

UN Report: 2014 Saw Extremists Use of Rape, Sexual Slavery

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In a report released Monday, the U.N. chief expressed "grave concern" over sexual violence perpetrated by armed groups, including those promoting extremist ideologies in Iraq, Syria, Somalia, Nigeria, Mali, Libya and Yemen.

"The confluence of crises wrought by violent extremism has revealed a shocking trend of sexual violence employed as a tactic of terror by radical groups," Ban said.

The secretary-general said efforts "to degrade or destroy" the Islamic State group, Boko Haram, al-Shabab, Ansar Dine and al-Qaida affiliates "are an essential part of the fight against conflict-related sexual violence."

The report focuses on 19 countries engulfed in conflict or trying to recover from fighting where sexual violence including rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution and forced pregnancy occurs, mainly against women and girls but also against boys and men. It lists 45 groups in Central African Republic, Ivory Coast, Congo, Iraq, Mali, Somalia, South Sudan and Syria as well as Boko Haram in Nigeria that are "credibly suspected of committing or being responsible for patterns of rape" in conflict — 13 of them for the first time.

The report said "one of the most alarming episodes of 2014" was the April 14 abduction of 276 secondary students by Boko Haram from a school in the northern Nigerian town of Chibok.

Issued a day before the first anniversary of the girls' abduction, the report said Boko Haram

often forces women and girls it seizes into marriages that entail repeated rapes.

"Forced marriage, enslavement and the 'sale' of kidnapped women and girls are central to Boko Haram's modus operandi and ideology," it said. "Abducted girls who refuse marriage or sexual contact within marriage have faced violence and death threats."

Since mid-2014, the report said, "there has been a significant increase in the number of reported cases of sexual violence perpetrated by terrorist groups," especially the Islamic State group which "uses sexual violence to spread terror, persecute ethnic and religious minorities and suppress communities that oppose its ideology."

The report singled out that group's abduction of hundreds of Yazidi women and girls in Iraq, some of whom were taken into Syria and "sold" in markets to be used as sex slaves. It said "three cases of forced abortion perpetrated because of the ethnicity of the victim were documented by the government" of Iraq.

In Colombia, the report said, "women working with displaced communities and calling for land restitution have been targeted by armed groups and subjected to repeated sexual assault." In the Central African Republic, the report said 2,527 cases of conflict-related sexual violence were documented in 2014, adding that "all parties have used sexual violence to subjugate and humiliate opponents."

In Sudan's western Darfur region, it said the number of displaced civilians has increased over the past year and so have reports of sexual violence. And in South Sudan, it said sexual violence remains prevalent — including gang rape, castration, forced nudity and forced abortion — which is "exacerbated by impunity and a militarized society in which gender inequality is pronounced."

On a positive note, the report said Congo's government took "unprecedented steps" including prosecuting high-ranking officers for sexual violence and paying reparations to survivors. But at the same time it said 2014 saw a resurgence of violence by armed groups including an increase in rape.

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