The UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Stephen O’Brien, concluded a four-day visit to South Sudan today, calling on all parties to lay down their arms and commit to sustainable peace to halt the rapidly spiralling humanitarian crisis.

During his mission, Mr. O’Brien met with humanitarian partners, Government officials and the diplomatic community, and visited communities affected by the conflict in Juba and Unity State.

“I am deeply shocked by what I have seen. Innocent civilians are bearing the brunt of this brutal war,” stated the Emergency Relief Coordinator. “Families have endured horrendous atrocities - including killing, abduction, and the recruitment of children into armed groups. Women and girls have been beaten, raped and set on fire. Entire communities have lost their homes and their livelihoods. Many people are starving, living in swamps or in bushes, hiding in fear of their lives. This senseless cycle of violence must stop.”

The UN humanitarian chief called on the leaders of the warring factions to take responsibility for their own actions and for those who act in their name; “I call on the leadership of South Sudan to listen to their people and lay down their arms, to stop the violence, reconcile their differences and commit to peace.”

The humanitarian consequences of the nearly 20-month long conflict in South Sudan are grave: Some 4.6 million people are severely food insecure, with a quarter of a million children at risk from rapidly worsening nutrition. Massive displacement continues - over two million people, half of whom are children - have fled their homes. This includes some 1.6 million people displaced inside South Sudan and almost 600,000 who have fled to neighbouring countries.

“Humanitarian needs are higher now than ever and we cannot wait to respond, to do even more than brave humanitarians are already delivering. I appeal to the international community to act now to avert an even greater humanitarian tragedy in South Sudan,” noted Stephen O’Brien.

The South Sudan Humanitarian Response Plan for 2015 is currently only 42 per cent funded, leaving a gap of nearly $1 billion dollars.

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