

Ebola aid workers 'forced job seekers into sex'

Sean O'Neill Chief Reporter

The World Health Organisation is facing a new wave of sexual misconduct allegations, including rape, by aid workers in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

The UN agency is at the centre of claims that women were forced to have sex with humanitarian staff when they applied for jobs during an ebola outbreak in the northeast of the country.

More than 20 women from the town of Butembo gave accounts of their experiences to journalists from the New Humanitarian news agency and Thomson Reuters Foundation. Last

year 51 women from nearby Beni made similar allegations to the reporters of a "jobs for sex" scandal.

The women said their abusers came from a number of NGOs and UN agencies but the name of the WHO was raised most frequently. Many of the women worked as cleaners at ebola treatment centres but said they had been employed only after having sex with men working for aid agencies.

One woman revealed a WhatsApp message from an aid worker which said: "If I give you work, what will you give me in return?" Another woman said she had been raped in a hotel room by a Cameroonian aid worker when she

went for what she expected to be an interview for a WHO job.

Three pregnancies were reported and one woman said her sister had died after drinking an illicit medication that she had been told would terminate the pregnancy. "If it weren't for this ebola response, my sister would still be alive and fighting for her children," the woman said.

Staff at a local hotel claimed WHO workers invited women to the bar, bought them drinks and tried to persuade them to visit their bedrooms.

One former hotel worker said: "What was happening here was plain to see. Anybody living here would've known

that it was happening. It wasn't a secret."

The WHO has already asked an independent commission to investigate the alleged abuses and exploitation in the country. It will also be asked to look at the new claims.

Tedros Ghebreyesus, director general of the WHO, said this month that the commission marked the first time an independent body had examined allegations of sexual exploitation at an UN agency. He added: "The commission's task is to establish the facts, identify and support survivors and provide reports that will enable us to hold perpetrators to account. I also hope this novel

approach will help us to better identify the root causes and systemic weaknesses that allow sexual exploitation and abuse to happen, or that prevent us from stopping it."

Britain is the third largest donor to the WHO and increased its contribution last year to £240 million.

The Commons international development committee said in January that the prevalence of sexual misconduct was a "scourge on the aid sector".

The Times revealed in April that Oxfam had suspended two senior aid workers over claims of sexual harassment and bullying in the country. The charity's investigation continues.



Green with envy A malachite urn that was presented to Queen Victoria in 1839 by Tsar Nicholas I is dusted in preparation for the reopening of Windsor Castle

Shrinking stratosphere leaves satellites in a spin

Ben Webster Environment Editor

Greenhouse gas emissions are shrinking the stratosphere and the reduction could affect satellite operations and navigation systems, a study has found.

The layer of the atmosphere, which sits above the troposphere where humans live and weather occurs, has contracted by about 400 metres since 1980, the research revealed.

The authors, from Charles University in Prague and Columbia University in New York, predicted that the stratosphere could lose almost another kilometre of thickness by 2080 unless man-made emissions were sharply reduced.

The contraction "may affect satellite trajectories ... radio waves, and eventually the overall performance of GPS and other space-based navigational systems", according to the study in the journal *Environmental Research Letters*.

The bottom of the stratosphere is between 10km and 20km above ground, varying with latitude and the season. Its highest point is at an altitude of between 50km and 60km.

The findings are further evidence of

the effect that emissions caused by humans are having on the planet.

Previous research found that while increased carbon dioxide concentrations had warmed the troposphere, they had also cooled the stratosphere.

The new study found that the contraction of the stratosphere was due partly to this cooling but also to "complex radiative and chemical feedbacks".

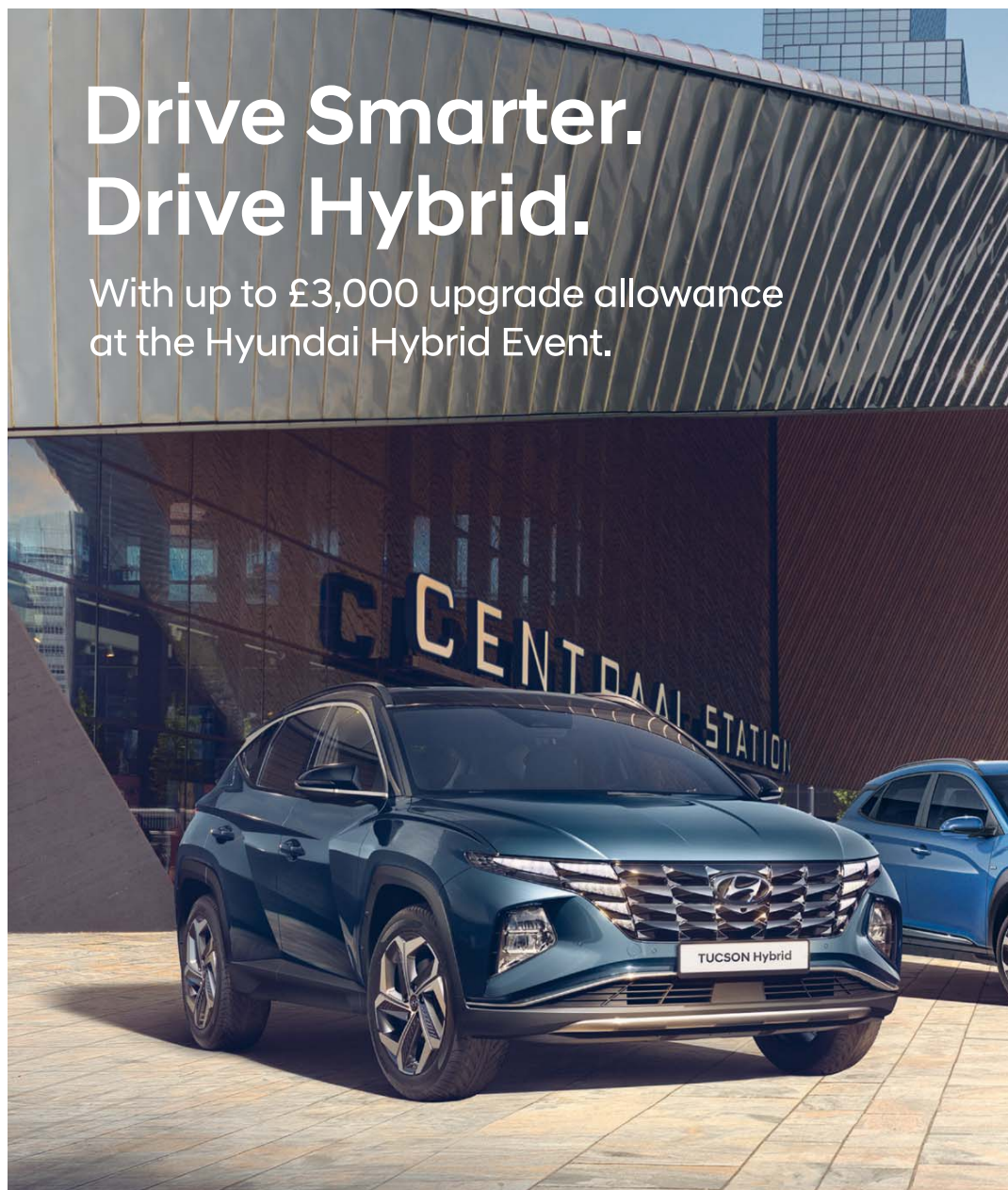
Paul Williams, professor of atmospheric science at Reading University, who was not involved in the new study, said that it showed that the shrinking of the stratosphere was primarily caused by greenhouse gases and not by depletion of the ozone layer.

"This finding is significant, because it means the shrinking effect will continue long after the ozone layer recovers," he said.

"If (and it is a big if) the shrinking stratosphere were to lower all the atmospheric layers above it, low-altitude satellites would experience reduced air resistance, which could modify their trajectories. Any change to the altitude of the electrically charged layer could alter the transmission of radio waves."

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