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UK Armed Forces: Institutional acquiescence in rape of hundreds of Kenyan women?

Six hundred and fifty allegations of rape have so far been made against members of the UK army posted to Kenya for training over a period of more than 30 years, Irene Khan, Secretary General of Amnesty International said today.

"The fact that so many rape claims over such a long period of time were neither investigated nor prosecuted shows a systemic failure of the UK army and may amount to institutional acquiescence which encouraged a pattern of grave human rights violations by members of the UK army."

Amnesty International has received information that UK Army officials in Kenya may have become aware of some of the rape allegations as early as 1977.

"It is particularly worrying that both the UK and Kenyan authorities failed to investigate these allegations, and the fact that there were no repercussions for the perpetrators of these crimes inevitably contributed to their widespread repetition," Ms Khan said.

Speaking at the launch of a new report *United Kingdom: Decades of impunity: Serious allegations of rape of Kenyan women by UK Army Personnel*, Irene Khan called on the UK government to establish without delay an independent and impartial commission of inquiry. The inquiry should examine the conduct of the UK Army in light of hundreds of allegations of rape of Kenyan women by UK Army personnel over the course of more than three decades.

"The women and children born allegedly as a result of these attacks have been suffering in silence for over thirty years -- stigmatized, discriminated and outcast within their own community. They have suffered a double injustice -- not only were they sexually abused but the crimes against them have never been properly acknowledged let alone thoroughly investigated."

"For decades they have been waiting for justice - only through the delivery of justice can they overcome their ordeal."

This report is largely based on information collected by an Amnesty International mission to central Kenya in June 2003 that interviewed women alleged to have been raped, chiefs, and witnesses.

Amnesty International also called on the Kenyan authorities to ensure that all allegations of rape made against UK soldiers are thoroughly and independently investigated either by instructing competent Kenyan authorities to conduct such an investigation or by instructing relevant Kenyan authorities to liaise and cooperate fully with UK investigating authorities; and to ensure that anyone reasonably suspected of criminal conduct be brought to justice in the course of a fair trial.

The organization also called on the UK authorities to ensure the protection of respect for the dignity of victims and witnesses.

Testimony

Oseina Thomas Koitat was born in 1964. She was reportedly attacked when she was in her late teens, possibly in 1984, at around midday, when she was taking her sheep home. A group of seven UK soldiers was walking past her and they greeted her. It is reported that, suddenly, one of the soldiers ran towards her. She became scared and started to run as well, but tripped and fell on her knees. The soldier reportedly caught up with her and held her down. She screamed and struggled. She tried to get up, but the other soldiers came and held her down. Oseina Koitat told Amnesty International that there were seven soldiers: she remembers being raped by four of them, and that she then lost consciousness. It is reported that the men who raped her were white and were wearing military fatigues, boots, a headgear of leafy branches, and were carrying large backpacks and guns.

When Oseina Koitat regained consciousness, she found herself in a pool of blood. She was angry and confused. She told Amnesty International that she felt like mud. She got up and walked for a long time, feeling dizzy. When she was close to her home, she saw the councillor's car parked nearby. Her neighbours were in the car and they asked what had happened. She reportedly told them that she had been raped. They took her home to her husband, who brought her to Nanyuki hospital where she stayed for one day. The following day the chief of the village went to visit her at home. Her husband reported the rape to the police.

At the time of her rape Oseina Thomas Koitat had two children and she has had another six since, but she stated that her health has never been the same again since the attack. As a result of the attack, she bled profusely, and suffered back and stomach pains.

After the rape, some people stopped socializing with her, and she feels ashamed because everybody -- even her grandchildren -- knows what happened to her. When she attends meetings related to bringing legal proceedings in connection with the alleged rapes, she does not tell her family where she is going and why, but everybody knows. Since the attack, she often feels very angry; when she sees a military vehicle or soldiers her heart beats faster. At times, while she is going about her daily chores, all of a sudden the thought of the attack crosses her mind and she stops and feels enraged.

Details of other cases are available in the report: *United Kingdom: Decades of impunity: Serious allegations of rape of Kenyan women by UK Army Personnel.*

Public Document

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