

SOUTH SUDAN: UN HUMANITARIAN CHIEF URGES PARTIES TO CEASE HOSTILITIES, PROTECT CIVILIANS AND AID WORKERS

(Juba, 16 May 2018): UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mark Lowcock, concluded his two-day mission to South Sudan today, calling for all parties to cease hostilities, amidst fresh fighting that has displaced tens of thousands of people in multiple locations across the country.

During his two-day visit, Mr. Lowcock met with Government officials, members of SPLA-in Opposition, humanitarian agencies, and partners. He also visited people affected by the crisis in Juba, Yei Town and Mundu. The latter is an SPLA-IO controlled area.

“The conflict in South Sudan is now in its fifth year. Ordinary people are suffering on an unimaginable scale. The peace process has so far produced nothing. The cessation of hostilities is a fiction. The economy has collapsed”, said Mr. Lowcock. “Belligerents use scorched-earth tactics, murder and rape as weapons of war. All these are gross violations of international law. Seven million people need humanitarian assistance in 2018. And things are simply getting worse.”

Reflecting on his meetings with affected people, Mr. Lowcock said, “When I asked them what they needed most, the word I heard most frequently from them was: ‘peace’. Ending the violence is the first and single most important thing needed to alleviating human suffering in South Sudan.”

The humanitarian crisis in South Sudan continues to intensify. As a result of the compounding effects of widespread violence and insecurity and a deteriorating economy, 7 million people – more than one in two across the country – will need humanitarian assistance in 2018.

Nearly 4.3 million people – one in three people in South Sudan – have been displaced, including more than 1.76 million who are internally displaced and about 2.5 million in neighbouring countries. Displaced people are more vulnerable to threats to their safety, health and livelihoods.

“Despite a multitude of challenges, humanitarians are saving lives and protecting people,” said Mr. Lowcock.

Humanitarian workers need rapid, safe, unhindered access to all people in need. Mr. Lowcock said that “aid agencies are subject to harassment, extortion, looting, kidnappings, killings, predatory fees and levies and other blockages across the country – perpetrated by all parties to the conflict.”

Mr. Lowcock also met with humanitarian organizations whose staff and operations have been affected by insecurity and paid tribute to the bravery of aid workers across the country. He described South Sudan as “one of the most dangerous places in the world to be a humanitarian worker. Crimes are being committed against aid workers, with apparent

impunity. There needs to be accountability, and the Government - because it is the Government, and this is a responsibility of Governments everywhere - have the prime responsibility for that.” The number of aid workers killed in South Sudan since conflict broke out in December 2013 reached 101 this month.

“When I discussed these issues with the Government in Juba yesterday, they assured me that they want humanitarian agencies to have unimpeded access to everyone who needs their help. But unfortunately, that is not the situation that prevails at the moment.”

Mr. Lowcock emphasized that the United Nations and its partners were fully committed to stay and deliver in South Sudan to alleviate the suffering of people in need. “However, we will also consider how we can improve the way in which we deliver our support in South Sudan, given the increasingly difficult environment in which we operate.”

Mr. Lowcock also addressed the issue of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SEA) in the aid sector in South Sudan. “The Secretary-General has been clear that we have a zero-tolerance approach to SEA in the United Nations. We are taking steps to ensure transgressors cannot move freely from job to job in our sector; to ensure that we have sufficient capacity to investigate allegations of SEA in the aid sector; and that we always take a victim-centered approach, standing in support and solidarity of people subject to these abuses.”

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