In the first quarter of 2020, humanitarian access continued to improve across South Sudan with a decrease in clashes between armed groups, attributed to the formation of the Revitalized Transitional Government of National Unity in February. A total of 170 humanitarian access incidents were reported in the first three months of the year, an 18 per cent increase from the 144 incidents reported in the same period in 2019, mainly due to localized inter-communal violence in areas that had not witnessed active armed conflict before.

Despite the relative access improvements, an upswing in inter-communal violence, particularly in Jonglei and Lakes, severely impacted humanitarian operations. More than 113 aid workers—59 from Pibor and 23 from Nyirol in Jonglei, and 20 from Rumbek North in Lakes—were relocated as a result of escalating tensions. Looting of humanitarian supplies by community members and armed youth groups during the inter-communal violence was a major setback to meet the needs of 5.6 million people targeted with assistance or protection across the country, particularly in Pibor and Rumbek counties. In Yei, Central Equatoria, soldiers reportedly vacated public facilities including a health facility and a primary school.

As access by road improved, February saw a notable upsurge in ambushes and roadside attacks on humanitarian personnel and humanitarian convoys across the country. A total of 24 ambushes were reported in the first quarter of 2020, compared to 15 incidents recorded in the same period of 2019. The majority of incidents was recorded in the Kapoeta and Rumbek corridors. In Cueibet County, Lakes, international non-governmental organization (NGO) staff were ambushed by unidentified armed men while travelling on the Tonj-Cueibet road and two staff were seriously injured. In Pibor, one aid worker was killed at a roadblock along the Pibor-Gumuruk road manned by unknown armed youth, bringing the number of aid workers killed in South Sudan since the conflict began in 2013 to 116.

Humanitarian organizations continued to face pressure from authorities, particularly in several locations in Jonglei, for remittance of tax to the former 32 states.
While the overall humanitarian access situation improved in the first quarter because of the impending formation of the transitional government, the 18 per cent increase in the number of incidents reported compared to the same period last year (from 144 to 170) was attributed to a rise in inter-communal violence in areas that had not witnessed active armed conflict before. These areas further witnessed the looting of humanitarian supplies and staff relocation.

At the end of the first quarter, no COVID-19 cases were confirmed in South Sudan. However, threats and fear of the spread of the pandemic led to restrictions of movement, suspension of visa issuance and entry denial for humanitarian personnel, affecting about 60 staff members from the UN and international and national NGOs. Those who were granted entry went into self-quarantine for a period of 14 days.

A significant number of international NGOs reduced their footprint by relocating non-essential staff. On 24 March, Juba International Airport suspended all international flights in and out of the country. Exceptions were given to a limited number of cargo and internal flights.

INCIDENT TYPE
- Violence against personnel: 27%
- Violence against assets: 24%
- Bureaucratic impediments: 15%
- Active hostilities: 13%
- Operational interference: 12%
- Restriction of movement: 8%
- COVID-19 restrictions: 1%

INCIDENT SEVERITY
- Significant: Serious incidents causing severe impact on staff, assets or response
- Moderate: Incidents with serious effect on staff, assets or response
- Minor: Incidents of minor severity, without notable impact to staff, assets or response

49% Significant
30% Moderate
21% Minor

ATTRIBUTED TO
- State civilian authorities: 26%
- Criminals/unknown: 23%
- Civilians: 23%
- State security forces: 18%
- Non-State armed forces: 7%
- Non-State civilian authorities: 3%

COVID-19
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- However, threats and fear of the spread of the pandemic led to restrictions of movement, suspension of visa issuance and entry denial for humanitarian personnel, affecting about 60 staff members from the UN and international and national NGOs.
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