

International

Human trafficking raises alarm in divided Cyprus

Breakaway north considered as bad as Afghanistan

NICOSIA: Cyprus's frozen conflict is providing fertile ground for human traffickers with cases at "alarming" levels in the EU member state, and the breakaway north considered as bad as Afghanistan. "I love her, but at the same time she reminds me about my past," said one Cameroonian trafficking survivor, referring to her young daughter. "There was so much abuse during those months," added the woman in her 20s, who said she was rescued by a client from her ordeal.

"I didn't die ... and God saved me, so I know that He has a plan for my life," she told an NGO working with survivors which requested anonymity to protect her identity. Last year the US State Department downgraded Cyprus in its annual Trafficking in Persons Report from Tier 1, the highest ranking, to Tier 2, citing problems including protracted court proceedings and a lack of convictions.

While the report does not formally rank the breakaway Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, only recognized by Ankara, it says the territory would be in Tier 3 with the worst offenders including Afghanistan and North Korea if it did. Cyprus has been split since 1974, after Turkey invaded in response to a Greek-sponsored coup.

And the lack of progress in resolving the conflict shifts attention and resources away from issues like human trafficking, said Nasia Hadjigeorgiou, assistant professor in transitional justice and human rights from the University of Central Lancashire Cyprus. The stalemate also means there is no collaboration between law enforcement on the two sides, Hadjigeorgiou said. So human trafficking

across the island as a whole is "literally not being dealt with," she said.

'Red alarm'

In the north, traffickers are abusing student visa regulations, said Fezile Osum from the north's Human Rights Platform, calling the situation a "red alarm". The organization manages an anti-trafficking hotline that has identified 12 victims—all of sex trafficking—since late last year.

In some cases, young women from African countries are brought in as students but when they arrive



Traffickers abusing student visa regulations

"they are locked in private apartments and forced into (commercial) sex", Osum said. That's on top of trafficking cases from nightclubs, where women on "barmaid" and "hostess" visas must get regular STD checks despite organized prostitution being illegal in the territory, she added. One survivor said clubs sometimes used blackmail and drugs to control trafficked women, Osum said.



NICOSIA: Awareness posters about human trafficking are seen during an interview at the Cyprus police's anti-trafficking unit in the capital Nicosia, on February 16, 2022. — AFP

The north criminalized human trafficking for the first time in 2020, but Osum said no convictions had yet been recorded. She knew of one victim who had reported her ordeal to police in the south, only to be told, "this happened in the north... how can we collect evidence that you were

actually trafficked?" Turkish Cypriot politician Dogus Derya said the territory's unrecognized status meant it was unable to cooperate with international bodies to fight organized crime. The north "can be seen as an area of 'impunity' for human traffickers", she said. — AFP

Hundreds rally against threat to close Turkish women's rights group

ANKARA: Hundreds of people demonstrated on Saturday in several Turkish cities including Istanbul and Ankara against a move to close one of the country's most respected women's rights groups. "It is not possible to stop our fight. We are not going to allow the closure of our association," the secretary-general of We Will Stop Femicide, Fidan Ataselim, told AFP.

An Istanbul prosecutor on Wednesday filed a lawsuit aimed at shutting down the association for "activity against law and morals". We Will Stop Femicide publicises the murder and abuse of women in the mostly Muslim but officially secular state. According to Ataselim, the lawsuit accuses the group of conducting activities that violate Turkey's "laws and morals".

The association was a vocal critic of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's decision last year to pull Turkey out of the Istanbul Convention, which requires countries to set up laws aimed at preventing and prosecuting violence against women. We Will Stop Femicide says 280 women were killed in Turkey last year, many of the murders committed by family members. Another 217 women died in suspicious circumstances, including those officially registered as suicide, the group says.

Ataselim said the lawsuit was filed based on a complaint registered by a group of Turks through a website set up by the presidency to field citizens'



ANKARA: Women hold up banners and shout slogans as they protest against the closure case filed against 'We Will Stop Femicide Platform Association' in Ankara on April 16, 2022. — AFP

requests. The complaint accused the group of "destroying the family based on the pretext of defending women's rights", Ataselim said. The language is similar to that used by Erdogan in his decision to withdraw from the Istanbul Convention, which Turkey signed in 2011.

Social conservatives in Turkey claim the convention promotes homosexuality and threatens traditional family values. "Don't prosecute women, but murderers!" Hundreds of demonstrators gathered in Istanbul shouted. Representatives of opposition parties as well as relatives of domestic abuse victims took part in the demonstration. "These women are fighters... I wanted to be there to support them," said Nihat Palandoken, the father of a young girl killed in 2017. — AFP

escalated into an 11-day war between Zionists and Palestinian militants in Gaza. Despite the tensions, a few streets away from the Al-Aqsa compound hundreds of Christians staged a noisy parade through the alleys of Jerusalem's Old City to mark Easter at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre where they believe Jesus was crucified. Marching bands led the processions with drumming and bagpipes, before worshippers gathered in the cavernous church for mass.

In another development, Pope Francis on Sunday called for peace in Ukraine during this "Easter of war" as he delivered the traditional Easter Sunday Urbi et Orbi address on St Peter's Square at the Vatican. "May there be peace for war-torn Ukraine, so sorely tried by the violence and destruction of the cruel and senseless war into which it was dragged," the pontiff said. "Our eyes, too, are incredulous on this Easter of war," he said. "May the leaders of nations hear people's plea for peace." "Let there be a decision for peace. May there be an end to the flexing of muscles while people are suffering."

"Our hearts, too, have been filled with fear and anguish, as so many of our brothers and sisters have had to lock themselves away in order to be safe from bombing," Francis said. The pontiff pointed that two years of the coronavirus pandemic had taken "a heavy toll." "It was time to come out of the tunnel together, hand in hand, pooling our strengths and resources. Instead, we are showing that we still have within us the spirit of Cain, who saw Abel not as a brother, but as a rival, and thought about how to eliminate him."

Pope said he held "in my heart all the many Ukrainian victims, the millions of refugees and internally displaced persons, the divided families, the elderly left to themselves, the lives broken and the cities razed to the ground. I see the faces of the orphaned children fleeing from the war." And he continued: "May the conflict in Europe also make us more concerned about other situations of conflict, suffering and sorrow, situations that affect all too many areas of our world, situations that we cannot overlook and do not want to forget." — AFP

S African deluge easing but flood emergency lingers

DURBAN: Rains were expected to let up in South Africa's flood-ravaged east Sunday after one of the deadliest storms in living memory killed nearly 400 and left tens of thousands homeless. Floodwaters engulfed parts of the southeastern coastal city of Durban and surrounding areas this week ripping apart roads, destroying hospitals and sweeping away homes and those trapped inside.

The city of 3.5 million was overcast but national forecaster with the South African Weather Service, Puseletso Mofokeng, said "rainfall is actually clearing". "The rainfall is going to clear all completely as we move to Wednesday," he told AFP. But recovery operations and humanitarian relief continued in the coastal city of 3.5 million whose beaches and warm Indian Ocean waters would normally have been teeming with Easter holidaymakers.

The number of flood-related emergency calls had decreased compared to early last week. "Emergency services are still currently on high alert on Sunday morning," Robert McKenzie of the provincial KwaZulu-Natal emergency services told AFP. It rained on Saturday and overnight, "however now, it has stopped," said McKenzie. Even so, emergency services were busy attending to a scene in the district of Pinetown where a house collapsed overnight.

"Fortunately now the flood waters have receded and (some) roads cleared. It's a lot easier to access

the community," he said. Christians congregated at churches across the city to pray for those affected by the floods as they celebrated Easter Sunday. Government and charities were marshalling relief aid for the more than 40,000 people left homeless by the raging floodwaters. The government has announced an immediate one billion rand (\$68 million) in emergency relief funding.

Hospitals, schools destroyed

Deputy Social Development minister Hendrietta Bogopane-Zulu, said some 340 social workers had been deployed to offer support to traumatised survivors with many still missing children and other relatives. The death toll rose Saturday to 398 while 27 people were reported still missing, the government said in a Saturday statement. Most casualties were in Durban, a port city and a major economic hub.

Parts of the city have been without water and electricity since Monday after floods ripped away infrastructure. Desperate residents have been seen carrying buckets of water using shopping trolleys. Scores of hospitals and hundreds of schools have been destroyed. The intensity of the floods took South Africa, the most economically advanced African country, by surprise. It has previously watched similar tragedies hit neighboring countries such as cyclone-prone Mozambique.

President Cyril Ramaphosa has postponed a working visit to Saudi Arabia that was scheduled to begin Tuesday. "The loss of nearly 400 lives and thousands of homes, as well as the economic impact and the destruction of infrastructure, calls for all hands on deck," said Ramaphosa. The country is still struggling to recover from the COVID pandemic and deadly riots last year that killed more than 350 people, mostly in the now flood-struck southeastern region. — AFP

Pope calls for free access to...

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saw barefoot Jewish worshippers leaving the site, protected by heavily armed police. Outside the Old City, in Zionist-annexed East Jerusalem, Palestinian youths threw rocks at passing buses, resulting in seven people being treated for light wounds at Shaare Zedek hospital, the medical facility said.

Senior Palestinian official Hussein Al Sheikh said Sunday that "Zionist dangerous escalation in the Al-Aqsa compound ... is a blatant attack on our holy places", and called on the international community to intervene. The chief of the Hamas Islamist movement which controls the Palestinian enclave of Gaza meanwhile warned Zionists that "Al-Aqsa is ours and ours alone". "Our people have the right to access it and pray in it, and we will not bow down to repression and terror," Ismail Haniyeh said in a statement.

Later Sunday morning, mosques in Palestinian neighborhoods of annexed east Jerusalem broadcast calls for people to head towards the Al-Aqsa compound. Weeks of mounting tensions saw two deadly attacks by Palestinians in or near the coastal city of Tel Aviv in late March and early April, alongside mass arrests by Zionist forces in the occupied West Bank.

A total of 14 people have been killed in attacks against Zionists since March 22, including a shooting spree in Bnei Brak, an Orthodox Jewish city in greater Tel Aviv. Twenty-two Palestinians have been killed over the same period, including assailants who targeted Zionists, according to an AFP tally. On Friday morning, police clashed with Palestinians in the Al-Aqsa compound, including inside the Al-Aqsa mosque, drawing strong condemnation from Muslim countries. Those clashes wounded some 150 people.

The United Nations has called for calm, a year after clashes in and around the mosque compound

Lessons of Ramadan...

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Most people probably would have said, "The neighbor sent it to me" or "A caravan has just arrived from Yemen" or "I bought it this morning from the farmers' market." Although any answer would satisfy the most curious person, it didn't satisfy her.

She was so devout and so wise that she could see beyond the obvious and the circumstantial - she could see the Truth. So she answered, "This is from Allah. Verily, Allah provides sustenance to whom He wills, without limit." (3:37) We should respond as wisely as Maryam when asked about our blessings. The Quran says, "Whatever good has come to you, it is from God" (4:79). So if someone asks you, I love your clothes! Where did you get them? you should realize that they are from God.

Or if someone remarks that you are so strong, you should acknowledge the source of all strength: "It's from God!" Or if your kids ask, what's for dinner, the best response is "rice and chicken from God."

Ukrainians vow to fight...

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While several cities are under siege, he said, not one—with the exception of Kherson in the south—had fallen. He said more than 900 towns and cities had been liberated. The capture of Mariupol, however, would represent a severe blow to Ukraine, both strategically and symbolically, as it would help Moscow open a land route to the Russian-occupied Crimean peninsula.

Shmyhal again implored Western countries to send more ammunition and weapons to bolster out-manned Ukrainian forces, while also pleading for

That's the outlook that Maryam had: appreciative, humble, insightful. Look around and start counting your blessings - from the food you expect to eat tonight, to the soft pillow on your bed, to the eyes that are reading these words. If it's good, it's from God.

Gratitude is one of the lessons of Ramadan. The Quran says, "[God desires] that you complete the number [of days required to fast], and that you extol God for His having guided you aright, and that you render your thanks [unto Him]." (285) Since gratitude is one of the goals of fasting, this Ramadan and always, follow the example of Maryam, mother of Jesus, by acknowledging the source of all your blessings. So great is our Lord, that he appreciates our appreciation, saying, "If you give thanks, I will surely give you more..." (14:7)

Courtesy of the TIES Center: As one of the projects funded and managed by Kuwaiti Society for Cultural Dialogue, TIES aims at empowering Kuwait's expats through social and educational services that promote a positive and productive role in society, and to facilitate opportunities for intra- and interfaith interactions that promote social solidarity. For more information, please call 25231015/6 or e-mail: info@tiescenter.net.

more financial help. The country, he said, is seeing a "huge humanitarian catastrophe," and needs further help "to save our economy for future recovery." "Now, only half of our economy is working" and Ukraine faces a huge monthly budget deficit of \$5 billion, Shmyhal said. He said Ukrainian officials would be in Washington in the coming week to press the country's needs at the spring meeting of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund.

Meanwhile, a Russian ultimatum for the last remaining Ukrainian forces in Mariupol to surrender expired on Sunday, with Moscow poised for a major strategic victory in the southeastern port city. In Kyiv, renewed Russian air strikes hit an armaments factory, despite Moscow shifting its military focus to gaining control of the eastern Donbas region and forging a land corridor to already-annexed Crimea. — AFP