

Continuing hostilities greatest challenge for South Sudan, says UN relief official

With the next phase of regionally-backed peace talks for South Sudan scheduled for later this month, a senior United Nations aid official in the country has urged the parties involved to find a political compromise and allow peace to take hold in the strife-ridden country.

Speaking to *UN News*, Alain Noudehou, the Humanitarian Coordinator for South Sudan, underscored that continuing hostilities remain the greatest challenge.

“People don’t feel secure [...] they are not able to go back to their lands and they are not able to produce. They need to feel secure, not only in sense of physical protection but actually in the sense that they can go back to their lives,” he explained.

The world’s youngest country, South Sudan, gained independence in 2011.

However, it spent much of its short life mired in conflict, as what began as a political face-off between President Salva Kiir and former Vice-President Riek Machar erupted into full-blown war late in 2013.

In December last year, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), an eight-country trade bloc in Africa, facilitated an [agreement](#) between the Government and opposing groups. The first phase of talks, formally called the High-Level Revitalisation Forum, was held in February this year.

In spite of the recent progress, close to two million people remain displaced within South Sudan and a further 2.5 million took refuge in neighbouring countries.

With women and children making up close to 85 per cent of the total, ensuring their inclusion and participation in the peace process is vital, stressed Mr. Noudehou, who is also the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for South Sudan.



UNMISS/Denis Louro

A woman paints a mural on a wall in Yei, South Sudan. As a part of a collective effort, the group of painters painted a number of pictures and messages on peace and harmony at many locations in the town.

Women's participation vital to securing peace

Mr. Noudehou stressed that the participation of women is critical for durable and effective peace.

"If they are not a part of the dialogue of peace-making, we will be missing a tremendous perspective of what it's going to take to make the peace much more lasting in [the country]," he added, noting that women's participation is vital in not only defining the peace agreement but also in implementing it.

"They understand the plight of the women [because] they have been there and can contribute to a solution that is durable and is effective," added the senior UN official.

The conflict and instability in South Sudan also led to a devastating famine last year, leaving over 7 million of its people dependent on humanitarian and protection assistance.

Across the country, 5.3 million people (48 per cent of the population) are estimated to be facing Crisis and Emergency – the highest levels – of [food insecurity](#) according to the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification.

Compared with the same period last year, this is a 40 per cent increase in the population facing severe food insecurity in the post-harvest season.



UNMISS Photo

Alain Noudehou (left), the Humanitarian Coordinator for South Sudan, speaks at the launch of the 2018 Humanitarian Response Plan for the country. Alongside him is Hussein Marnyot, the Minister of Humanitarian Affairs and Disaster Management of South Sudan.

A ‘catastrophic situation’ can be avoided

However, with coordinated action, a “catastrophic situation” can be avoided, said Mr. Noudehou.

“We are planning a multi-sectoral approach to provide the assistance. We are not talking about only about food assistance; but the whole gamut of a system that goes together with it.”

Alongside the [humanitarian effort](#), full and sustained support and funding is equally important. And the resources are needed now, he said, noting that this will enable supplies to be pre-positioned and unnecessary costs avoided.

“If we start to act now and receive the funding now, we will be able to serve more people and do it cheaply,” he said.

With full funding, the \$1.76 billion [Humanitarian Response Plan](#) for South Sudan will provide assistance to some 6 million people across the country. In all, 167 aid organizations, including 11 UN agencies, 61 international non-governmental organizations and 95 national non-governmental organizations are part of the response.