

The people of South Sudan are 'desperate for peace,' though political crisis persists – UN peacekeeping chief

21 June 2017 – Deliberate actions by the Government and opposition armed forces as well as other actors to advance their political goals continue to severely undermine efforts to get the country back on the path to peace and development, the top United Nations peacekeeping official has warned.

"We must not lose sight of the fact that this tragedy is man-made," Jean-Pierre Lacroix, the UN Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, told the Security Council today.

He added that the Sudanese Peoples Liberation Army (SPLA)-in Government, the SPLA-in Opposition, and various other entities, took decisions that have fed the conflict, creating ever deeper divisions between the people of South Sudan.

In his briefing to the 15-member Council, Mr. Lacroix emphasized that while the Organization continues to make every effort to implement its commitment to the country, "only a truly inclusive political process and the genuine political will" of the key protagonists to end the conflict and implement agreements they reached will bring peace to the war-torn country.

Continued violence and insecurity has left more than half of South Sudan's population in need of food aid. Furthermore, a third of its population is displaced and half of those displaced have sought refuge in neighbouring Uganda, Sudan, Kenya and Ethiopia.

Of particular concern, Mr. Lacroix said, are persisting hostilities in many parts of the country, even after a ceasefire commitment made by President Salva Kiir.

He also informed Council members that in the midst of the fighting, the UN Mission in South Sudan ([UNMISS](#)) is "doing its utmost" to protect civilians.

"Our peacekeepers are persistent in getting through checkpoints to reach vulnerable populations, even when the patrols are threatened and, at times, shot at [...], giving the populations confidence that we are there to protect them enables us to report human rights abuses, and helps us to support our humanitarian partners in ensuring that assistance goes to those who need it most."

He also updated members on progress towards the deployment of the Rapid Protection Force (RPF), mandated by the Council last year to provide a secure

environment in and around capital Juba, and noted some issues concerning the plot of land provided by the Government to the RPF to establish its northern basing site.

Further in his briefing, with regard to a pledge made by President Kiir to release political prisoners, the UN peacekeeping chief told the Council that while one UN staff member was released recently, two others have been held for two years without charge, and another has recently been detained in Rumbek.

“We must judge the President’s commitments by his actions, not his words,” said Mr. Lacroix, also calling for full freedom of movement for the Ceasefire Transitional Security Arrangement Monitoring Mechanism (CTSAMM) to monitor and verify ceasefire violations as well as UNMISS, which have faced far too many obstructions to their movements, making their work extremely challenging, and in some cases, impossible.

[Warring parties in Yemen ‘must take all feasible precautions’ to minimize harm to civilians – UN envoy](#)

21 June 2017 – Civilians in Yemen continue to be killed and injured during Ramadan, despite calls for the conflict parties to respect their obligations under international law, the senior United Nations aid official in the country warned today.

“Targeting of civilians and civilian infrastructure in Yemen continues during the holy month of Ramadan despite my repeated calls and the calls from the international community, including the UN Security Council, to all parties to the conflict to respect their obligations under international humanitarian and human rights laws,” said Jamie McGoldrick, Humanitarian Coordinator in Yemen, in a press statement.

On 17 June, at least 22 civilians, including six children, were reported killed and injured in a series of air attacks on a market in Sa’ada Governorate, near the border with Saudi Arabia.

“There were no reported military targets in the proximity of the market at the time of the attack, and no warning was issued to civilians in the area,” said Mr. McGoldrick.

On 19 June, the power lines to the main water supply system in Dhamar City were damaged as a result of military activity, affecting one million people who rely on this water source and putting them at greater risk of death, given the current fast-spreading cholera outbreak in Yemen.

Following the attacks on the market in Sa'ada, the European Union and others in the international community have expressed concern over the reported deaths of civilians, noting that this is a stark reminder that Yemeni civilians are the ones bearing the brunt of a war that has devastated their country.

"The disregard for the loss of civilian lives and damage to civilian infrastructure at a time of great need, due to the combined effects of the cholera outbreak and the looming famine, continues to shock me and must end," underscored the Humanitarian Coordinator.

"Wars have laws and I implore that all parties to the conflict uphold their responsibilities to comply with international humanitarian and human rights laws," he continued. "The warring parties must distinguish between the civilian population and combatants at all times and between civilian objects and military objectives; and must take all feasible precautions to minimize harm to civilians and civilian objects."

Mr. McGoldrick urged those influencing and arming the parties to use their position to end the conflict and to stop fuelling the violence.

"The humanitarian crisis in Yemen is entirely man-made and it is immoral to allow hardship and deprivation to continue. We must give hope to millions of Yemenis by showing that the world is not indifferent to their suffering," he concluded.

Afghan Government must work to build trust in an 'increasingly fragile environment' – UN envoy

21 June 2017 – Warning that the recent surge of violent attacks in Afghanistan could signal a much worse and more fragile period ahead, the United Nations envoy for the country today called for urgent action to strengthen stability, including through improving the Government's credibility, and urged all parties to exercise restraint and avoid violence.

"The months since my last briefing [have been unusually tense in Afghanistan](#)," said Tadamichi Yamamoto, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, briefing the UN Security Council today.

"Without enhanced efforts by the National Unity Government to increase political inclusiveness, strengthen accountability, and improve the Government's credibility, particularly in the security sector, we are likely to face more crises in an increasingly fragile environment."

In his briefing, the senior UN official spoke of the emerging difference following the 31 May [terrorist attack in Kabul](#) and warned that violent extremist groups could try to exasperate the divisions, especially along sectarian lines.

Urging all sides to exercise restraint and avoid violence, Mr. Yamamoto underscored the need to address the root cause of the issues and reminded national actors that efforts to build consensus and political stability are critical.

He also noted steps by the Government towards consolidating peace, such as a recent outreach on regional and security as well as implementation of the political agreement with a former insurgent group.

In the current context, Mr. Yamamoto – also the head of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) – said that there are two areas for immediate attention: elections and peace.

“We understand that the Independent Elections Commission will make an announcement as early as tomorrow regarding the date for parliamentary elections,” he said. “I believe that this announcement will contribute to allaying the political tensions I have referred to.”

Turning to the second priority, peace, the Special Representative of the Secretary General encouraged the people of Afghanistan to begin an internal dialogue on the “meaning of peace and reconciliation” and added that the Government and the Taliban needed to engage directly with each other to define a political solution.

Also, recalling [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres' [visit to Afghanistan last week](#), Mr. Yamamoto stated that the visit “clearly demonstrated his and the [UN system's] commitment to Afghanistan, solidarity with its people, and perseverance in the pursuit of peace.”

[As South Sudan famine ebbs, millions still face 'extreme hunger on the edge of a cliff' – UN](#)

21 June 2017 – While famine has eased in South Sudan, the situation across the crisis-torn country remains dire, as the number of people struggling to find food each day has grown from 4.9 million in February to six million today – the highest level of food insecurity the young nation has ever experienced, according to the United Nations.

“The [increase in food insecurity](#) has been driven by armed conflict,

below-average harvests and soaring food prices as well as the effects of the annual lean season,” said the Food and Agriculture Organization ([FAO](#)), UN Children's Fund ([UNICEF](#)) and the World Food Programme ([WFP](#)) in a joint press statement today.

According to the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification ([IPC](#)) update, an analysis by the UN agencies, the Government and other partners, the technical definition of famine no longer applies to former Unity State's Leer and Mayandit counties where famine was declared in February. Immediate and sustained humanitarian assistance most likely played a significant role in preventing the Koch and Panyijiar counties from deteriorating into famine.

However, hunger has flared in in the nation's north-east corner – the western bank of the Nile River – while those in the south-west are facing unprecedented levels of need.

“The crisis is not over. We are merely keeping people alive but far too many face extreme hunger on the edge of a cliff,” said FAO's Director of Emergencies Dominique Burgeon. “The only way to stop this desperate situation is to stop the conflict, ensure unimpeded access and enable people to resume their livelihoods.”

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The three UN agencies warned that the improvements in the worst hunger hotspots must not be lost. People's ability to feed themselves has been severely eroded and continued life-saving emergency food and livelihoods support must continue to prevent a shift back to famine.

“The gains made in the famine-affected counties show what can be achieved when sustained assistance reaches families. But the job is far from done,” said Joyce Luma, WFP's Representative and Country Director in South Sudan. “This is a crisis that continues to get worse with millions of people facing the prospect of starvation if humanitarian assistance ceases. An end to this conflict is imperative.”

“When humanitarian agencies have access and resources we are able to mount a swift and robust response, and save lives,” said Mahimbo Mdoe, UNICEF Representative in South Sudan. “And yet more than one million children in South Sudan are estimated to be malnourished.”

Food insecurity is a key issue, but so is lack of health care, poor water and sanitation and, most crucially, access to those children in need of treatment. At present, too many parts of the country remain cut off due to insecurity, leaving hundreds of thousands of children on the cusp of catastrophe.

Each of the agencies has stepped up its response:

- WFP has reached 3.4 million people in South Sudan since the beginning of the year, including assistance for 2.6 million people displaced or affected by conflict and 800,000 people through a recovery operation;
- UNICEF and partners have treated some 76,000 children with severe acute malnutrition and provided 500,000 people with safe drinking water and 200,000 others with access to sanitation facilities; and
- FAO has provided fishing, crop- and vegetable-growing kits to more than 2.8 million people, including 200,000 in the famine-affected areas, and vaccinated more than 6 million livestock to save lives through livelihoods.

[World population to hit 9.8 billion by 2050, despite nearly universal lower fertility rates – UN](#)

21 June 2017 – The world population is now at least 7.6 billion, up from 7.4 billion last year, spurred by the relatively high levels of fertility in developing countries – despite an overall drop in the number of children people have around the globe – the United Nations today reported.

The concentration of global population growth is in the poorest countries, according to [World Population Prospects: The 2017 Revision](#), presenting a challenge as the international community seeks to implement the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, which seeks to end poverty and preserve the planet.

With roughly [83 million people being added to the world's population](#) every year, the upward trend in population size is expected to continue, even assuming that fertility levels will continue to decline, said the report's authors at the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

At this rate, the world population is expected to reach 8.6 billion in 2030, 9.8 billion in 2050 and surpass 11.2 billion in 2100.

The growth is expected to come, in part, from the 47 least developed countries, where the fertility rate is around 4.3 births per woman, and whose population is expected to reach 1.9 billion people in 2050 from the current estimate of one billion.

In addition, the birth rates in African countries are likely to at least double by 2050, according to the report.

That trend comes despite lower fertility rates in nearly all regions of the world, including in Africa, where rates fell from 5.1 births per woman up to 2005 to 4.7 births in the five years following.

In contrast, the birth rates in Europe are up to 1.6 births per woman, up from 1.4 births in 2000-2005.

During 2010-2015, fertility was below the replacement level in 83 countries comprising 46 per cent of the world's population, according to the report.

The lower fertility rates are resulting in an ageing population, with the number of people aged 60 or over expected to more than double by 2050 and triple by 2100, from the current 962 million to 3.1 billion.

Africa, which has the youngest age distribution of any region, is projected to experience a rapid ageing of its population, the report noted.

Although the African population will remain relatively young for several more decades, the percentage of its population aged 60 or over is expected to rise from five per cent in 2017 to around nine per cent in 2050, and then to nearly 20 per cent by the end of the century, the authors wrote.

In terms of other population trends depicted in the report, the population of India, which currently ranks as the second most populous country with 1.3 billion inhabitants, will surpass China's 1.4 billion citizens, by 2024.

By 2050, the third most populous country will be Nigeria, which currently ranks seventh, and which is poised to replace the United States.

The report also noted the impacts of migrants and refugees between countries, in particular noting the impact of the Syrian refugee crisis and the estimated outflow of 4.2 million people.

In terms of migration, although international migration at or around current levels will be insufficient to compensate fully for the expected loss of population tied to low levels of fertility, especially in the European region, the movement of people between countries can help attenuate some of the adverse consequences of population ageing, the authors wrote.