Humanitarian Coordinator a.i. in South Sudan condemns the murder of a humanitarian worker during an armed attack on a UN convoy

(Juba, 20 December 2021) The Humanitarian Coordinator ad interim (a.i.) in South Sudan, Mr. Matthew Hollingworth, strongly condemns the targeted attack on a UN World Food Programme convoy, and the murder of a UN-contracted aid worker and injury of another. He calls on the perpetrators to respect international law and humanitarian staff and assets, and demands that authorities make every effort to bring the perpetrators to justice and to protect communities, humanitarian personnel and assets across the country.

“In a week when many families prepare for celebrations and festivities, teams of aid workers across this country do everything in their power to support vulnerable people in need. An incident of this nature against clearly defined civilians, against humanitarians and humanitarian assets is unacceptable. One humanitarian aid worker was murdered during this incident, and another injured. I extend my sincerest condolences to the family and loved ones of this colleague who was killed. These vehicles were clearly marked. I must accept that this was a targeted attack and a violation of International Humanitarian law. This behaviour must stop,” said Mr. Hollingworth.

Reports indicate that on 19 December, armed men attacked the convoy of five amphibious vehicles between Tindiir and Duk Padiet in Jonglei State, spraying the vehicles with bullets. The team was returning from Tindiir, where they had delivered critical life-saving food assistance for flood-affected people when it was ambushed. These specialized vehicles were clearly marked as humanitarian vehicles and are the only means that enable deliveries to flooded zones.

“Given that all of greater Jonglei has suffered from flooding these past three years, it is entirely irrational that perpetrators that come from this region, whose families would have benefited from their deliveries in the recent past, attacked these brave aid workers delivering humanitarian assistance to vulnerable communities. These senseless acts of violence compromise our ability to continue assisting people in remote and difficult to reach flooded areas,” added Mr. Hollingworth.

People in Duk County were significantly impacted by flooding in 2020 and again in 2021. There are approximately 130,000 people estimated to be in need Duk County. The response teams are leveraging every support to provide food assistance for these people, including 17,000 children under 5 years who benefit from life-saving nutrition support.

Since March 2021, there has been an increase in the number of incidents of armed attacks against civilians and especially against humanitarians and humanitarian assets across South Sudan. This incident brings to five (5) the number of aid workers killed while undertaking their work in 2021. Most of those killed were South Sudanese colleagues. Such incidents disrupt humanitarian operations and affect delivery of humanitarian assistance to the most vulnerable.

“Every humanitarian aid worker in this country has the right to carry out their work in a safety and secure environment. Perpetrators of such heinous acts must be brought to justice,” the Humanitarian Coordinator a.i. concluded.
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Note to editors
To learn more about humanitarian access in South Sudan, see the access snapshots of 2021 here: First: bit.ly/3dZQtGw; Second: bit.ly/3hBAsNB; and Third: bit.ly/2ZWh1nK

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