

SOUTH SUDAN: HUMANITARIAN COORDINATOR A.I. CALLS FOR PROTECTION OF CIVILIANS IN AND AROUND ABUROC

(Juba, 1 May 2017): The Humanitarian Coordinator *ad interim* for South Sudan, Serge Tissot, has demanded that parties to the conflict uphold their responsibilities to protect thousands of Shilluk civilians sheltering in and around Aburoc following the resumption of the government offensive and clashes in several locations on the West Bank in Upper Nile last week.

“Civilians in Aburoc are living in fear, not knowing what each day will bring,” said Mr. Tissot. “I call on the Government to respect the civilian nature of these settlements and ensure they are not subject to attacks, and call on the opposition forces to ensure that areas highly populated by civilians are, and remain, demilitarised.”

Thousands of civilians have arrived into Aburoc in recent days. Many have walked for days on foot—without access to sufficient water due to conflict along the River Nile—and are arriving exhausted and weak. Thousands are reportedly now moving toward Sudan out of fear of potential future attacks. Prices are exorbitant and transport is inadequate, so many people are having to walk.

“The first priority for civilians in Aburoc is, of course, their protection,” said Mr. Tissot. “Many are fleeing to Sudan, and our colleagues on the other side of the border will do all that is possible to assist them. However, it is entirely unacceptable that they are being forced to flee their home land.”

On 23 and 24 April, humanitarian organizations relocated staff from Kodok and Aburoc amidst the spread of conflict on the West Bank. Several courageous local staff remain in the community and are doing all they can to assist people in need. However, key humanitarian assets were looted by opposition forces and other actors in recent days.

“I demand the immediate return of all looted humanitarian assets in Aburoc, which are absolutely vital to life-saving humanitarian action. Without these assets, we are unable to operate in this area, which is very remote and incredibly logistically challenging,” said Mr. Tissot. “I also demand immediate guarantees from authorities that they will ensure the safety and security of humanitarian staff and assets and respect humanitarian space. We are outraged that humanitarians are again having to condemn unacceptable actions by authorities which ultimately increase the suffering of people in dire need.”

Humanitarians are exploring all feasible options to provide assistance to those fleeing the fighting but are facing major challenges, including lack of fuel in the area. An inter-agency team visited Aburoc on 29 April to see the situation first-hand and the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) has released funds that will support the scale-up of emergency operations in locations where civilians are arriving.

“This operation is the true definition of life-saving,” said Mr. Tissot. “I therefore call on both parties to ensure immediate, free and unhindered humanitarian access to civilians, wherever they may flee, including for trucks to safely access the river and carry water to locations where IDPs are sheltering.”

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