

United Nations



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Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

**UNDER-SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR HUMANITARIAN AFFAIRS AND
EMERGENCY RELIEF COORDINATOR, STEPHEN O'BRIEN**

REMARKS TO THE PRESS ON SOUTH SUDAN
New York, 10 August 2016

Checked against delivery

Thank you.

I have just returned from a three-day visit to South Sudan, where I had the opportunity to see for myself the enormous and complex humanitarian crisis facing the people of this young country, and the impact of recent fighting and violence.

This was my second visit to South Sudan since I assumed this role last June. Sadly, in the past year, the humanitarian situation has significantly deteriorated, including in areas that were relatively stable, and displacement and hunger are now widespread across the country.

During my visit I travelled to Wau and Aweil, where I was able to meet with displaced and severely food insecure people and hear first-hand the stories of their plight.

Women in Wau told me how they were attacked and displaced multiple times; I spoke personally with three courageous women who told me how women and girls were raped, and men and boys were killed, abducted or prevented from seeking protection. They did tell me that they need security to continue their lives.

Let me be clear: people in South Sudan are not just fleeing their homes because they need food, shelter or medical care and school for their children. They are fleeing through fear for their lives – just as you or I would if faced with the same hideous threat. So we must protect them, and we must save their lives with food, water, medical care and shelter.

In Aweil, I met a woman who brought her 8-month-old daughter, Icahn, to a treatment centre for severe acute malnutrition. The mother herself was so malnourished that she could no longer breastfeed. She had already lost the baby's twin due to malnutrition not long before. I can add that that 8-month-old baby weighed only three kilogrammes.

The situations that I saw in Wau and Aweil are of course emblematic of the devastating fate that has befallen this country, even since I last visited, and over recent times.

In July 2015, both of these locations were seen as beacons of hope and prospects for development. Today, one is mired in conflict and the other is facing the worst food insecurity it has seen in many, many years – and is at real risk of getting worse, despite the incredible work of humanitarian organizations.

But Wau and Aweil are just the tip of the iceberg.

In each location where there has been fighting, civilians have been attacked and forcibly displaced. Over two million people have fled their homes since December 2013. Some 1.6 million people are displaced inside South Sudan, with more than 900,000 people having fled to neighbouring countries.

Over the last month some 70,000 South Sudanese crossed the border into Uganda as refugees. Across the country, some 4.8 million people are severely food insecure and a quarter of a million children are severely malnourished. Again this year we are battling a cholera outbreak.

During my visit, I met with His Excellency the President of the Republic of South Sudan, Mr. Salva Kiir Mayardit, and his most senior Government officials, to discuss the dire and worsening humanitarian crisis.

I expressed in clear terms my shock and dismay at the appalling reports of violations committed against civilians during fighting in recent months, including in Juba. In particular, I condemned the heinous acts of sexual violence carried out against women and girls, including by members of the armed forces.

I also reiterated the need for humanitarians to be granted free, safe and unhindered access to all people in need, wherever they may be, and for humanitarian workers and their assets to be respected. Humanitarians are in South Sudan to save lives and for no other reason. Our task and our demand by the UN and beyond is to impartially meet the urgent and severe humanitarian and protection needs of the millions of suffering people in this country.

Humanitarian workers are saving lives while risking their own, and I am appalled that they continue to be harassed, targeted and killed. When I visited last year, 27 of our colleagues sadly had lost their lives and many more were missing and unaccounted for. Today, the number of aid workers killed since December 2013 is 57. This is unacceptable and unconscionable, and I urged the President to take immediate action to end the impunity that has prevailed to date.

I met with humanitarian partners and members of the diplomatic community in South Sudan to discuss the grave situation and ways to scale up the humanitarian operation.

I did stress my admiration and support for the unwavering commitment and courage of aid workers, who continue to alleviate suffering, despite the immense challenges they face each day. And I paid special tribute to the NGOs whose staff are on the frontlines of humanitarian response.

I also met with the leadership of the UN mission, UNMISS, to discuss the many challenges facing South Sudan and efforts underway by the United Nations to better protect civilians both inside its bases and beyond.

The people of this country have suffered far too much. There is no military solution to this conflict; the fighting must stop and the atrocities must end immediately. I call on all armed actors to immediately silence the guns, end the culture of impunity, and allow civilians to live in peace.

I thank the international community for their continued generosity to South Sudan. Already this year, donors have given more than half a billion dollars for the Humanitarian Response Plan. But we still have a gap, of more than US\$700 million, and this will increase once the appeal is revised in the coming weeks to reflect the needs that have arisen since the beginning of 2016.

So far this year, even in the most difficult circumstances, aid workers have reached more than 2.8 million people with assistance and protection in South Sudan. Despite the violence, intimidation, and interference they have faced, aid agencies are determined to assist civilians across this country who have already suffered too much. The scale, breadth and depth of humanitarian needs in South Sudan continue to grow, and the plight of the people demands the world's attention.

I call on the international community to make sure together we can avert an even worse humanitarian tragedy in South Sudan.

Thank you.

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