

**SOUTH SUDAN: HUMANITARIAN COUNTRY TEAM STATEMENT ON
THE DETERIORATING OPERATING ENVIRONMENT**

(Juba, 14 December 2016): The Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) in South Sudan is gravely concerned regarding the deteriorating operating environment, including the recent expulsion of the Country Director of the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) and the order for a second senior NRC staff member to leave South Sudan.

The HCT condemns the deportation of the head of one of the largest operational organizations in South Sudan, and stands in full solidarity with NRC's call for the Government of the Republic of South Sudan to reverse these decisions and to cooperate fully with all international organizations working to bring aid to the South Sudanese people. Humanitarians in South Sudan are striving day and night to assist civilians who have suffered far too much, for far too long. Unacceptable actions such as this significantly undermine the ability of humanitarian organizations to operate at a time when the crisis is deepening and aid is needed most.

The orders for two senior NRC staff to leave the country are the latest in a series of deeply concerning incidents which characterize the increasingly challenging operating environment in South Sudan. In addition to the NRC cases, two staff of international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) were deported in November and the Juba-based office of one of the largest South Sudanese national NGOs was shut-down by national authorities. There were 100 humanitarian access incidents reported in November, 66 of which involved violence against humanitarian personnel or assets.

Three years of conflict and economic decline have taken a devastating toll on the population of the world's youngest nation. Horrendous violations against civilians continue to be reported on a regular basis. Food insecurity and acute malnutrition are at unprecedented levels and diseases have spread to new locations. More than three million people have now been displaced, including nearly 1.9 million who are internally displaced and more than 1.3 million refugees in neighbouring countries.

Now, more than ever – as humanitarian needs continue to grow exponentially - it is imperative that humanitarians are able to reach all people in need across the country to deliver life-saving assistance and protection. The HCT remains firmly committed to assisting the most vulnerable in South Sudan. However, there are minimum conditions that must be met to be able to fund and implement humanitarian operations. If these conditions continue to not be met, it will ultimately undermine the ability of humanitarian organizations to save lives.

Background: The HCT is the strategic decision-making body for humanitarian action in South Sudan and is comprised of UN agencies, NGOs and donors.

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