year-old elite long-distance runner came only 44th in the race, but Uganda's women's marathon record holder was riding the high of her first Olympic Games, with years of races ahead of her.

But just four weeks later, she was dead – murdered by her ex-partner at her home in the quiet village of Kinyoro in Kenya's western Rift Valley region.

The horror of her killing left East Africa reeling. For years, women have suffered physical and sexual abuse, including gruesome murders, from partners, spouses and other male family members in Kenya. Cheptegei's killing underscored how even successful, elite athletes weren't safe.

Yet, according to female athletes and the organisations supporting them, it is the very success these women achieved that may have made them a target among men still governed by more patriarchal gender norms.

One in three women in Kenya reports at least a case of abuse by the age of 18, according to Kenyan charity, the Gender Violence Recovery Centre, largely from their intimate male partners, male family members, or other males known to them.

In January this year alone, there were at least 32 women murdered by male perpetrators – about one woman every day – according to Femicide Count Kenya, a monitoring group

tracking media-reported femicides – or the intentional murder of a woman by a man.

Although hundreds of women marched in the streets of Nairobi calling for an end to violence against women in a massive January demonstration, the killings have continued through the year, said Audrey Mugeni, co-founder of Femicide Count.

“We had 154 cases by the end of last year ... we are already at 174 now,” Mugeni said.

At the present rate of killings, the femicide count for 2024 will pass 200 cases by the end of the year, she added.

Elite athletes not spared

Kenya has a thriving athlete community. In the western Rift Valley where Cheptegei lived, pro and amateur runners from the region or abroad train, as very high altitudes – about 8,000 feet (2,500 metres) above sea level – help athletes gain better stamina, and make competing at lower altitudes a breeze.

About three hours from Cheptegei's village of Kinyoro, the rural town of Iten – with its rolling hills and dirt roads – is the Rift Valley's running capital. Young people there, including girls, get into the sports early on, inspired by the success stories of locals like Eliud Kipchoge and Mary Keitany who are now international stars. Many are motivated by the promise of fame and earnings that can help them get out of poverty.

However, because of their success as Olympians, world champions, and national stars, female athletes face high levels of emotional and physical violence from males jealous of their success or looking to control their earnings, female athletes say.

Cheptegei, who was originally from Bukwo, a town on the Kenya-Uganda border, lived and trained in Kenya, but competed for Uganda.

As a pro runner, she recently hit several high points in her career: she'd won gold in 2022 at the World Mountain and Trail Running Championships in Chiang Mai, Thailand, and finished second at the November 2023 Florence Marathon in Italy.

After finishing 44th at her Olympics race in Paris, Cheptegei returned to Kinyoro. On Sunday, September 1, she had just arrived home from a church service when her ex, Dickson Ndiema Marangach, jumped at her, threw fuel on her and set her alight, according to neighbours who spoke to local journalists.

Doctors said Cheptegei suffered burns on more than 80 percent of her body by the time she was rushed to a hospital in Eldoret county. She died four days later after all her organs failed.

On September 9, Marangach, who'd also sustained burns as he attempted to douse Cheptegei in even more petrol, died in hospital.

The two had disputed over the small piece of land where Cheptegei built her home in Kinyoro, in a bid to be closer to training facilities in the region. Cheptegei's brother, Jacob, told the BBC that the two had lived together, but then had started to fall out over money in 2023, as Marangach started to question Cheptegei over what she did with her earnings.

After the attack, the head of Uganda's Olympic Committee, Donald Rukare, decried Marangach's "vicious attack" against Cheptegei, while the Paris Olympics organisers said the "despicable crime reminds us of the alarming reality of violence affecting too many women in society".

Tirop's Angels

At least three other female runners have been murdered in Kenya since 2020. The death of long-distance runner Agnes Tirop, who was murdered in 2021, has left lasting effects.

A small-statured athlete, Tirop once sported a closely cropped cut but was beginning to flaunt braids and flashy long nails on the track as she evolved from a junior athlete to a senior.

In September 2021, she put on a dazzling performance in Germany, smashing the world record in the 10,000km world women's race – called the 10k road race.

Barely a month later, on October 13, she was found stabbed to death in her home in Iten. Police confirmed her husband and coach, Ibrahim Rotich, was the main suspect. Tirop was only 25.

For years, the runner's family witnessed Rotich's interactions with Tirop, who was 15 years his junior. He first befriended and then started to date the young girl in her teen years. Her brother, athlete Martin Tirop who discovered her body, told *The New Yorker* magazine in 2022 that Tirop's parents had tried to warn her against Rotich, but she dropped out of school and secretly married him. Towards the end, however, the athlete told her siblings that she planned to leave Rotich.

"I kind of blame myself, even though there were no signs, because Agnes always kept to herself," Viola Lagat, Tirop's friend, and fellow long-distance pro runner, told Al Jazeera. She once noticed Tirop had an injury, which she now suspects was caused by Rotich, but Lagat says she did not press her about it at the time.

"She's not someone who would tell you that she has any trouble. You wouldn't know that she was going through anything. And that's something that still amazes me, that she was being abused, and she's breaking a world record during a very tough time in her life," she said.

After her death, Lagat and some of Tirop's friends and relatives founded Tirop's Angels, a centre for women and girls suffering abuse. Based in Iten, the organisation has catered to about 50 women survivors of abuse, offering them financial or emotional support. It has opened up to women in the sporting community and beyond. Lagat says many of the cases reported are from women who survive sexual abuse by their close family members – like their fathers.

Edith Mutoni, 27, a national star who ran 400 and 800-metre races in regional championships was found with fatal stab wounds in her neck at her home in Kianjege village, closer to Nairobi the same week as Tirop. The main suspect was Kennedy Chomba, her husband. He was arrested and charged with murder, but it's unclear if he is out on bail.

In April 2022, rising middle-distance athlete Damaris Mutua, a mother of one, was found strangled in an apartment close to Iten. The runner, who also competed for Bahrain, had taken second place in the Arab Cross-Country Championships that year. A manhunt is under way for her Ethiopian boyfriend and fellow runner Folie Hailemaryam Eskinder, who is believed by authorities to have fled to Ethiopia.

Lagat said female athletes are more vulnerable to violence from male partners because they wield money and influence – the kind their male partners, even if they are fellow athletes, are unlikely to attain, as there are more male athletes and therefore more competition. In some cases, she said, older men spot a promising young girl and try to groom her and her family for exploitation by disguising themselves as her coach and promising to get her to international competitions.

"That's something that entices perpetrators who don't want to work hard, for those men who are lazy. Men who just want to feed off of someone's sweat," Lagat said. "I don't know why these men want to be with women in sports, and yet they cannot stand their success at the same time."

Lorna Kimaiyo, a former student athlete who is now studying the history of female athleticism

in Kenya at

Columbia University, says many successful elite runners are from the Kalenjin ethnic group in the Rift Valley, where the success of early women runners had historically clashed with ingrained gender identities.

At first, only Kalenjin men competed professionally. However, after the 1984 Olympics featured the first women's marathon, Kenya's female runners started to dominate long-distance events – but they were not hailed at home by the men.

"Women who sought to race after marriage faced unsupportive husbands and widespread derision from others in the community. Wives' running was a source of conflict and often led to them abandoning it," she said.

More female athletes going pro and earning more money from their wins is one of the reasons why violence against them has worsened, Kimaiyo said.

Holding perpetrators to account

Ibrahim Rotich, Agnes Tirop's husband and suspected murderer, has been out on bail since November 2023, after serving two years in jail. A judge said his release would allow a murder trial to begin, after determining that Rotich's life was not in danger, due to the widespread anger that followed Tirop's death.

Although Rotich is barred from leaving his home county in Eldoret or visiting Iten, where Tirop was killed, women's rights activists point to the fact that he was freed as one of the reasons why male perpetrators of violence against women are not deterred by Kenya's laws. Under the country's constitution, suspected murderers are allowed to be released on bail before trial. However, some kick against this policy, and point out that murder trials can take several years. Suspects should be held in detention and murder trials should be sped up, advocates say.

"You will be living your life while somebody's daughter has been buried," said Tirop's friend

Lagat, adding that the legal system was not a strong enough deterrence.

Women's rights groups are also pushing for femicide to be specifically named and encoded in Kenya's constitution to spread more awareness. They also want separate courts and faster sentences for perpetrators. At present, women's murders are treated as homicides, and guilty parties can attract a maximum life sentence.

Often, women's murders go unsolved, activists say, and the Kenyan police are lax concerning violence against women by men. Since she has been counting deaths, Mugeni of Femicide Count says she has rarely seen cases of femicide that successfully end with male perpetrators in jail because of the lax laws.

"Of more than 700 cases that we've looked at, there have been only three cases where the perpetrator was jailed that I remember," Mugeni said, adding that in total, there are fewer than a handful.

"What we are seeing more and more of are cases of murder-suicides," Mugeni said, with male perpetrators facing trial dying by suicide, forcing the case to shut.

Gender desks were introduced in police stations across Kenya in 2004, but many women complain of a lack of privacy – the desks are often in open spaces, leaving survivors of abuse feeling exposed when narrating their ordeal. Some say police officers also tend not to take women's complaints seriously, instead encouraging couples to "resolve" their quarrels with dialogue.

Before her gruesome death in September, Cheptegei had reported her ex, Marangach, to the police thrice this year, her father told the Reuters news agency. Officials had told Marangach to leave her alone, but had not done much else, he said.

While Kenya's deeply patriarchal culture comes into play, some experts lay the blame for deaths squarely on the government and security officials, saying they do not react with urgency to women's murders.

"The Kenya government has not been quick to respond to it [and] the story of the killers just disappears after some months," said Kimaiyo of Columbia University.

Building safe spaces

Athletes like Lagat further blame Athletics Kenya, the umbrella organisation for runners. Female athletes, she said, should be trained to spot signs of abuse in a relationship the same way athletes are constantly drilled against doping, that is the use of drugs to enhance performance.

With the constant cases reported, the organisation ought to also have a safe space for female athletes to train, complete with the amenities they'd usually have access to, she said.

Al Jazeera reached out to Athletics Kenya for comment but did not get a response.

Meanwhile, there are only a few government-run safe spaces for female survivors of violence by men in Kenya. There were some 54 operational shelters and rescue centres in 18 out of Kenya's 47 counties, with only two managed by the government, according to the United Nations.

It's why Lagat says she is pushing hard to get the government of Kenya to spare some land for Tirop's Angels so the group can build a permanent safe house. That, she said, would allow Tirop's Angels to reach more women, especially young girls in need of help as cases continue to flow in.

"Many of the cases that really stick with us are defilement cases," Lagat said, referring to cases where fathers sexually abuse their daughters. "The reason that affects is that many mothers don't speak up ... we don't know if they are being manipulated or if they are scared for themselves.

In one case, a teenage girl abused by her father ended up contracting HIV from him and getting pregnant, Lagat said. Although it took a while to get her spirits up and although her perpetrator walked free, the girl is now successfully managing the condition – four years later.

“She graduated from primary school and is now in high school,” Lagat said, a smile in her voice. “She is running, she is doing amazing now and that’s something we are really proud of,” she said.

Meanwhile, even as cases of femicide seem to be on the rise in Kenya according to data from Femicide Count, the monitoring group’s Mugeni suggested that this may not necessarily be because there has been an increase in the murder of women, but rather because more people are aware of what counts as femicide.

“When we started counting six years ago, many people did not know what femicide was and I had to train Google Alert,” Mugeni said. “I told it: tell me when a woman has been hacked, tell me when a woman is strangled, and so on. But now, there’s much more awareness of what it is and so we are finding more cases.”

Source: <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2024/10/10/rebecca-cheptegei-and-the-epidemic-of-womenathletes-killed-by-men-in-kenya>.

More media are also reporting the deaths of murdered women, not as isolated cases, but as part of a systematic problem, she said.

Nevertheless, when she goes through the cases, Mugeni said she still feels fear. “I always think – am I going to be next?”

As Lagat sets about her own training and work, she said she is now constantly on alert, watching her female friends and other women around her for indications of abuse – not wanting to miss any signs.

When her team goes out to talk to young female runners, she drums their rights into their ears.

“You should be respected, nobody should be hitting you,” Lagat tells them. “You are the decision-maker when it comes to what you want to do with the money that you have earned through your career ... You have your money. He should have his own money.”

Some men might not necessarily like the advice but Lagat is past caring, she said. “We are still going to preach the same message because that’s how it should be.”

TANZANIA

ALL ABOARD THE SPARKLING RAILWAY BREAKING NEW GROUND FOR EAST AFRICA

Shaped and coloured like the country's rare gemstone, tanzanite, the sparkling new railway terminal in Dar es Salaam is a symbol of Tanzania's transport ambitions.

The glass panels gleam in the sun, like an outsize version of the prismatic bluish-purple gem that glitters in the light.

The trains – powered by electricity, a first for the region – carry passengers from the commercial hub to the capital, Dodoma, in less than four hours, half the time it takes by road.

It marks the starting point of one of the country's strategic projects – the building of a 2,560km (1,590-mile) Standard Gauge Railway (SGR) envisaged to connect key cities and link up with neighbours Burundi, Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

The 460km (285-mile) Dar es Salaam to Dodoma leg has been open since August, when President Samia Suluhu described the railway as “a pathway to our future” that would “enhance our standing in the region”.

In Dodoma, the station is another grand building, resembling the rocky hills around the city – an effort to blend the country's natural heritage with modernity.

It is a reluctant capital. In the middle of the country, it was first designated the centre of power 50 years ago, but it took the strong-willed late President John Magufuli to force government bodies to relocate.

But as most commercial activity, and even some government work, continues in Dar es Salaam, a fast and efficient transport link

between the cities has been seen as vital.

The electric train has also made it smooth and convenient for the ordinary Tanzanian. A far cry from the experience on the road or the older slower, narrower train that this service replaces.

Inside the train carriage, the seats are clean, comfortable and reclining. There is a foldable tray table attached to each one. A member of the train crew is on hand to sell hot and cold drinks as well as snacks.

In economy class there are five seats in each row, three on one side of the aisle and two on the other. In the business and luxury (royal) classes there are two seats on either side of the row, offering more comfort and legroom.

“We are grateful, we are not tired,” Gloria Sebastian who lives in Dar es Salaam, tells the BBC during a trip to visit her family in Dodoma. She is happy about the convenience that the train provides.

And she is not alone.

The man who is overseeing the building and operation of the SGR service says at least 7,000 passengers travel on the eight daily services on the line, which is already approaching capacity.

Machibya Masanja tells the BBC that the demand has been so high that “we cannot meet it with those trips we are making per day. We

expect the number [of passengers] will double or triple." There are plans afoot to add more journeys.

The popularity means that advance planning is essential as services can be fully booked several days in advance. Payment must be made within an hour of booking in order to reserve a seat. An economy class trip to Dodoma costs a reasonable 40,000 Tanzanian shillings (\$15; £11), while going business class will set you back 70,000 shillings (\$26).

The early morning service leaves Dar es Salaam at 06:00 but people are required to turn up two hours earlier for security checks.

- Tanzanite: The hidden treasure of Tanzania
- The Freedom Railway: A 1,860km journey across Africa

The inside of the tanzanite-shaped building resembles an airport terminal. Passengers queue up and go through thorough checks just like in an airport. The luggage is scanned and people are sometimes frisked before accessing the boarding lounge.

One man later told the BBC that he felt the intense scrutiny seemed unnecessary, and there does not seem to have been any direct security threat, but the atmosphere is good-natured.

Nevertheless, there is an edginess from officials evidenced by the fact that a police officer questioned the BBC team who were taking pictures at the terminal – but they were quickly cleared after some checks.

The boarding was calm and orderly and the train pulled away on time.

Gathering speed – the trains currently hit a maximum of 120km/h (75mph) but can go faster

– it was soon whizzing through the outskirts of Dar es Salaam as the early morning sun began to illuminate the panoramic view. We cross a vast countryside – scrub and grassland plains interspersed with views of lush farms – and pass a meandering river, craggy terrain and undulating hills.

There were also the tunnels, causing some discomfort in the eardrum.

"You are advised to be chewing something, yawn or keep your mouth open," the announcer said, to the amusement of some passengers.

For first-timers, the excitement was evident.

Bernice Augustine was with her daughter for a weekend vacation in Dodoma.

"It is awesome," she says. "You cannot compare it with the old train: it's convenient, it's clean, it's easy."

Hilaly Mussa Maginga has bad memories of going on the old line. After the trip to Kigoma he vowed never to get on a train again as he was so tired and his lower back was in pain.

But his curiosity was piqued when he heard about the SGR.

"When you are used to travel for long distances, you sit until it hurts, so when you have this option to travel for a shorter time, there is a lot to enjoy. We've come from far, thank God," he says.

For Mr Maginga the journey on the SGR is a zen-like voyage, a calm, unperturbed travel experience.

The project's journey to reach this point has not been entirely smooth.

From the initial groundbreaking in 2017, the first section had been scheduled for completion

in 2019. But it faced lengthy delays which the railway company attributes to Covid and construction costs as well as labour issues.

There have also been questions about its huge cost, estimated at \$10bn (£8bn) upon completion.

Turkish firm Yapi Merkezi is the main contractor for the route's first four sections, including the Dar es Salaam to Dodoma segment, while Chinese firms are building the other two.

Funding has come from the Tanzanian government and lenders, including from Denmark and Sweden, the Chinese Exim bank and the African Development Bank.

But Mr Masanja says it is too soon to be worried about profitability, saying this will only be realisable once the entire network is complete. He adds that the service is generating enough passenger income to offset operation costs, and that from January the company plans to introduce freight trains.

For now, he says, "its social contribution is much more profitable".

The service has occasionally been disrupted by power failure but Mr Masanja says they are building a dedicated power transmission line, tapping into the country's vast power generation capacity to eliminate the risk of unstable power.

Using electricity has reduced the cost of

operations to about a third of what would have been spent on diesel, which neighbouring Kenya uses to power its own SGR line, he tells the BBC.

"We are the cheapest in the region, and in Africa, in terms of the cost," he says.

Not everyone is entirely happy, though.

Adam Ally Mwanshinga, chairman of the Dodoma Bus Terminal Agents' Union, says his members have lost a significant part of their business because of the railway.

The modern bus station in the capital was not so long ago a bustling terminal, he says, adding there are now 4500 fewer passengers each day.

While it is cheaper to travel by bus, the convenience of the train has been more attractive for many.

"Business is down and life is difficult," Mr Mwanshinga says.

"The buses can't fill up and the many businesses here that used to benefit from the many people coming here are suffering," he says.

However, he seems resigned to the situation, saying that the SGR development "has done well for the majority of the people".

"It is the nature of life - there are those who benefit and those who will suffer."

Source: <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c70z109nnk4o>.

CHARITY CEO AWARDED AFRICA EDUCATION MEDAL

10TH OCTOBER 2024

The leader of a charity that tackles poverty and inequality in five African countries through girls' education has been awarded the Africa Education Medal 2024.

Angeline Murimirwa is the CEO of UK-registered Camfed, which was founded in Cambridge and Zimbabwe. It now has 7,044 partner schools in underserved rural communities in Zimbabwe, Zambia, Tanzania, Malawi and Ghana.

Ms Murimirwa, one of the first girls in Zimbabwe who was helped to attend secondary school by the charity, said she was "deeply honoured" by the award.

"This medal belongs to our entire movement - to every single person whose commitment to education drives them to go further and do better every day," she added.

'Vital work'

The Africa Education Medal was founded by T4 Education and HP Inc and is one of three World Education Medals.

Mayank Dhingra, senior education business leader at HP, congratulated Ms Murimirwa, and said: "Her vital work has led the way in breaking down barriers to girls in education.

"We know that so many others will be inspired to follow in her footsteps, to build a world where every child receives the quality education that is their right."

Source: <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c756kwldgyyo>.

The vast majority of girls in rural Africa never complete secondary school, according to Camfed.

Their exclusion from education plays out at every stage of a young woman's life and is passed on to future generations.

The charity helps schools tackle the impediments to marginalised girls' school attendance, as well as partnering with governments to help them develop education that better serves the needs of girls.

Once they graduate, it enables them to transition to work or entrepreneurship and provides a platform for them to step up as leaders to support younger generations of girls.

Ms Murimirwa was the first elected chair of the Camfed Association – a pan-African network of 279,000 women leaders educated with Camfed support.

Each member financially supports at least three other girls in their community to help them stay in school.

"The need is great, and we cannot do this alone - together we're raising the flag for a more equitable world," she said.

UNIFORMS DONATED TO PUPILS IN ROMANIA AND TANZANIA

5TH OCTOBER 2024

Pre-owned uniforms from schools in Guernsey are set to be donated to charities to help students in other countries. La Mare de Carteret High School and grammar school uniforms will be donated to the Tumaini Fund, which helps orphans with Aids in Tanzania.

They will also be donated to the Friends of Romania, a Guernsey charity which helps children in the European country.

Deputy Andrea Dudley-Owen, president of the Committee for Education, Sport & Culture, said she was pleased to support "this important overseas work".

'Essential for the future'

The uniforms have been collected over the summer, as the new Les Varendes High School uniform has been rolled out.

Source: <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c361zy933w7o>.

PE Kits, blazers, trousers, jumpers and other garments have been brought together to be donated to school children in Tanzania.

Friends of Romania work with a sister charity in-country called Tabita 96 which will allocate the uniforms to students who need them, and also help them attend school.

Dr Susan Wilson, chair of the Tumaini Fund said education was "essential for the future of children living in poverty".

Patricia Holland from Friends of Romania said the uniforms had been sorted and packed and will now make their journey.

The uniform donation scheme was led by a team of students from Les Varendes High and from La Mare de Carteret High.

RAPPER'S ROAD SAFETY VIDEO TO BE USED IN TV CAMPAIGN

4TH OCTOBER 2024

A rapper's music video about road safety is set to appear in a national TV campaign in Tanzania.

Mbulelo Mtandana, 45, who lives in Gorse Hill, Swindon, Wiltshire, and performs under the stage name Silver

Star, decided to act after seeing the "chaos" caused by motorbike taxis during a recent trip to his home country. His song Bodaboda, a term used for motorbike across east Africa, was also inspired to take action after his uncle was paralysed in a crash.

Mr Star, who moved to the UK in 2003, said: "My ambition is to be able to save lives."

Speaking to BBC Radio Wiltshire, he added: "When I went to Tanzania I saw a lot of chaos on the roads.

"I thought that I could come up with something to help the community and help the citizens of Tanzania."

'Saving lives'

Mr Star collaborated with Tanzanian urban

artist Jam Bito on the track, with lyrics written in Swahili.

The government commissioner for road safety, MD Stephen Michael Deleli, appeared in the music video after hearing about the idea.

Mr Silver said: "If I can save just one life from this video, then it would have been worth it.

Source: <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c4gqje2z9n6o>.

"It's really exciting that the Tanzanian government have thrown their full support to the video and the campaign.

"I can't wait for people to see it."

Translated by Silver, the final lyrics on the track tell people to be stay safe on the motorbikes.

TANZANIA NEWS SITES BANNED OVER ANIMATION DEEMED CRITICAL OF PRESIDENT

3RD OCTOBER 2024

Three of Tanzania's leading newspapers have been banned from publishing their online editions after they ran an animation deemed critical of President Samia Suluhu Hassan.

The Citizen, Mwananchi and Mwanaspoti newspapers have had their online licences suspended for 30 days over the viral animated clip, which has since been removed.

The clip, just over a minute long, published by the Citizen on social media highlighted the increasing cases of abductions and disappearances in the country.

The media regulator said the content "threatens and is likely to affect and harm national unity and social peace of the United Republic of Tanzania".

Rights groups have accused President Samia's government of stifling dissent and targeting opponents ahead of next year's general elections.

It follows a recent wave of abductions, arrests and the brutal killing of an opposition official in the country.

- Why Samia's hesitant reforms are fuelling Tanzanian political anger
- Tanzania leader condemns killing of opposition figure doused in acid

Wednesday's ban affects all websites, social media and YouTube platforms of the three newspapers, all run by Mwananchi Communication Limited (MCL).

The viral animation by the Citizen, which authorities said violated the country's online communication laws, was published on Tuesday.

It depicted a female cartoon character who resembled Samia with her signature hijab.

It showed the character switching between different TV stations. On each one there was someone complaining about the killing, abduction or disappearance of a family member. At the end, the character appears upset by all the complaints.

Mpoki Thomson, the Citizen's managing editor, said the animation depicted "events that raised concerns regarding the safety and security of individuals in Tanzania".

The animation was taken down a few hours later due to what the newspaper termed "misinterpretation" by the public.

"Our decision to take down the animation stems from the misinterpretation it has generated, which diverges from our original intent," Mr Thomson said in a statement.

In a statement on Wednesday, the Tanzania Communications Regulatory Authority (TCRA) said the audio-visual content violated the Electronic and Postal Communications (Online Content) Regulations of 2020].

"Following the publication of content which contravenes the law, TCRA suspends online media services licences for The Citizen, Mwananchi Digital, Mwananchi and Mwanaspoti for a period of 30 days," it added.

The suspension prevents the outlets from

Source: <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/czeg6wkelz5o>.

publishing any content online, "while further regulatory actions are under review."

The media company has assured its audience that it would continue to serve them through its daily print editions and noted that it would engage with the authorities to resolve the matter.

Rights groups and opposition parties have condemned the ban, describing it as a move to muzzle the media in the country.

It comes two years after the lifting of a ban on four newspapers that had been barred from publishing since 2016 and 2017 for exposing alleged corruption and human rights violations.

The four newspapers, Daima, Mawio, Mwanahalisi and Mseto, were banned from publishing for various offences under the restrictive Media Services Act, which came into force in 2016, under the late President John Magufuli. When Samia succeeded Magufuli after his death in 2021, there were hopes that she would allow the media more freedom.

KILIMANJARO CLIMB IN MEMORY OF SON KILLED IN WAR

3RD OCTOBER 2024

A West Sussex man has set off to climb Mount Kilimanjaro in memory of his son, who was killed in the war in Afghanistan.

Efrem Brynin, from Pulborough, will scale Africa's highest peak with 19 others to raise funds and awareness for the StrongMen bereavement charity.

The Brighton & Hove Albion FC fan lost his son James in 2013.

"I always wear his watch because that's the last thing that felt his heartbeat," Mr Brynin said, adding that his son would be at the front and centre of his mind during the challenge.

Before setting off to Tanzania, Mr Brynin told the BBC he was naturally apprehensive.

"The unknown is the thing that makes you slightly nervous. But that's part of the journey," he said.

However, he said it would not be as bad as his experience on the Channel 4 reality show SAS: Who Dares Wins, which saw him subjected to gruelling tests in the jungles of Ecuador.

Mr Brynin is due to return on 14 October - the day before the 11th anniversary of his son's death. StrongMen, which was co-founded by Mr Brynin, aims to support men following bereavement.

"Grief can cause severe emotional and physical

Source: <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cx2yp3n4wjro>.

health conditions which are often overlooked and even ignored, especially in men," it says on the charity's website.

Four hundred and fifty-seven UK armed forces personnel were killed in Afghanistan, according to the Ministry of Defence.

The Costs of War project estimates more than 176,000 people died in the Middle Eastern country as a direct result of the war, which took place from 2001 to 2021.

RWANDA

MARBURG VIRUS DISEASE - RWANDA

25TH OCTOBER 2024

As of 24 October 2024, a total of 64 Marburg virus disease cases, including 15 deaths (case fatality ratio (CFR) 23.4%), have been reported in Rwanda. Among the initial 62 confirmed cases with available data, 70% were males, and 48% were aged between 30 to 39 years. The highest number of new confirmed cases were reported in the first two epidemiological weeks of the outbreak with 26 cases reported in epidemiological week 39 (23 to 29 September 2024) and 23 cases in week 40 (30 September to 6 October). This was followed by a sharp decline in weeks 41 and 42, with 12 and one case reported respectively. Contact tracing is ongoing, with 1146 contacts under follow-up as of 20 October 2024. Based on available updates from the outbreak investigation, the index case was a male between 20 and 30 years old with a history of exposure to bats in a cave.

Since the last Disease Outbreak News on this event was published on 18 October 2024, two additional laboratory-confirmed cases of Marburg virus disease (MVD) were reported in Rwanda on 23 and 24 October. The new cases include a healthcare worker who had been treating MVD cases since the start of the outbreak and a case linked to the site where the index case was exposed. Both cases are currently in isolation and receiving treatment. As of 24 October 2024, a total of 64 confirmed cases, including 15 deaths (CFR: 23.4%), have been reported. Excluding the recently confirmed cases, 70% of the 62 initially confirmed cases were among males, and 48% were among adults between 30 and 39 years of age. Health workers from two health facilities in Kigali account for over 82% of confirmed cases. Most of the cases have been reported from the three districts in Kigali city.

The highest number of new confirmed cases were reported in the first two epidemiological weeks of the outbreak with 26 cases reported in the epidemiological week 39 (23 to 29 September 2024) and 23 cases in week 40 (30 September to 6 October). This was followed by a sharp decline in epi weeks 41 (7 to 13

October) and 42 (14 to 20 October), with 12 and one cases reported respectively.

Since the declaration of the outbreak by the Government of Rwanda on 27 September and as of 23 October, 46 confirmed cases have recovered, and three cases are under care at the designated Marburg treatment center. The 62 confirmed cases reported since the start of the outbreak have been part of one major cluster with three branches. As of 24 October 2024, a total of 5074 tests for Marburg virus have been conducted, with approximately 100-300 samples being tested daily at the Rwanda Biomedical Center.

Contact tracing is ongoing, with 1146 contacts under follow-up as of 20 October 2024.

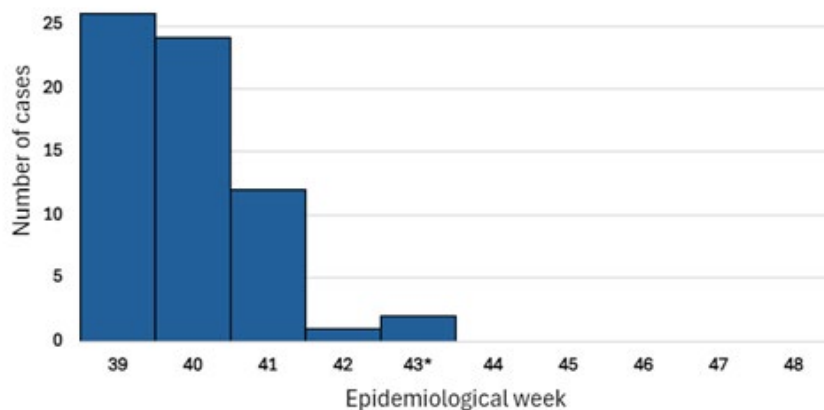
WHO continues to support the Government of Rwanda. Enhanced surveillance, contact tracing and infection prevention and control measures must be maintained until the outbreak is declared over.

Based on available updates from the outbreak investigation, the index case was a male between 20 and 30 years old with a history

of exposure to bats in a cave. Preliminary phylogenetic analyses indicate a close evolutionary relationship to a viral sequence

from Orthomarburgvirus marburgense (Marburg virus, MARV) that was observed in the MVD outbreak in East Africa in 2014.1

FIGURE 1. MVD CASES BY WEEK OF REPORTING IN RWANDA, AS OF 24 OCTOBER 2024, (N=64)



*The epidemiological week 43 is not complete as it will end on 27 October 2024.

MVD is a highly virulent disease that can cause hemorrhagic fever and is clinically similar to Ebola virus disease. Marburg and Ebola viruses are both members of the Filoviridae family (filovirus). People are infected with Marburg virus when they come into close contact with Rousettus bats, a type of fruit bat, that can carry the Marburg virus and are often found in mines or caves. Marburg virus then spreads between people via direct contact (through broken skin or mucous membranes) with the blood, secretions, organs or other bodily fluids of infected people, and with surfaces and materials (e.g. bedding, clothing) contaminated with these fluids. Health workers have previously been infected while treating patients with suspected or confirmed MVD. Burial ceremonies that involve direct contact with the body of the deceased can also contribute to the transmission of Marburg virus.

The incubation period varies from two to 21 days. Illness caused by Marburg virus begins abruptly, with high fever, severe headache and severe malaise. Severe watery diarrhea, abdominal pain and cramping, nausea and vomiting can begin on the third day. Although not all cases present with hemorrhagic signs, severe hemorrhagic manifestations may appear between five and seven days from symptoms onset, and fatal cases usually have some form of bleeding, often from multiple areas. In fatal cases, death occurs most often between eight and nine days after symptom onset, usually preceded by severe blood loss and shock. There is currently no approved treatment or vaccine for MVD. Some candidate vaccines and therapeutics are currently under investigation.

Seventeen outbreaks of MVD have previously been reported globally. The most recent outbreaks were reported in Equatorial Guinea and the United Republic of Tanzania between February and June 2023. Additional countries that previously reported outbreaks of MVD in the African Region include Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ghana, Guinea, Kenya, South Africa, and Uganda

- The Government of Rwanda is coordinating the response with support from WHO and partners.
- A surge team from WHO was deployed to support the in-country response across the functions of incident management, epidemiology, health operations, case management, infection prevention and control, health logistics, therapeutics and vaccines research, and partner coordination.
- On 19-20 October, WHO Director-General Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus visited Kigali, where he met with the national authorities and WHO staff taking part in the national response.
- WHO is continuously engaged with its viral hemorrhagic fever collaborating centers and other reference laboratories and partners to support Rwanda in assessing laboratory test performance.
- WHO is supporting the Government in the establishment of a program for recovered patients, by sharing technical guidance and protocols for the establishment of a national program and by supporting Rwanda Ministry of Health (MOH) implementation effort.
- WHO, the Government of Rwanda, and partners have launched Marburg therapeutics clinical trials, which is currently enrolling patients.
- WHO and partners supported MOH in developing and finalizing the national Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) operational guidance for MVD adapted from WHO IPC guideline. This operational guidance together with IPC standard operating procedures is being rapidly disseminated to all health facilities.
- WHO supported MOH in the enhancing of IPC measures in the isolation sites.
- WHO has provided technical advice to

public health authorities in Rwanda and at-risk countries on the implementation of evidence-informed and risk-based health measures; the strengthening of detection, reporting and management capacities at points of entry and across borders; and travel advice.

- WHO has published interim guidance on the Considerations for border health and points of entry for filovirus disease outbreaks, which applies to but is not limited to the current MVD outbreak in Rwanda.
- WHO has also published a statement advising against any travel restrictions and against any trade restrictions with Rwanda in the context of the ongoing MVD outbreak.
- WHO is providing support in surrounding countries to assess the readiness of healthcare facilities, points of entry and border communities within surrounding countries and specifically risk mapping for areas bordering Rwanda.
- WHO is supporting the MVD treatment center with direct support from clinical experts in infectious disease, ICU and nursing as well as health logistics and WASH assessment

Marburg virus disease (MVD) is caused by the same family of viruses (Filoviridae) that causes Ebola virus disease. MVD is an epidemic-prone disease associated with high CFR (24-88%). In the early course of the disease, MVD is challenging to distinguish from other infectious diseases such as malaria, typhoid fever, shigellosis, meningitis and other viral hemorrhagic fevers. Epidemiologic features can help differentiate between viral hemorrhagic fevers (including history of exposure to bats, caves, or mining) and laboratory testing is important to confirm the diagnosis.

With 64 confirmed cases reported, this is the third largest MVD outbreak reported to date,

with 82% of confirmed cases reported among healthcare workers. Healthcare-associated infections (also known as nosocomial infections) of this disease can lead to further spread if not controlled early. The importance of screening all persons entering health facilities as well as inpatient surveillance for prompt identification, isolation, and notification cannot be overemphasized. This is in addition to the importance of contact identification and listing and daily follow-up of all contacts.

Based on the outbreak investigation which included record review in health facilities, review of epidemiological data, serology and genomic sequencing, as well as environmental and animal testing, the source of the outbreak is reported to be of zoonotic origin, linked to exposure in a cave inhabited by fruit bats. However, the dates of symptom onset of cases is still unknown to WHO.

On 30 September, WHO assessed the risk of this outbreak as very high at the national level, high at the regional level, and low at the global level. However, based on the evolution of the outbreak and ongoing investigations, this risk assessment may be revised. MVD is not easily transmissible (i.e. in most instances it requires contact with the body fluids of a sick patient presenting with symptoms or with surfaces contaminated with these fluids). In addition, there are ongoing public health measures in place, including active surveillance in facilities and communities, testing suspected cases, isolation and treatment of cases and contact tracing.

MVD outbreak control relies on using a range of interventions, including prompt isolation and case management; surveillance including active case search, case investigation and contact tracing; a laboratory service; infection prevention and control, including prompt safe and dignified burial; and social mobilization – community engagement is key to successfully controlling MVD outbreaks.

Raising awareness of risk factors for Marburg virus infection and protective measures that individuals can take is an effective way to reduce human transmission. WHO advises the following risk reduction measures as an effective way to reduce MVD transmission in healthcare facilities and in communities:

- To reduce human infections and deaths, it is essential to raise community awareness about the risk factors for Marburg virus infection particularly of human-to-human transmission, and the protective measures individuals can take to minimize exposure to the virus. This includes encouraging anyone with symptoms to seek immediate care at a health facility or designated treatment center to lower the risk of community transmission and improve their chances for recovery.
- Reducing the risk of bat-to-human transmission arising from prolonged exposure to mines or caves inhabited by fruit bat colonies. People visiting or working in mines or caves inhabited by fruit bat colonies should wear gloves and other appropriate protective clothing (including masks).
- Surveillance activities, including the wide dissemination of the MVD case definition, should be strengthened in all affected districts, including contact tracing and active case finding.
- Critical infection prevention and control measures should be implemented and/or strengthened in all health care facilities, per WHO's Infection prevention and control guideline for Ebola and Marburg disease. Health workers caring for patients with confirmed or suspected MVD should apply Transmission-based precautions in addition to: Standard precautions, including appropriate use of PPE and hand hygiene according to the

WHO 5 moments to avoid contact with patient's blood and other body fluids and with contaminated surfaces and objects. Waste generated in healthcare facilities must be safely segregated, safely collected, transported, stored, treated and finally disposed. Follow the national guidelines, rules and regulations for safe waste disposal or follow the WHO's guidelines on safe waste management

- Patient-care activities should be undertaken in a clean and hygienic environment that facilitates practices related to the prevention and control of health-care-associated infections (HAIs) as outlined in Essential environmental health standards in health care. Safe water, adequate sanitation and hygiene infrastructure and services should be provided in healthcare facilities. For details on recommendations and improvement, follow the WASH FIT implementation Package
- A comprehensive strategy to manage deceased individuals in communities should be implemented in communities. Safe and dignified burials should be carried out, with strong engagement communities.
- Rapid qualitative assessments should be implemented to collect socio-behavioral data, which can then be utilized to guide the response.
- Results of the phone Knowledge, Attitude and Practices (KAP) survey and other surveys should be integrated into the response strategy and interventions.
- Timely laboratory testing of all suspected cases needs to be maintained and supported with a reliable sample

transportation system.

- Border health readiness and response capacities should be strengthened at points of entry and in communities bordering areas reporting MVD cases and onboard conveyances, and public health advice should be provided to travelers in line with WHO's interim guidance on considerations for border health and points of entry for filovirus disease outbreaks.
- WHO encourages all countries to send the first samples that tested positive for Marburg virus and a subset of negative samples to a WHO Collaborating Centre or a regional reference laboratory for inter-laboratory comparison.
- WHO recommends that clinical data from suspected and confirmed Marburg virus disease cases be systematically collected to improve the limited understanding of the clinical course and direct causes and risk factors for poor outcomes. This can be done by contributing anonymized data to the WHO Global Clinical Platform for viral hemorrhagic fevers.
- WHO advises that all patients with MVD receive holistic care including optimized supportive care including critical care and mental health services in a treatment center designed for optimal patient care and patient centered experience with biosecurity measures such as unidirectional patient and staff flow and WASH services in place.

Based on the current risk assessment, WHO advises against any travel restrictions or any trade restrictions with Rwanda. For further information, please see WHO advice for international traffic in relation to the Marburg virus disease outbreak in Rwanda.

Source: <https://www.who.int/emergencies/disease-outbreak-news/item/2024-DON541>.

RWANDA BEGINS VACCINE TRIAL TO CURB MARBURG VIRUS OUTBREAK

AUTHORITIES TO PRIORITISE THOSE 'MOST AT RISK' AND 'MOST EXPOSED HEALTHCARE WORKERS' FOLLOWING THE DEATHS OF 12 PEOPLE.

6TH OCT 2024

Rwanda has launched a trial of a vaccine against the Marburg virus to try to combat an outbreak of the Ebola-like disease in the East African country.

"The vaccination is starting today immediately," Health Minister Sabin Nsanzimana said at a news conference on Sunday in the capital, Kigali.

The Marburg virus has killed 12 people in Rwanda since it was declared an outbreak on September 27. Authorities said at the time that the first cases had been found among patients in health facilities. There is still no confirmation of the source of the outbreak.

The experimental vaccine, currently in phase 2 trials, was provided by the US-based Sabin Vaccine

Institute.

"The vaccines have been tested by health officials here in Rwanda and the standards bureau," Nsanzimana told reporters. He added the vaccinations would focus on those "most at risk, most exposed healthcare workers working in treatment centres, in the hospitals, in ICU, in emergency, but also the close contacts of the confirmed cases".

"We believe that, with vaccines, we have a powerful tool to stop the spread of this virus," the minister said.

The Sabin Vaccine Institute said in a statement

Source: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/10/6/rwanda-begins-vaccination-drive-to- curb-marburgvirus-outbreak>.

on Saturday it had sent an "initial shipment of approximately 700 vaccine doses", adding that trials had already been under way in neighbouring Uganda and Kenya, with "no safety concerns reported to date".

The Rwandan government said there were 46 confirmed cases, with 29 of them in isolation. Health authorities have identified at least 400 people who came into contact with confirmed cases of the virus.

Like Ebola, the Marburg virus is believed to originate in fruit bats and spreads between people through close contact with the bodily fluids of infected individuals or with surfaces, such as contaminated bedsheets. Without treatment, Marburg can be fatal in up to 88 percent of people who fall ill with the disease.

Its symptoms include fever, muscle pains, diarrhoea, vomiting and, in some cases, extreme blood loss, often leading to death.

Marburg outbreaks and individual cases have in the past been recorded in Tanzania, Equatorial Guinea, Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Kenya, South Africa, Uganda and Ghana, according to the World Health Organization.

WHAT IS THE DEADLY MARBURG VIRUS AND WHERE HAS IT SPREAD?

WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION WARNS OUTBREAK RISK IS 'VERY HIGH AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL' IN RWANDA, BUT LOW AT THE GLOBAL LEVEL.

5TH OCT 2024

Rwanda is fighting its first outbreak of the "highly virulent" Marburg virus which was first reported in late September.

As of Thursday, 11 people were reported to have died of the virus in Rwanda. The health minister announced the country will begin clinical trials of experimental vaccines and treatments.

What is the Marburg virus?

Marburg is from the same family as Ebola, namely the Filoviridae family (filovirus) of viruses. It has been described as more severe than Ebola.

It causes a haemorrhagic fever, which is a type of fever that can damage the walls of blood vessels, according to information from the Mayo Clinic. Other diseases which produce this type of fever include dengue and yellow fever.

According to the Mayo Clinic, a haemorrhagic fever causes internal bleeding, which can be fatal.

The virus was first identified in 1967 in a town in Germany called Marburg, from which it gained its name. Simultaneously, it was identified in Belgrade, Serbia.

The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates the case fatality rate to be between 24 and 88 percent. On average, about half of all those who contract the virus die from it.

After a person is exposed to the virus, it can take between two and 21 days for symptoms to show, according to the WHO.

"Fatal cases usually have some form of bleeding,

often from multiple areas," the website says, adding that the onset of bleeding can occur within five to seven days.

Bleeding in vomit or faeces is often accompanied by bleeding from the nose, gums and vagina, WHO's website says.

In severe cases, death can occur eight or nine days after symptoms start to show.

"Those with weakened immune systems are more susceptible to severe illness and death from this virus," infectious disease expert Amira Roess told Al Jazeera. Roess is a global health and epidemiology professor at George Mason University's College of Public Health.

What are the symptoms?

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Marburg virus symptoms include fever, headache, muscle and joint pain, fatigue, appetite loss, bleeding and gastrointestinal symptoms.

How does the Marburg virus spread?

Some people have contracted the Marburg virus after coming in contact with Rousettus bats, a type of fruit bat found in mines and caves, that carry the virus.

The source of the Rwanda outbreak remains unclear, however.

Once an individual contracts the virus, they can transmit it to others through direct contact with bodily fluids via broken skin or mucous

membranes. The WHO website says even surfaces contaminated with bodily fluids, such as bedsheets or clothing, can spread the virus.

According to information from the CDC, the virus is not airborne.

What is the situation in Rwanda?

There are currently 36 confirmed cases of Marburg in Rwanda, with 25 people being cared for in isolation, according to the government's latest update.

According to the WHO, on September 30 when there were 26 confirmed cases, 70 percent of the cases were in healthcare workers in two of the country's healthcare facilities, which were not named.

"It's not uncommon to see outbreaks in healthcare facilities, especially in low-resourced healthcare facilities that may not have sufficient infection control," Roess said.

Additionally, Rwanda is monitoring 300 people who have come into contact with known cases.

Where has the Marburg virus spread?

On September 27, Rwanda's Ministry of Health confirmed the latest outbreak of the Marburg virus. The current outbreak has only been reported in Rwanda so far.

There were fears that the virus had reached Germany when two passengers on a train from Frankfurt to Hamburg contacted doctors, fearing they had the virus.

However, local authorities announced on Thursday that both had tested negative in a polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test, where a sample from the inner cheek, called a buccal swab, or blood is tested. It tests genetic material

from a specific organism, which in this case is the virus.

Small outbreaks of the virus have occurred in recent years including West Africa's first outbreak in Guinea in 2021, Ghana's first outbreak in 2022 and the first outbreaks in Tanzania and Equatorial Guinea in 2023.

These were quickly contained. In Equatorial Guinea, 17 confirmed and 23 probable cases were reported. "12 of the 17 confirmed cases died and all of the probable cases were reported deaths," according to WHO. In Tanzania, there were one probable and eight confirmed cases, of which five resulted in death.

According to the CDC, in Guinea, only one case was diagnosed after the death of the patient; in Ghana, three cases emerged leading to two deaths.

"We know that an infectious disease that emerges in one area has the potential to become a problem across the globe," Roess said.

How dangerous is the latest Marburg outbreak?

WHO has assessed the risk of this outbreak to be "very high at the national level, high at the regional level, and low at the global level".

Is there a vaccine or treatment?

There are no approved vaccines or treatments for the virus.

Rwanda's Minister of Health Sabin Nsanzimana, announced on Thursday that the country is racing to develop a vaccine.

The WHO said some candidate vaccines are being manufactured. These include vaccines developed by the International AIDS Vaccine Initiative (IAVI) and by the Sabin Vaccine Institute which said it is collaborating with the Rwandan government.

The team at Oxford University which formulated the AstraZeneca vaccine for COVID-19 started a trial of its Marburg vaccine candidate this summer in the United Kingdom, employing similar technology to the COVID vaccine.

The WHO told Reuters that it has released funding for vaccine trials in collaboration with the Canadian government and the European Union's Health Emergency Preparedness and Response Authority (HERA). Diagnosed patients should promptly seek treatment of symptoms with painkiller medication and stay well hydrated.

How can you avoid catching Marburg?

Roess said: "The best thing to do is to practise good hygiene and to limit your exposure to individuals who are sick."

She advised wearing masks when in contact with people who have symptoms of the virus, and not sharing food with people who may be infected.

"If you think that you've been exposed to the virus, then limit your contact with other individuals, monitor your symptoms and report to your local healthcare worker or health ministry official," she said.

She added that the situation is difficult with most disease outbreaks because many healthcare facilities globally do not have the resources to properly monitor how many people are infected.

"It is very important for the global community to work together to fund preventative active

surveillance and other programmes. If we don't take the seriously, more human lives will be lost."

Why are Marburg outbreaks becoming more frequent?

In the 50 years between 1967 and 2017, 13 outbreaks were recorded.

Since 2021, five outbreaks have been recorded, indicating that the outbreaks are becoming more frequent. Roess said we will likely continue to see outbreaks and cases rise for multiple reasons.

"First, people are coming into closer contact with wildlife everywhere in the world," she said, adding that wildlife are adapting to contact with humans and both wildlife and humans are becoming less scared of each other.

She added that cases are rising also because of the rise of chronic conditions and immunocompromising conditions such as diabetes and heart disease. These make people more susceptible to contracting the virus.

Due to technological advancements, people with such conditions are living longer "which is great but that also means that there are more people who are now susceptible to getting sick when they are exposed to pathogens", Roess said.

She added that the spread of the virus is more likely in places with limited healthcare infrastructure. "People will show up to seek care when they are very sick. [At which point] they may be shedding a lot of virus." This also increases the chance of transmission.

Source: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/10/5/what-is-the-deadly-marburg-virus-and-where-has-itspread>.

SOUTH SUDAN

SOUTH SUDAN IN FOCUS: SOUTH SUDAN'S HEALTH MINISTRY DECLARES CHOLERA OUTBREAK

South Sudan's minister of health Yolanda Awel Deng says the influx of refugees from Sudan is posing health risks at South Sudan's border crossings points; the family of former humanitarian worker Muki Johnson, who disappeared in Juba last week, is urging South Sudan's government to help find their loved one; former chairperson of South Sudan community in the Washington DC area says his country stands to benefit from America; plus, more.

Source: <https://www.voaafrica.com/a/7821144.html>.

SOUTH SUDAN IN FOCUS: SOUTH SUDAN CIVIL SERVANTS' ORDEAL

A group of 34 teachers are demanding \$205,200 from the non-profit group the Melut Development Committee; some civil servants in Eastern Equatoria state say they are forced to take extra jobs to feed their families; a South

Sudanese-born American Jok Madut Jok, who lives in Syracuse in New York state, says the U.S. election is important for the people of South Sudan; plus, more

SOUTH SUDAN IN FOCUS: UNITED NATIONS MISSION IN SOUTH SUDAN MARKS UN DAY

The Special Representative of UN Secretary General in South Sudan calls on South Sudanese leaders to work for lasting peace across the

country; U-S State Department sanctions on a top leader of the Sudan Armed Forces; U.S. electoral campaigns increase; plus, more.

Source: <https://www.voaafrica.com/a/7816951.html?withmediaplayer=1>.

SOUTH SUDAN IN FOCUS: SOUTH SUDAN'S LAWMAKER CALLS FOR DEPLOYMENT OF SECURITY FORCES IN WARRAP STATE

The Intergovernmental Authority on Development, or IGAD, is calling for women to be involved in peace and reconciliation efforts in Sudan; State Ministry of roads and bridges

in Eastern Equatoria state has imposed road taxes on roader users entering the State; a lawmaker calls on President Kiir to deploy security forces in Warrap state; plus, more.

Source: <https://www.voaafrica.com/a/7814069.html?withmediaplayer=1>.

IN SOUTH SUDAN, HUNGER COMPLICATES PLANS TO END WILDLIFE POACHING

CONSERVATIONISTS URGE THE PROTECTION OF WILDLIFE, BUT IN THE ABSENCE OF FOOD, MANY COMMUNITIES SAY THEY ARE FORCED TO HUNT TO SURVIVE.

3RD OCT 2024

Mading, South Sudan – On a hot morning in July, Michael Alier grabbed his assault rifle and

headed out on a motorcycle taxi, known locally as a boda boda, to the bush in search of food.

It was the wet season in Mading, some 200km from Juba, the capital of South Sudan.

At that time of year, the grassy wetland is lush and teeming with antelope who have made their way down from the Boma plateau in search of fresh water and greens to graze on.

Conservationists and the government say this is part of the world's largest land mammal migration, and highlight the collective responsibility to ensure its future preservation. As part of that, they want to end rampant poaching of the antelope.

But in South Sudan, the world's youngest country racked by decades of conflict, extreme poverty and catastrophic levels of hunger, the mammal makes for a hearty meal for many in need of food.

Alier, 28, says he has no choice but to hunt the animals. The beef and goat meat for sale at nearby shops is far too expensive on his 100,000 Sudan pound (\$166) monthly salary, which he earns working as a security guard on local farms.

"Life forces us to go and hunt," he said.

The bushmeat he hauls back has to feed nine people – five siblings, two parents, and two cousins. If he doesn't bring back a fresh kill, they usually have to skip meals. So, he makes the trip at least three times a week.

But it is a treacherous outing, as the antelope also attracts the attention of heavily armed gangs who poach them for profit. The hunting trips are a deadly game for people like Alier, but he feels he has no other choice.

"It's better to be killed by the armed criminals than to die of hunger at home," he said.

Alier's rugged self-reliance is admirable, but it presents a major quandary for South Sudan's cash-strapped government, which is under pressure from environmentalists to stamp out poaching even as it can barely feed its population of 11 million.

In June, President Salva Kiir urged security forces and the Ministry of Wildlife and its partners to "priorities the training and equipping of wildlife rangers to combat poaching and trafficking" of wildlife, saying those caught should be brought to court and punished.

The president was speaking in Juba at an event announcing the country's first-ever comprehensive aerial survey on the land mammal migration, which counted six million antelope on the move.

Great Nile Migration

The landlocked east African country situated in the Nile basin is home to one of the animal kingdom's most wondrous spectacles: a twice-yearly procession of antelopes known as the Great Nile Migration.

During the migration, the antelopes follow the water. When the swampy, low-lying floodplains of the Sudd start to dry out in December, the antelopes begin hurtling up to the Boma plateau in search of fresh water and vegetation. In May, when the White Nile overflows and revitalizes the Sudd's vegetation, they glide back down to their preferred habitat.

Conservationists say the mass migration is crucial to the region's ecosystem. As they graze across a 200300km migratory corridor, white-eared kob and tiang antelopes chew up a diverse range of plant species, excreting the

different seeds far and wide. This enriches the soil and promotes biodiversity.

While environmentalists want to crack down on poaching, it's a formidable challenge.

"The problem is two-way," explained Abraham Garang Bol, the executive director of the independent Environment Protection Agency, and a researcher and master's student in natural resource management at the University of Juba.

"One is the economic aspect: we are in an economic crisis where poverty levels affect everybody. Wildlife becomes an alternative source of food to local people, which is very hard for the government to stop.

"But at the same time the government needs to create an alternative," he added, saying the government "should bring services also to the community so that the community will be paid back" for helping protect wildlife.

"As the government and partners are trying to preserve this wildlife, locals or maybe communities living in the same area where those animals [are] should be given some money, some support, so that they will know they have other alternative benefits [besides having] wildlife as food," he said.

Meanwhile, John Lwong, an activist in Malakal working with the nonprofit Royal Aid for Development (ROAD), said asking South Sudanese to give up hunting without providing alternatives is completely unreasonable – especially when people go months without receiving salaries.

"How many months now have civil servants not received their salaries – almost a year or so? So how do you expect people to live?" said Lwong.

'Animals protected; people are not'

More than 82 percent of South Sudanese live on less than \$1.90 per day, according to World Bank data. And the UN says more than 1.6 million children under the age of five suffer from malnutrition, partly the result of flooding.

War in neighboring Sudan has meanwhile brought an influx of refugees, putting even more pressure on scarce food resources.

The plight of Alier's family is illustrative. In January 2022, they were driven out of their home in Baidit division by an armed gang that ransacked their village.

The gang killed 33 villagers, stole their livestock and crops, and torched their homes.

Alier and his nine relatives were displaced 30km south, to Mading, where they share a two-bedroom thatched roof home built of plastic sheets. They have no electricity and share two narrow boreholes for water with 1,140 other displaced families.

Most villagers don't have work and depend on the largesse of family members to survive.

Subject to years of violence and displacement, Alier and others are critical of government warnings not to poach animal meat, especially when it's keeping them alive: "Why is it that animals are protected and people's lives are not?" asked Alier.

"If you give us what to eat, we shall not complain," he said. "But for now, we say give us a chance. We are feeding our families with it."

Although displaced people are assisted with food rations on a monthly basis, they say this is not enough. When Alier doesn't go hunting, his family can go for two to three days without food unless they get support from relatives, he said.

Commercial poaching, community conservation

South Sudan's embattled government hopes its rich wildlife population could one day be a source of badly needed tourism revenue.

"If we manage to control the level of poaching, then tourists will come to the country and it is the way we can actually get the income," David Deng Adol, the government's director for wildlife in Jonglei State, told Al Jazeera.

"The government is not getting the income at the moment, but it is trying to invite investors [in] natural resources to establish a way of getting the revenue."

The government's anti-poaching efforts are tied to building up its six national parks and 12 game reserves that cover about 13 percent of the country.

South Sudan's populations of Grevy's zebra, Nubian giraffe and rhinoceros are just a few of the many on the brink of extinction.

For its unarmed wildlife forces, cracking down on armed poachers is no easy task.

In the past, South Sudan's poachers hunted with dogs and spears. That's no longer the case. Owing to years of armed conflict, today's poachers zip around on motorbikes armed with machineguns, letting them hit far-away targets and pursue animals 30-40km into the bush, said Adol.

Commercial poaching of wildlife in South Sudan is "at a scale that we have never witnessed before", Peter Fear head, the CEO of conservation nonprofit African Parks, noted in June when the land mammal survey was

released. "This wildlife and larger ecosystem is the basis for survival for multiple ethnic groupings which are often in conflict with each other over resources. Successful management of this landscape will only be possible through building trust with and amongst these ethnic groupings," he added in a statement.

South Sudan's government has been working with conservation NGO Fauna & Flora International (FFI) to get local communities more invested in the wildlife around them, hoping to encourage people to preserve animals for future generations, said Adol from the wildlife ministry.

"We have what is called community conservation. The FFI is doing community conservation awareness. So the communities are the ambassadors of wildlife," he added.

However, Bol from the Environment Protection Agency points out that even beyond the need for food, hunting and killing animals is something deeply rooted in culture, that will not lose its importance overnight. "Some of them now if you stop them [from hunting], they get surprised. They will say 'No, our grandfathers used to kill this animal,'" said Bol, referring to the practice of killing beasts for food, but also as a show of strength and bravery among village men.

"It is a source of pride," he added. "Like those who kill lions, they are named [for that], and they can feel proud that they are brave people."

To balance the priorities of conservation and culture going forward, Bol said, "People need to be informed, educated and shown that wildlife is important in other aspects and ways."

Source: <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2024/10/3/in-south-sudan-hunger-complicates-plans-to-end-wildlife-poaching>.

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