

Somalia: UN Humanitarian Wing Warns of Pervasive Sexual Violence in Somalia
By UN News Service
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Sexual and gender-based violence continues to be a pervasive issue in Somalia, the United Nations humanitarian wing said today, adding that many times it is perpetrated by armed men in the Horn of Africa nation.

According to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), during the first half of the year, there were some 800 cases of sexual and gender-based violence reported in the Somali capital, Mogadishu.

OCHA spokesperson Jens Laerke told a news conference in Geneva that rapes continue to be perpetrated by unknown armed men and men wearing military uniform. Sexual and gender-based violence also includes domestic violence, harmful traditional practices such as female genital mutilation, and early and forced marriage, he said, adding that the majority of the survivors were women aged 18 and above.

Last year, there were at least 1,700 people affected by sexual and gender-based violence in Somalia, according to the Office of the Secretary-General's Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict, and protection of the survivors continues to be a major concern. Mr. Laerke pointed to a case in January in which a woman who alleged she had been raped by security forces and the journalist who interviewed her about the allegations were both arrested.

In the same briefing, the spokesperson for the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), Marixie Mercado, said that around one-third of victims of sexual violence were children and that last year UNICEF and its partners had provided assistance to some 2,200 victims of sexual violence in the country.

Assistance included the provision of thousands of fuel-efficient stoves as women were at risk of attack when collecting firewood. UNICEF has also provided support for survivors, including livelihood and socio-economic assistance, as well as psycho-social assistance.

Mr. Laerke added that in spite of the precarious conditions for humanitarian agencies, OCHA would continue to provide medical and psychological support, and legal counselling in conjunction with its partners.