



Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

Under-Secretary-General Stephen O'Brien**Briefing to the Security Council
The Humanitarian situation in South Sudan****New York, 25 August 2015***As Delivered*

Thank you for this opportunity to brief the Security Council following my visit to South Sudan on 22-25 July. This was my first visit to South Sudan as the Emergency Relief Coordinator. My objective was to evaluate the humanitarian situation first-hand and to address critical concerns affecting our operations in South Sudan.

During my visit, I had the opportunity to meet with President Salva Kiir and the Minister for Cabinet Affairs, Dr. Elias Lomuro. I also met with Ambassadors from the region and donor Member States. I also was able to visit civilians directly affected by the conflict in the Juba Protection of Civilians site as well as in Bentiu and Nyal in Southern Unity. I witnessed the consequences of over 20 months of brutal conflict on the lives of men, women and children. This was a very deeply harrowing experience.

The overall humanitarian situation continues sharply to deteriorate. As of today, over 2.2 million people have been displaced due to the conflict, an increase of 200,000 since the beginning of this year. Over 1.6 million are displaced internally and over 616,000 people have fled to neighbouring states. Almost 200,000 IDPs are now seeking refuge in UNMISS bases, compared to 121,000 just four months ago. Severe food insecurity is affecting 4.6 million people this year compared to 3.8 million at the height of the lean season last year. While WFP and its partners have reached more than 2.3 million in 2015, severe hunger will be a threat well into next year – especially if fighting continues. There is no doubt that we will continue to see higher than usual food insecurity in the conflict-affected states. In these states, displacement, the inability to plant crops now and the destruction of livelihoods has just been too severe, and has left people unable to meet their own most basic needs.

Host communities such as in Nyal, as I saw, are generously giving up their own resilience to those to whom they are giving sanctuary as they flee or die, and wade through the swamps, currently saturated, chest high to safety, however temporary, before the fighting catches up with them again.

The lives of more than a quarter of a million children are at risk from rapidly worsening malnutrition. In half of South Sudan's states, one in three children suffers acute malnutrition. The situation for children in the Protection of Civilians sites is particularly concerning. UNICEF reports that global acute malnutrition is higher inside the Bentiu Protection of Civilians site at 12.9 per cent than for new arrivals, at 1.6 per cent, which could be attributed to overstretched basic services and outbreaks of disease that can contribute to malnutrition. Large spikes in malaria across South Sudan have also raised the possibility of a second consecutive season with exceptionally high numbers of malaria cases and preventable deaths, as we know particularly affecting under 5s and pregnant mothers.

Madam President,

The situation is particularly alarming in areas directly affected by armed conflict, in particular in Unity and Upper Nile states. I was able to see this for myself during my visit to Bentiu and Nyal.

I am very concerned about the atrocities which continue to be reported. The scope and level of cruelty that has characterized the attacks against civilians suggests a depth of antipathy that goes beyond political differences. Allegations include rampant killing, rape, abduction, looting, arson and forced displacement and even such horrific acts as burning of people inside their own homes. There is evidence of deliberate ethnic targeting of and reprisals against women and girls. According to information received from Unity, hundreds of women and girls have been abducted and hundreds more have been subjected to sexual violence, including gang-rape. For example, a survivor from Koch County reported how she was dragged out of her tukul and gang-raped alongside her neighbour by government soldiers in front of her three-year old child. In another instance, a witness from Rubkona County has said that she saw government forces gang-raping a breast-feeding mother after tossing her baby aside.

Those who can flee from this unspeakable violence hide in the hard-to-reach swamp lands, while some others make the long journey by foot to the Bentiu Protection of Civilians site in search of safety. In Nyal, I met many women and children who had been separated from their husbands and other family members. One woman had just arrived after walking for several days from close to Leer with her seven children to seek safety among fellow Nuer in Nyal. The host community in Nyal was very welcoming, but the food and resources they were sharing with those who were arriving were running quite low. While insecurity has made it difficult for humanitarians to maintain a presence in southern Unity, we are making all possible efforts to reach these displaced people, and host communities are in need themselves of urgent assistance. To further boost these efforts, I recently approved over \$5 million from the CERF for survival kits that contain food, seeds, mosquito nets and other essential items. We have reached over 33,000 people with these kits so far.

I am concerned about civilians being attacked at distribution sites in southern Unity. We have had to halt provision of assistance in some instances where people did not dare to come out of hiding to receive life-saving aid. These attacks are inhumane and illegal, and the international

community should reiterate its call on all parties to the conflict to meet their obligations under international humanitarian law to protect civilians.

While needs are increasing, our ability to reach people in a timely manner is hampered by severe restrictions. During my visit, I was able to discuss the ban on barge movement on the Nile and the use of Malakal airport with President Kiir and Minister Lomuro. I am pleased that the Government of South Sudan then moved to lift these restrictions at the beginning of August, but I remain deeply concerned about access restrictions to neighbouring Wau Shilluk from Malakal. More than 16,000 people have arrived in the Malakal Protection of Civilians site since mid-July, primarily because humanitarian assistance to Wau Shilluk has stopped. Humanitarians are still being prevented from delivering aid to Wau Shilluk from Malakal, but have at least been able to fly in aid from Juba, reaching 20,000 so far. This is neither cost effective nor the best way to ensure that all needs are met. We therefore need to continue to call on authorities to facilitate the safe, rapid and unimpeded access of humanitarian organizations and supplies to all persons in need of assistance within South Sudan, in line with international humanitarian law.

I am very concerned about the security of humanitarian workers in South Sudan. At least 29 humanitarians have been killed since the beginning of the conflict, including sadly recent confirmation of the killing of three WFP workers. Many more have been wounded or abducted, and often they have been ethnically targeted. There has also been a worrying trend of robberies of NGO compounds in Juba, with 24 such robberies in July alone. This is unacceptable. I raised this in my meetings with the Government of South Sudan, but wish to recall again parties' obligations to protect and respect humanitarian personnel and supplies.

Despite this increasingly difficult operating environment, I am glad to report that, in 2015, humanitarians have so far reached over 2.3 million people with food and livelihood assistance and over 1.6 million with water, sanitation and hygiene services. Health workers have seen more than 1.1 million patients in conflict-affected states, and more than half a million people have received critical items like tarpaulins, blankets and cooking sets, while more than 200,000 children have been provided with child-friendly spaces. The cholera outbreak, which resulted in 1,644 cases and 45 deaths, has been largely contained. Challenges remain, including the need to scale up the response fast enough to meet the ever-increasing needs, especially in places such as the Bentiu and Malakal Protection of Civilians sites, where people continue to arrive in their hundreds on a daily basis.

Madam President,

To help address the humanitarian challenges I mentioned, I believe the international community should address the following four priority areas:

First and foremost, the people of South Sudan are looking for lasting peace. A first step would be a credible cessation of hostilities, which would give people breathing space and allow humanitarians to deliver assistance to those currently cut off from life-saving aid by insecurity. As a second step, a durable peace agreement would allow people to consider returning home and

rebuilding their lives. But we must be realistic: a peace agreement that is not inclusive and does not bring an end to the fighting will ultimately fail the people of South Sudan.

Second, the call on parties to the conflict to protect civilians must be reinforced. Over the past four months alone, and despite the best efforts of UNMISS and humanitarians, an untold number of civilians, among them many women and children, have died cruel deaths, were wounded or lost their livelihoods. The Government needs to do more to protect civilians and prevent or stop violations of international humanitarian law. While we work towards peace, we must ensure that, even if current developments lead to political change, the UN continues to put protection at the centre of its focus as well. We also need to put an end to the prevailing impunity for violations of IHL committed by all parties to the conflict and for violations and abuses of human rights law.

Third, anyone with influence on the parties should ensure that humanitarian response efforts are not impeded and that all South Sudanese in need of assistance can be reached in a principled and cost effective manner. Continued pressure and action on the parties to the conflict to abide by their commitments is crucial.

Finally, we need adequate funding for the humanitarian operation. Only half of the requirements of the 2015 Humanitarian Response Plan have so far been met, and I am concerned that, without timely and sustainable funding, we will not be able to deliver on our promise to enable the people of South Sudan to realize their basic right to be safe, live with dignity and free from want.

Thank you.