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UN 'Horrificed' by Libya Slave Auctions

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres [described himself as "horrificed" on Monday following a flurry of reports showing slave auctions being held in Libya](#), with African migrants being sold to the highest bidder.

Guterres urged all countries to adopt the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime's protocol barring human trafficking. The overwhelming majority of the planet signed this convention already but there remain a few glaring omissions, including Pakistan. Libya, however, is a signatory.



Guterres went on to warn that such actions were not just "egregious abuses of human rights," but might amount to crimes against humanity under international law. Treaties regarding crimes against humanity nearly universally include enslavement as such a crime. The adoption of such practices within Libya is a very recent phenomenon, with African migrants historically flocking to the country during the Gadhafi era to find work. After the ouster of Gadhafi, however, many Libyans have seen Africans as de facto supporters of the old regime, and have targeted them as a result.

This was most glaring in 2011 when the town of Tawergha, an overwhelmingly black town, was violently depopulated by the Misrata militia. Refugees from Tawergha were repeatedly targeted in trying to escape to other parts of the country, and were presented as “collaborators.”

It is still not clear where in Libya these auctions are taking place, or how prevalent they have yet become. It appears many of the slaves were originally captured by militias to be ransomed off, and were simply sold into slavery when they couldn’t get ransoms. The expectation is that they are broadly being sold as farm laborers.