



**UNDER-SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR HUMANITARIAN AFFAIRS AND  
EMERGENCY RELIEF COORDINATOR, MARK LOWCOCK**

**Statement to the Security Council on the humanitarian situation in South Sudan**

07 December 2017

*As delivered*

Mr. President,

This is my first briefing to the Security Council on South Sudan and I would like to focus on four issues: the humanitarian outlook for the coming months, humanitarian access constraints, current aid delivery, and the help we seek from the Council to guarantee free and consistent access to all those who need humanitarian assistance and protection. I agree with – and will try not to repeat – what was said by Jean-Pierre.

On Tuesday, we released the South Sudan Humanitarian Needs Overview for 2018. The conclusions of this comprehensive assessment of needs are bleak: even though more than 2 million people have fled South Sudan as refugees over the past four years of conflict, 7 million people inside the country – that is almost two-thirds of the remaining population – still need humanitarian assistance. About 1.9 million people are internally displaced, of whom some 210,000 seek safety in the Protection of Civilians sites located on UNMISS bases.

According to the latest Integrated Food Security Phase Classification released by the Government of South Sudan and food security partners a month ago, the number of severely food insecure people has steadily increased with each successive year of the conflict. As we approach the end of 2017, 1.25 million people are in the emergency phase of food insecurity – that is almost twice as many people who are just one step away from famine as was the case at the same time last year. In early 2018, half of the population will be reliant on emergency food aid. The next lean season beginning in March is likely again to see famine conditions in several locations across the country.

The massive and debilitating needs do not stop with hunger. Only one in ten people currently has access to basic sanitation which helps prevent deadly diseases. Only half of the country's schools are functioning and 2 million children are currently out of school. In one household in two, a woman or girl experienced gender-based violence in the past year, according to the IOM [International Organization for Migration]. A study released by the International Rescue



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Committee underscored the high levels of violence, with many incidents directly related to a raid, displacement or abduction. Reported rates of violence against women and girls in South Sudan are double the global average and among the highest in the world.

Secondly, on access Mr. President, the suffering faced by civilians in South Sudan is primarily the result of actions by the parties in their conduct of the conflict. The alarming level of food insecurity, for example, is directly linked to restrictions on people's freedom of movement, their access to humanitarian assistance and their ability to plant or to harvest. The impact of conflict on agricultural production is particularly severe in the Greater Equatorias, which was typically a surplus-food producing area before the conflict, but is now seeing production deficits due to insecurity and related access challenges. Most farmers from the most productive area along the border with Uganda are now in refugee camps inside Uganda.

The recent rainy season did not see the usual lull in fighting, nor a respite in humanitarian need. Now with the beginning of the dry season and ahead of the anticipated peace talks between parties this month, military offences have further intensified in the recent days, especially in Jonglei's Ayod county, Unity's Leer and Mayendit counties, and Western Equatoria's Greater Mundri – all forcing more civilians to flee these areas in search of safety and the essentials to survive.

Protection of civilians remains a key concern. Violations of international humanitarian law and human rights violations and abuses continue to be perpetrated by both the SPLA and SPLM/A-in-Opposition. I remind all parties that they must take constant care to spare civilians and the infrastructure they rely on.

The suffering is also both a cause and a consequence of the economic situation which continues to deteriorate, as Jean-Pierre said. Many government workers have not been paid in months. The brutal reality of the economic situation puts food out of reach for many, further undermines people's livelihoods, reduces the provision of even the most basic services such as health and education, and increases criminality especially in urban areas. Civilians' safety is at risk and humanitarian organisations face an increasing number of armed robberies and looting of convoys. Just last week in Jonglei, around 2.3 metric tons of food was looted from a humanitarian warehouse. Such actions are perpetrated both by parties to the conflict and by criminal groups for economic benefits.

Aid workers are paying with their lives to deliver assistance. At least 95 humanitarian workers have been killed in the line of duty since the start of the conflict; and at least 28 of them this year alone. More than 90 per cent of them are national staff, who form the backbone of the



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humanitarian response. Jean-Pierre mentioned the horrific attack in Jonglei last week. That's just one example of the violence aid workers face and five aid workers were killed in that attack.

Mr. President,

Allowing and facilitating rapid and unimpeded humanitarian access for civilians in need is an obligation for all parties and essential for humanitarian relief organizations to effectively save lives. The parties regularly and flagrantly ignore these obligations.

There are areas of the country where humanitarians have been unable to deliver assistance and programmes for extended periods, that compounds already dire food security and nutrition situations. One example is the opposition-held territory of Greater Baggari, near Wau, which is classified in emergency phase of food insecurity – again a step away from famine – and where agencies have been able to deliver aid only sporadically due to access denials and SPLA roadblocks. The situation will get even worse without an improvement in access.

In recent weeks, the Government as well as opposition forces and non-state armed actors have continued to interfere with the delivery of humanitarian assistance to people in need. Government security forces have denied humanitarian access in Liwolo in Kajo-Keji county, non-state armed actors continue to deny access in areas outside Yei and Mundri towns, and opposition forces have denied access in Torit county's Gunyoro town. Access blockage to a waste disposal site in Bentiu also continues despite assurances from the Governor that humanitarian agencies would be provided unhindered access to the site.

Ongoing fighting also prevents us from delivering aid, including, clashes between SPLA and SPLA-in-Opposition in Yei and surrounding counties. In 2017, more than 500 humanitarian workers across the country have been relocated for extended periods of time due to conflict and insecurity. Humanitarian organizations do not relocate staff lightly – the objective is always to stay and deliver. When we have to relocate, the situation has to be extreme.

In early November, President Kiir released a Republican Order for the Free, Unimpeded and Unhindered Movement of Humanitarian Assistance Convoys. I take note of this order, which enshrines existing international obligations. I urge for it to be translated into concrete actions and instructions at all levels to remove roadblocks and bureaucratic and other types of impediments and for it to be realized in practice on the ground. Because, as I have said, that is not happening now.

Thirdly Mr. President,



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Despite these challenges, this year, the United Nations and its humanitarian partners have reached 5 million people, and next year the aim is to reach more. About 4.6 million people have received food assistance and emergency livelihoods support, and nearly 730,000 children and pregnant and breastfeeding women have benefited from emergency nutritional assistance. More than 2.1 million have gained access to clean water; nearly 780,000 were assisted with vital non-food items, including blankets and mosquito nets; more than 350,000 children got a chance to go to school; and nearly 400,000 people have received gender-based violence services. To ease aid delivery, an additional humanitarian corridor was opened from Sudan last month.

Mr. President,

The fact remains that until international humanitarian law is complied with, until the fighting ends and until basic services are established, humanitarian needs will remain dire. This year the United Nations and its humanitarian partners halted famine, but that took enormous resources and involved substantial risk to staff. Some of whom, as I have said, lost their life in the endeavour.

UNMISS has and will continue to play an important role in protecting civilians and creating conditions conducive to the delivery of humanitarian assistance. But their efforts cannot replace or in any way substitute for the responsibilities of the host government.

Fourthly and to conclude, Mr. President, I call upon the Council members:

- Firstly, to use their influence to ensure that the parties comply with their obligations under IHL to respect and protect civilians, including humanitarian workers; and,
- Secondly, to ensure that the parties allow and facilitate humanitarian relief operations and people's access to assistance and protection.

Thank you.