



WOMEN'S INTERNATIONAL LEAGUE FOR
PEACE & FREEDOM

**Submission to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against
Women, (Virtual) Pre-sessional working group (5 July – 9 July 2021)**

List of issues for Djibouti

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Submitted on 7 June 2021

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I. Introduction

In 2017, the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) published the report “Remote warfare and sexual violence in Djibouti”.¹ The report provides some insight and analysis of the militarisation and human rights abuses in Djibouti, focusing in particular on the relationship between the presence of foreign military bases and sexual violence. Since the issues addressed in the report are relevant to the Committee’s preparation of the list of issues for Djibouti, in particular regarding the issue of trafficking and prostitution, our organization is sending it as annex to the present submission. This submission provides an overview of the report’s key findings as well as suggested questions that could be asked in relation to those.

II. Overview of key findings of the report on Djibouti

Djibouti is home to the military bases of some of the most powerful countries in the world, including the United States, China, France, Japan, Saudi Arabia, and Italy. Russia, Spain, Germany, and the United Kingdom also have troops operating out of Djibouti. Most of these forces participate in antipiracy initiatives off the coast of Somalia. Some are also engaged in training and capacity building with East African military forces. The US military also runs special forces units and drone strike operations out of its base, Camp Lemonnier—the only officially recognised US military base on the continent.

Heavily militarised by foreign powers, the Djiboutian government collects at least \$300 million of rent per year, while nearly two-thirds of the Djiboutian population lives in poverty and half the labour force is unemployed. Djibouti ranks 142nd (out of 180) on the Corruption Perceptions Index of Transparency International.²

Djibouti received the lowest ranking in the 2016 Trafficking in Persons Report published by the US State Department. In 2017, Djibouti was once again elevated to the “Tier 2 Watch List” on the basis that the government made “key achievements” to meet the “minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking,” even though the report acknowledges it has not met these standards.³

¹ <https://reachingcriticalwill.org/images/documents/Publications/remote-warfare-sexual-violence-djibouti-2nd-edition.pdf>

² <https://www.transparency.org/en/countries/djibouti>

³ <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/271342.pdf>

About 100,000 men, women, and children from Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Somalia transit through Djibouti each year, most heading to Saudi Arabia, Yemen, or other Middle Eastern countries. Since March 2015, Yemenis and others have also fled Yemen via Djibouti. These people are fleeing poverty, drought, war, or repression, looking for better opportunities abroad. However, these migrants and refugees are at grave risk of trafficking, forced labour, sexual exploitation and abuse, and forced prostitution.

The foreign military presence in Djibouti exacerbates the risks of trafficking and forced prostitution, providing a steady market of women, girls, boys, and non-binary people who are forced into sex work due to poverty or who are trafficked for sex. The combination of high numbers of foreign military personnel, flows of migrants, high numbers of refugees, and low unemployment and opportunities for work creates a powder keg for sexual violence and exploitation.

III. Suggestions for questions to Djibouti

- What are the Djiboutian government's efforts in preventing abuses of rights of women and girls in relation with the presence of foreign military bases in Djibouti?
- Provide information as to whether the government collaborates with the governments with military bases in Djibouti to:
 - provide training so that all troops are aware of the crimes related to having sex with a trafficked person and in all cases of sex with minors;
 - ensure real investigation and accountability mechanisms are in place in cases of allegations of abuses; and
 - place all civilian contractors of foreign military bases under the same regulations and obligations as military personnel through status of forces agreements (an agreement between a host country and a foreign country stationing military forces there).
- Djibouti should also provide information on:
 - measures put in place to ensure that survivors of trafficking are provided with effective, accessible and gender-sensitive access to justice;
 - investigations into allegations of human rights abuses, including of acts of sexual and gender-based violence against women and girls, committed by private military and security companies contracted by all the military bases in Djibouti, as well as by members of foreign troops posted in Djibouti;
 - the number of convictions for such crimes;

- steps taken to overcome challenges in conducting investigations and in establishing convictions;
- the regulations and legal obligations in home governments of foreign troops regarding their conduct and accountability mechanisms for abuses committed in Djibouti;
- How has the Djiboutian government made information about the risks of abuse in relation to the foreign military bases publicly available to people, including migrants, refugees, and NGOs supporting victims of trafficking and sexual exploitation, in Djibouti?
- What steps has Djibouti taken to develop a National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security? How is this process incorporating Djibouti's compliance with UN Security Council resolution 1325 with regard to preventing abuse and exploitation of women and girls by foreign troops and ensure accountability for commission of such harms?
- Has Djibouti taken steps to demilitarise its economy? Rather than hosting foreign military bases, are there ways the Djiboutian government can work with the international community to ensure economic and other support to address the chronic human rights situation in the country?
- People on the move from other states in the region will continue to flee unless and until the root causes of forced displacement are addressed, including armed conflict, poverty, and environmental degradation. What measures is Djibouti willing to undertake to promote and support the development a strategic and integrated plan for the region based on the realisation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as an alternative to militarised security policies?

IV. Annex: 2017 WILPF report on Djibouti

Remote warfare and sexual violence in Djibouti, August 2017, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, available at:

<https://reachingcriticalwill.org/images/documents/Publications/remote-warfare-sexual-violence-djibouti-2nd-edition.pdf>

Sent also as a separate file.