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The South Sudan NGO Forum condemns violent assaults against aid workers

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The South Sudan NGO Forum condemns in the strongest possible terms the concerning increase in threats and incidents of aggression against humanitarian workers that are multiplying across the country. On 24th April, aid workers were attacked inside an NGO compound in Jamjang County in Ruweng Administrative Area where multiple youth entered the perimeter and physically attacked staff, resulting in serious injuries. On the 28th April in Torit in Eastern Equatoria following a meeting between humanitarian agencies, the United Nations and local community groups, an unconfirmed number of humanitarian workers were physically assaulted by community members, sustaining serious injuries requiring hospital treatment.

These unacceptable incidents, both citing grievances over local recruitment, follow one of the most dangerous years on record for aid workers in South Sudan in 2020 with a sharp rise in the number of aid workers killed since 2019. Multiple serious and direct attacks on aid workers have already been seen in 2021, with South Sudanese aid workers most affected. Late last year, criminal attacks on humanitarian organisations in Renk resulted in the suspension of essential humanitarian services in the county for more than five months, with dire consequences for vulnerable people most in need. Continued violence and a lack of action not only impact on the humanitarians delivering services but can lead to the collective suspension of urgently needed assistance, putting the most vulnerable South Sudanese further at risk.

"We are deeply disturbed by these attacks. Thus far, the perpetrators have not been caught and there has been no accountability for those that have carried out this attack. We urge the local authorities to provide a guarantee of staff security so that we can continue to provide life-saving humanitarian services to host and refugee communities in South Sudan."

Carol Sekyewa, IRC Country Director, South Sudan

The NGO Forum routinely issues guidance to NGOs to follow regulations of the South Sudanese labour law, including the recruitment of at least 80% of their workforce from the South Sudanese population, irrespective of where in the country they are originally from. Ultimatums by local groups to recruit based on ethnic or local geographic lines cannot be tolerated and are in breach of the South Sudan Labour Act and humanitarian principle of non-discrimination.

The South Sudan NGO Forum urges the Government of South Sudan at all levels to ensure that there is protection of NGO staff and assets from direct attacks and criminality that are on the rise in the country, and to ensure that there is swift, robust, and transparent accountability for perpetrators of the attacks. The NGO Forum also urges all community groups to address grievances through local authorities and desist from any act of violence against humanitarians. Continued violence against aid workers in any form cannot be allowed to continue with impunity.

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