I. HIGHLIGHTS/KEY PRIORITIES
- Heavy fighting between SAF and SPLA spreads to Abyei town, and SAF forces enter the town
- The majority of civilians flee Abyei town southward, no major influx yet reported in Agok
- Humanitarian workers relocating from Abyei to Agok and further south into Warrap State
- Movement restrictions due to insecurity impede humanitarian needs assessments

II. Situation Overview

Late Thursday, 19 May an UNMIS convoy transporting Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) Joint Integration Units (JIU) equipment and soldiers, was fired upon. The convoy was transporting 200 SAF troops as part of the deployment plan of the Kadugli Agreement, aimed at defusing tensions in Abyei. Two SAF soldiers and a UN driver were wounded. The identity of the attackers was not confirmed.

As a result, fighting intensified in and around of villages north and east of Abyei town as well as in Abyei town itself. UNMIS reported that the Banton Bridge, over Bahr el Arab/ the River Kiir, on the road from Abyei town to Agok was targeted, but not hit. The river is still traversable by foot. Agok is located 40km south of Abyei and 30km south of the river. Throughout Saturday 21 April, heavy shelling of Abyei town was reported, and SAF entered the town after dark.

Early Saturday morning, all NGO personnel in Abyei relocated to Agok. At the same time, some NGOs temporarily moved their non-essential international staff out of Agok, due to security concerns, while keeping their programs running with national staff. The security situation in being monitored, all staff are safe and accounted for.

Population movements
Reports and observation on the ground indicate that most of the civilian population has left Abyei town. Although numbers cannot be ascertained at this time due to movement restrictions, anecdotal reports suggest that the vast majority of women and children have left. It is not yet clear where these displaced civilians have taken refuge or whether they are still on the move. Most appear to have headed for villages in the Abyei area, south of Abyei town, but so far there has not been a big influx south of the river into Agok.

Due to movement restrictions, the extent of civilian casualties is not yet known.

III. Humanitarian Needs and Response

The current security situation does not permit humanitarians in Abyei to conduct needs assessments.

Regularly updated contingency plans since October 2010 (with planning figures of 110,000 people displaced or affected by conflict), pre-positioning of emergency items was completed and preparedness measures were put in place. Most response items were stored in Agok, Warrap and Unity States in southern Sudan, and Kadugli, South Kordofan State in northern Sudan. Only a limited stock is available in Abyei town itself. This was decided in light of recent displacement trends which showed civilians moved southwards.

Movement and replenishment of pre-positioned items could be constrained by ongoing heavy fighting in northern parts of Unity and Warrap States between the SPLA and other armed groups; as well as by blocked roads from South Kordofan into Abyei.
IV. Coordination

The humanitarian contingency plan for Abyei was activated. As part of this plan, the first State Emergency Operation Team meeting was held today, 21 May, in Abyei and OCHA held a meeting with Heads of Agencies. In addition, a special Security Management Team meeting on Abyei was conducted on Saturday afternoon in Khartoum and OCHA is participating in a Crisis Management Group chaired by UNMIS. The Crisis Management Group meets in Abyei and Khartoum.

OCHA and RCSO are planning to deploy a staff each to Agok on 22 May, to Turalei, approximately 90 km south of Agok. They will support the response from Turalei until the security situation allows their movement to Agok.

VI. Contact

Please contact:

New York
Rosa Malango: Section Chief a.i. Africa II Section
Coordination Response Division
Tel: +1 212 963 5699 E-mail: malango@un.org

Michal Ullmann: Humanitarian Affairs Officer, Africa II Section
Coordination Response Division
E-mail: ullmann@un.org
Tel: +1 347 604 2815

Amanda Pitt: Head, Strategic Communications
Communications and Information Services
E-mail: pitta@un.org
Tel: +1 917 442 1810

Mark Turner: Deputy Spokesperson/Public Information Officer
Communications and Information Services
E-mail: turner5@un.org