

'Zero tolerance' to sexual exploitation and abuse by UN staff in South Sudan, underscores senior official

7 December 2017 – The relationship between United Nations peacekeepers and civilian staff and the vulnerable people in South Sudan they are working for must be one of mutual trust and confidence, said a senior UN official, noting that instances of sexual exploitation and abuse by UN personnel not only breaks down that relationship, it also destroys the trust communities have in the Organization.

“It is conduct which is absolutely abhorrent and a conduct which is extraordinarily painful to its victims and undermines the UN itself and, of course, dents the trust that communities should have in the UN,” [said](#) Jane Connors, the UN Victims’ Rights Advocate, at the end of her visit to the country.

“It is about dignity for the victims, compassion, a real feeling of empathy, a feeling that they are not forgotten – that victims feel they can tell their story to someone like myself and, if they’re lucky, to the Secretary-General as some have been able to do,” she said, adding: “That their hurt, their pain is acknowledged, and we do as much as we possibly can do to make their situation better.”

The Victims’ Rights Advocate is visiting South Sudan to promote the importance of the “no excuses, zero tolerance” approach to UN personnel.

During her visit, she has met with victims and local authorities and spent time listening to the concerns of internally displaced persons residing at the UN Mission in South Sudan ([UNMISS](#)) Protection of Civilians’ Sites.

“There should be no victims. Women and girls should not feel pain,” she told crowds of people at the Malakal camp, in the north of the country.

“All I can say is the UN entities, funds, programmes, agencies and the Mission stand with you but you are in the lead to say no and act.”

Globally there were 103 allegations made last year with four in South Sudan.

The low number could be due to reluctance on part of victims to report abuse because of the stigma attached. Therefore it is vital to encourage reporting to ensure perpetrators are held accountable.

“Many victims are focused on their lives, as you know, legal processes take a long time and many victims wish to move on. They are interested in justice, but at the same time, they wish to rebuild their lives, move into a scenario whereby they feel valued, they are not stigmatized, and that is the approach

we need to take,” said Ms. Connors.

“We need to ask the victim what she or he wants and not substitute our judgement, not say you need to do this, you need to do the other.”

Jane Connors was [appointed](#) the UN’s first Victims’ Rights Advocate by [Secretary-General](#) Antonio Guterres in August 2017 in line with his pledge that the UN will put the rights and dignity of victims at the forefront of its prevention and response efforts.

South Sudan: Security Council urged to do more to protect civilians, help end violence

7 December 2017 – With the conflict in South Sudan entering its fifth year, senior United Nations officials on Thursday expressed concern about the precarious security situation and bleak humanitarian conditions in the world’s youngest country.

“The people of South Sudan have simply suffered far too much for far too long and we must not take their resilience against incredible odds for granted,” Jean-Pierre Lacroix, the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, told the Security Council today, about a week before the current mandate of UN peacekeeping force in the country expires.

Focusing his remarks on developments over the past year, Mr. Lacroix said the UN’s sustained efforts to effect change on the ground will require the continued support of the 15-member Council.

“Now, more than ever, I urge this Council to remain vigilant and exert more effort to condemn and stop the violence, protect civilians, and urgently facilitate a political settlement of the conflict,” he said.

The UN Mission, known as UNMISS, he said, has endeavored to be more robust, nimble and proactive in its approach to mandate delivery. Its peacekeepers have helped protect humanitarian facilities, facilitated aid delivery in areas plagued by insecurity, and on many occasions contributed to the evacuation of humanitarian personnel caught in active hostilities.

To further deter violence and human rights abuses, they have intervened to protect civilians from abduction, recruitment, sexual violence and harassment.

Shortly, UNMISS will establish a permanent presence in Yei and has already reinforced its presence in Yambio and Torit. The Mission is also working with

partners to stem the increasing number of local-level conflicts through reconciliation and peaceful coexistence activities.

“This young nation struggles to define a path towards inclusive governance,” said the peacekeeping chief.

As the dry season sets in, there is a possibility that the military conflict will escalate, as well as intercommunal fighting. The economic crisis also continues to have serious repercussions for the security environment. Civilians will suffer the consequences of any escalation of violence.

“We cannot continue to stand by and watch,” he said.

Prompted by the rapidly deteriorating situation in the country, regional partners stepped up their efforts to revitalize the peace process. In particular, he welcomed and expressed full support for the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD)-led High-level Revitalization Forum (HLRF), which aims to secure a cessation of hostilities, implementation of the 2015 Peace Agreement, and the development of a revised and realistic timeline for its implementation.

He also welcomed the efforts of the African Union, and its Peace and Security Council’s expression of intent to consider punitive measures against those who aim to spoil the peace process.

Humanitarian needs assessment paints bleak picture

Also briefing the Council was Mark Lowcock, the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, who said comprehensive needs assessment paints a “bleak” picture.



Mark Lowcock, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, addresses the Security Council on Sudan and South Sudan. UN Photo/Manuel Elias



Jean-Pierre Lacroix, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, addresses the Security Council on Sudan and South Sudan. UN Photo/Rick Bajornas

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Even though more than two million people have fled South Sudan as refugees over the past four years of conflict, seven million people inside the country – that is almost two-thirds of the remaining population – still need humanitarian assistance, he said, adding that as the end of 2017 approaches, 1.25 million people are just one step away from famine, almost doubling from a year earlier.

In early 2018, half of the population will be reliant on emergency food aid. The next lean season beginning in March is likely again to see famine conditions in several locations across the country, he said.

Only one in 10 people currently has access to basic sanitation which helps prevent deadly diseases. Only half of the country's schools are functioning and two million children are currently out of school.

Reported rates of violence against women and girls in South Sudan are double the global average and among the highest in the world.

"The fact remains that until international humanitarian law is complied with, until the fighting ends and until basic services are established, humanitarian needs will remain dire," Mr. Lowcock stressed.

This year the UN and its humanitarian partners halted famine, but that took enormous resources and involved substantial risk to staff, with some losing their life in the endeavor, he said.

Lastly, he called upon the Council members to use their influence to ensure that the parties comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law to respect and protect civilians, including humanitarian workers, and to ensure that the parties allow and facilitate humanitarian relief operations and people's access to assistance and protection.

[Children not a 'bargaining chip' in tug of war between Syrian parties – UN advisor](#)

7 December 2017 – The United Nations advisor for Syria said Thursday that obstacles stopping humanitarians from delivering aid and carrying out medical evacuations in besieged parts of the war-ravaged country are not being lifted, and "children are dying" as a result.

"We need help from the parties on the ground, by the Government, by all of those nations who have influence and they are not helping us as they should," Jan Egeland, the UN Senior Advisor for Syria, told reporters in Geneva after a meeting of the Humanitarian Taskforce on the country.

The "epicentre" of the suffering, he said, is eastern Ghouta, where some 400,000 are besieged, cut off from aid and medical help.

"Six months ago a very detailed plan was delivered to the Government for needy cases of evacuation, on medical grounds. Since then, names have been added regularly and [...] we now have a revised list of 494 names," explained

Mr. Egeland.

Twelve among them have died waiting for “a half an hour drive to hospitals in Damascus and elsewhere,” he stated, noting that relief workers and aid convoys remain stalled.

“Why are we not rolling? Because of lack of facilitation letters from the Government,” he said.

Assistance to other Syrian towns and cities, including Foua and Kefraya – which are besieged by armed opposition groups – and Yarmouk, besieged by many groups, including forces loyal to the Government, also remain stalled due to disputes among the parties – on what the UN adviser referred to as – “simultaneous exchange of convoys.”

I would like to say that civilians, children, no one can be a bargaining chip in some kind of tug of war, where many things are negotiated at the same time Jan Egeland, UN Senior Advisor for Syria

“I would like to say that civilians, children, no one can be a bargaining chip in some kind of tug of war, where many things are negotiated at the same time. These have a right to be evacuated and we have an obligation to evacuate them,” he said, adding:

“So, I’d say, I have failed, I feel we have not been able to fix it, it is very, very heart breaking to get photos every day from children who are increasingly malnourished and who are increasingly dying and not being able to help them.”

Government delegation to return to Geneva talks on 10 December – UN mediator

At the same press briefing, Staffan de Mistura, the UN Special Envoy for Syria announced that the Government delegation – currently on a recess – is expected to return to Geneva for the [intra-Syrian talks](#) on Sunday and that work has continued with the opposition delegation.

“We shall assess the behaviour on both sides, Government and opposition in Geneva, and based on that we will then decide how this [...] can be a building up or not, or a sabotage of [the Geneva process],” he said.

“If that is the case, we will draw our own conclusions,” added the UN negotiator, noting that any type of new initiative as an opportunity of supporting the Geneva process, building on the process and coming back to the process.

“That is the position of the [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres,” he said.

Ukraine: UN and partners seek \$187 million amid humanitarian crisis that is 'worse than it's ever been'

7 December 2017 – The humanitarian situation in war-torn eastern Ukraine is worse than ever, and people are at breaking point, the senior-most United Nations aid official in the country said on Thursday, as he launched a response plan.

“From my perspective, the humanitarian crisis in Ukraine is worse than it’s ever been since the onset of conflict in 2014,” said Neal Walker, UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator in Ukraine, in Geneva.

He urged UN Member States to support the country’s 2018 Humanitarian Response Plan ([HRP](#)), which calls for \$187 million to help 2.3 million people in the country’s east.

“Today, I call on the Member States to show their solidarity by supporting this important appeal,” said Mr. Walker, stressing that “lasting peace is the only humanitarian solution for millions of people affected.”

Amid a spike in needs and ongoing clashes in the east between government forces and separatists, Mr. Walker noted Ukraine as being among “the most forgotten” conflict.

Entering its fourth year, many of the affected people have exhausted their savings and ability to cope, and are now forced to choose between food, medicine, shelter or their children’s education. Millions risk daily shelling, intensive fighting and other hostilities.

At the same time, through only five operational checkpoints along a 457-kilometre ‘contact line,’ up to one million people cross every month to access basic services, social benefits and maintain family networks.

“The people of eastern Ukraine continue to [pay the highest price for the conflict](#),” maintained Mr. Walker.

Of the 4.4 million affected people, some 3.4 million require humanitarian assistance and protection – 2.3 of whom are considered to be the most vulnerable, including the elderly, women and children.

“While Ukraine may no longer be front page news, millions of men, women and children urgently require our help,” he underscored.

The HRP outlines the key humanitarian relief and protection activities required by 32 international and 16 national organisations in 2018, including throughout the harsh winter months.

[UN health agency launches first global monitoring system for dementia](#)

7 December 2017 – The United Nations health agency on Thursday launched the first global monitoring system for dementia, which is expected to affect 152 million people worldwide by 2050 – triple the current 50 million – amid the aging of the global population.

Dementia includes Alzheimer's disease and other types of memory loss and cognitive disabilities.

"Nearly 10 million people [develop dementia](#) each year, six million of them in low- and middle-income countries," said Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General of the World Health Organization ([WHO](#)), in a news release.

"The suffering that results is enormous. This is an alarm call: we must pay greater attention to this growing challenge and ensure that all people living with dementia, wherever they live, get the care that they need," he added.

The [Global Dementia Observatory](#), a web-based platform, launched by WHO, can track progress on the provision of services for people with dementia and for those who care for them, both within countries and globally.

It will also monitor the presence of national policy and plans, risk reduction measures and infrastructure for providing care and treatment.

"This is the first global monitoring system for dementia that includes such a comprehensive range of data," said Tarun Dua of WHO's Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse. "The system will not only enable us to track progress, but just as importantly, to identify areas where future efforts are most needed."

WHO says the annual global cost of dementia is estimated at \$818 billion, equivalent to more than one per cent of global gross domestic product. The total cost includes direct medical costs, social care and loss of income of caregivers.

By 2030, the cost is expected to more than double, to \$2 trillion, a cost that could undermine social and economic development and overwhelm health and social services, including long-term care systems.

To date, WHO has collected data from 21 countries. By the end of 2018, it is expected that 50 countries will be contributing data.

Of the countries reporting data so far, 81 per cent have carried out a dementia awareness or risk reduction campaign, 71 per cent have a plan for dementia, 71 per cent provide support and training for caregivers and 66 per

cent have a dementia-friendly initiative.

All of these activities are recommended by WHO in the Global action plan on the public health response to dementia 2017-2025.

The Plan provides a comprehensive blueprint for action that can be taken by policy-makers, health- and social-care providers, civil society organizations and people with dementia and their caregivers.