World Humanitarian Day Commemorative Event
19 August 2015

Remarks by the Humanitarian Coordinator, Eugene Owusu

Excellencies,
Ambassadors,
Colleagues from the UN System,
Colleagues from the NGO community,
Members of the press,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you for being here with us today in Juba as we join people around the globe to mark World Humanitarian Day.

Today, we celebrate the spirit that inspires humanitarian work around the world and pay tribute to all heroic aid workers who have lost their lives helping the world’s most vulnerable people.

Every day, across South Sudan, many actors work together to provide millions of conflict-affected populations with life and livelihood-saving emergency relief. A number of those actors are here today.

Some of the dignitaries present here provide funding, the lifeblood of humanitarian operations and without which we would not be able to provide food and nutrition; shelter; water and sanitation; or agricultural, medical and educational support to those in need.

Some of the colleagues present here provide on-the-ground staffing and essential services, from arranging transport logistics for food delivery; to ensuring the security of our personnel; to managing refugee camps; to providing protection for vulnerable IDP populations; and some look after the special needs of women and children.

No one action alone can address humanitarian challenges, in South Sudan or elsewhere. No one action alone can get the job done. Taken together, the myriad important humanitarian jobs which get done, day in and day out, constitute a tremendous effort to help those in need.

Thousands of South Sudanese and international staff work side by side every day to deliver humanitarian assistance to millions of South Sudanese who are in need. Humanitarian workers come from all walks of life and all corners of the globe. Some have worked in the field for over twenty years and experienced manifold crises, while others assist in their communities at home. Yet they are all united by a single belief: that every human being deserves a life in safety and dignity and free from harm.
In many cases humanitarian workers risk their own safety and well-being to be at the service of others and alleviate humanitarian suffering. Sadly far too many humanitarian workers have made the ultimate sacrifice in the efforts to alleviate human suffering and to help others in need. Here in South Sudan, 29 aid workers have tragically been killed since the beginning of the conflict in December 2013 and many more remain missing or unaccounted for.

As we see too often, humanitarian workers are not protected by the virtue of their work. The humanitarian principles of neutrality and impartiality we strive so hard to maintain are no longer protecting us. No life should be lost in the service of humanity. As we recall the tragic losses of our colleagues here in South Sudan and around the world, let us increase our resolve to continue the work to which they gave their lives.

Ladies and Gentlemen,
In addition to commemorating the heroic lives of our fallen colleagues, World Humanitarian Day provides an opportunity to recognize that each one of us can make a difference in the lives of others; and that each one of us has the power to inspire our fellow human beings to take action to create a more humane world. In this spirit I would like to recognise and celebrate the achievements of humanitarian aid workers around the world in general, and in South Sudan in particular.

Every day, across South Sudan, the people of this country have tirelessly helped one another to survive in tragic circumstances. Neighbours and communities have extended their hands and their homes to people fleeing from violence; friends and families have shared meals and whatever meagre resources they have left with those who have arrived on their doorsteps. This is a true manifestation of this year’s theme – *Inspir the World’s Humanity*.

Every day we hear inspiring and humbling stories of people helping people across this country. Every day, we are reminded that ordinary people are often the ones who save lives and alleviate suffering; that ordinary people in South Sudan are humanitarians. This is a day to celebrate the incredible and unwavering spirit of humanity that drives people across this country to open their doors and their hearts to help those in need.

Ladies and Gentlemen,
The conflict and fighting in South Sudan has caused immense suffering and loss for millions of civilians. More than 2.2 million people have now fled their homes in search of safety and assistance since December 2013. Around 1.6 million people are internally displaced and more than 619,000, principally women and children, have fled across the borders as refugees to Ethiopia, Kenya, Sudan and Uganda. The number of people seeking shelter in Protection of Civilians (PoC) sites at UN bases has increased rapidly over the last three months and there are now some 200,000 sheltering in six sites across the country.

As a result of the conflict, thousands of people have had to walk for days through harsh conditions looking for safety and shelter. Many have lost their homes, their family members and their crops.

I would like to share with you the story of a 50 year old man, whom UNHCR recently visited in Maridi. Bernard is his name, and he is blind. He was driven from his home in early June when conflict between cattle keepers and farmers triggered ethnic violence. He ran for his life with the help of his wife and son who guided him through the bush for several hours. The one thing
that he managed to take with him was a pan. Bernard now lives out in the open under a mango tree in the bush east of Maridi.

Regrettably, Bernard’s story is not unique. Thousands of other people across South Sudan now carry with them stories of death, displacement and desperation.

We need peace. This lovely country needs peace to bring about an end to the untold sufferings of many of its citizens. It is a terrible tragedy that millions of South Sudanese wake up each day with diminished hope and desperation because of the conflict. The conflict must end, and people must be given the opportunity to rebuild their lives. On this World Humanitarian Day, let us recommit to doing all that we can to provide all South Sudanese with a better future, one that is filled with hope, and not despair. Much too often, indifference amongst those in power leaves too many without hope.

Humanitarian partners are committed to doing their part. Every day, aid workers are carrying vital food, shelter, water, healthcare, education, protection and other critical supplies to help people survive across the country.

Already this year, more than two million people have received food assistance and nearly 2 million people have been reached with livelihoods support. Health workers have seen more than 1.1 million outpatients in conflict-affected states, and more than half a million people have received critical items like tarps, blankets and cooking sets. More than 200,000 children have been provided with child friendly spaces and critical services.

By the end of 2015, we are aiming to reach 4.6 million people with assistance and protection. We are able to do this because of the passion, dedication and humility of aid workers. Take for example Betty, a de-miner with an all-female team in Yei. Every mine Betty finds is one less waiting to kill or injure. Or take the example of Daniel, an aid worker who the community calls “man of food”. Daniel takes pride in the fact that he is himself an IDP helping fellow IDPs to survive this crisis.

I would like to use this opportunity to thank the Government of South Sudan for its presence at this occasion and its support to humanitarian work. As a new Humanitarian Coordinator in South Sudan, I look forward to working with the Government, its humanitarian partners, and all the peoples of this country as we seek to save lives and livelihoods, and to bring true meaning to what humanitarianism is all about – **inspiring the World’s Humanity**.

Thank you for joining us today as we call for a more humane world and seek to inspire action by people all over the world. Every human being on this earth has the right to lead a dignified life. Our collective dream should be to see a world free from suffering, poverty and humanitarian crises.

Let us take this opportunity of this year’s World Humanitarian Day to celebrate the resilience of the proud people of this country, which I find truly inspirational, and to recommit to working together to help them. Each one of us, and each one of our organisations, has a role to play. Together, we can truly make a difference. We cannot and must not turn our backs on the people of South Sudan.

I thank you.