

Fighting reaches 'worrying proportions' in South Sudan's north-east – UN mission

9 February 2017 – The United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) today voiced concern about an escalation in the fighting between Government and opposition forces in the west bank of the River Nile in the African country's north.

Fighting has reached what the head of UNMISS, David Shearer, described as 'worrying proportions,' according to a statement issued by the Office of Spokesperson for the UN peacekeeping operation.

'What began with an exchange of fire between SPLA [the Sudan People's Liberation Army] and Aguelek opposition forces, has expanded geographically,' the statement said, noting that military resupplies have since been observed arriving in the area.

Military operations on the west bank of the Nile River are taking place in an area where people, predominantly from the Shilluk ethnic group live, forcing people out of their homes. The town of Wau Shilluk is now reported to be deserted. Humanitarian workers have been evacuated and aid is not being provided, the statement added.

On Wednesday, UNMISS received reports of hostilities between the two sides in Owachi and Tonga, Panyinkang County.

Meanwhile, Mr. Shearer today returned to the South Sudanese capital, Juba, from a two-day field visit to Bentiu and Leer, two towns which have been among the most affected by the country's conflict, according to a separate statement issued today by the spokesperson's office.

In Bentiu, Mr. Shearer met state government officials, as well as internally displaced people who are living in the largest protection of civilians site in the country. In Leer, he visited the mission's temporary operating base to assess UNMISS' success in mounting robust patrols which push the mission's presence deep into the field.

He held discussions with local officials and also took the opportunity to travel to an opposition-controlled area to meet with pro-Machar representatives so he could hear all shades of opinion on how to facilitate humanitarian assistance and advance the peace process, the statement said.

The local opposition told Mr. Shearer that they support the current localized cessation of hostilities and remain in a defensive position which they hope will encourage the return of humanitarian agencies to Leer.

Both the local authorities and the opposition praised the UN for its efforts to facilitate communications between them. Mr. Shearer heard that they both

recognize that an inclusive national dialogue will assist the peace process, the statement added.

South Sudan has faced ongoing challenges since a political face-off between President Salva Kiir and his then former Vice-President Riek Machar erupted into full blown conflict between forces loyal to each in December 2013. The crisis has produced one of the world's worst displacement situations with immense suffering for civilians.

Despite the August 2015 peace agreement that formally ended the war, conflict and instability have also spread to previously unaffected areas.

Central African Republic: Senior UN official condemns armed, forceful entry into hospital

9 February 2017 – Denouncing forceful entry by armed individuals into a hospital in the Central African Republic's restive PK5 neighbourhood with the intention to kill some of the patients, a senior United Nations humanitarian official has emphasized that such incidents are in violation of the international humanitarian law.

This is the second such incident at the health facility, situated in the capital, Bangui, in the last five days.

“It is unacceptable that armed elements come to a hospital, with arms to kill patients,” stressed Michel Yao, the Acting Humanitarian Coordinator and the head of the World Health Organization (WHO) office in the Central African Republic (CAR), in a news release.

The UN official also underlined that that respect for health facilities and their civilian character must be ensured, and that free and unhindered access to patients and medical staff must be safeguarded.

International humanitarian law expressly forbids attacks on or targeting of medical facilities and personnel.

“I call on all parties including national authorities to enhance the protection of civilians and peaceful cohabitation of communities,” the Acting Humanitarian Coordinator added.

At least three killed in the restive neighbourhood

According to the news release, at least 26 individuals – both civilians and combatants – were injured and at least three killed in the violence

in Bangui's PK5 neighbourhood that has witnessed violent flare-ups in the past.

Several houses, a school and a church were also destroyed.

Protection of civilians continues to be a major concern in CAR where, according to estimates, 400,000 people remain displaced due to conflict and 2.2 million people are currently in need of humanitarian assistance.

In January, the UN together with the Government and relief organizations launched a \$400 million appeal for humanitarian response until 2019. Funding, however, remains a major challenge.

Clashes between the mainly Muslim Séléka rebel coalition and anti-Balaka militia, which are mostly Christian, plunged the country of 4.5 million people into civil conflict in 2013. Despite significant progress and successful elections, CAR has remained in the grip of instability and sporadic unrest.

[UN calls for 50 per cent increase in funding for mine action in 2017](#)

9 February 2017 – The United Nations has launched a \$511 million international appeal for humanitarian mine action in conflict and post-conflict settings for 2017, a 50 per cent increase from last year's \$347 million consolidated appeal.

“Across the world, the conflicts tearing countries, communities and lives apart cause a tragic increase in the number of casualties due to landmines and other explosive hazards,” said the Director of the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS), Agnès Marcaillou, in a press release issued earlier this week.

“There is an absolute necessity for a humanitarian mine action response. The knowledge and willingness to help are there – it is adequate funding that is missing,” added Ms. Marcaillou, who also chairs the UN Inter-Agency Coordination Group on Mine Action.

According to the Portfolio of Mine Action Projects 2017, an online resource for information on such projects, there is a sharp increase in the need for humanitarian mine action, including landmine clearance, risk education and victim assistance.

The Portfolio covers over 200 projects and presents a consolidated picture of the needs and strategies of 22 countries and territories contaminated with landmines and other explosive hazards such as unexploded cluster munitions,

rockets and improvised explosive devices across Africa, Asia, Europe, the Middle East and South America.

Needs are the greatest in active conflict zones, with Afghanistan requiring \$124 million; Iraq \$75 million; Syria \$52 million; and Yemen \$17 million. In addition, countries which have extensive residual contamination also need substantial support, with Cambodia requiring \$23 million and the Lao People's Democratic Republic \$26 million, according to UNMAS.

[Somalia: UN mission pledges support as new President will face 'daunting challenges'](#)

8 February 2017 – Congratulating former Prime Minister Mohamed Abdullahi 'Farmajo' on his election as Somalia's new President, the United Nations Assistance Mission in the country (UNSOM) said the UN and the wider international community are ready to assist him in addressing the myriad challenges that await his Government.

"We [...] look forward to working with him and his Government in tackling the many economic, political, security and humanitarian challenges facing Somalia," UNSOM Spokesperson Joseph Contreras told *UN News* after the presidential polling, which followed a nearly 18 month exercise that included an extended parliamentary electoral process.

"It's an historic milestone in the country's emergence from years of chaos and civil war. We feel the process, though flawed in some respects by allegations of corruption and manipulation of some of the parliamentary voting, overall, produced some very positive results," he said, noting that the new Federal Parliament that was elected is the most representative and legitimate national legislature in the history of the country.

The new president, known as 'Farmajo,' was declared the winner after two rounds of voting by the Somali Parliament in the capital, Mogadishu. The runner-up, the incumbent, Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, chose to withdraw from a third and final round of voting and congratulated the former Prime Minister on his victory.

Mr. Contreras said that the voting today, held under "very, very tight security," was conducted in a peaceful, orderly and transparent manner according to the rules stipulated by Somalia's provisional Federal Constitution. "Voting was held at the airport and there had been some questions raised about security, but I take it everything went smoothly," he said, stressing that had been no attempted attacks on the venue whatsoever.

He went on to say that the Mission also thanked the outgoing President and his government for the achievements they registered over the past four years “and for the very good working relationship that we enjoyed as the United Nations with President Hassan Sheikh and his team.”

Looking ahead, Mr. Contreras said that what is next for Somalia first of all is for the new Federal President to name a prime minister. The prime minister then in turn will appoint a cabinet.

“And then they will get down to business. The new President [...] faces a daunting list of challenges in the coming months and years. There is of course the ongoing drought crisis in many parts of the country where over six million people are facing varying degrees of food insecurity,” he explained.

Furthermore, Mr. Contreras continued, there is a presumption of the constitutional review process that needs to take place, and that process needs to be completed this year. “Also, the new Federal President will need to promote reconciliation among various communities across Somalia who have disputes over resources, land and other matters.”

In all this, the international community, led by the UN, stands ready to work closely with the new Government and help it promote the State-building process and consolidate the peace and promote the development of the country, he stated.

[Colombia: UN chief Guterres welcomes start of peace talks with ELN](#)



The city of Quito, Ecuador, which was declared a World Heritage Site by the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), in the late 1970s. Photo: © UNESCO/Francesco Bandarin

8 February 2017 – United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres has welcomed yesterday’s launch of formal peace talks between the Government of Colombia and the National Liberation Army (ELN) in Ecuador’s capital, Quito, his spokesperson said today in a statement.

In the talks with the second-largest opposition group, the Government seeks an agreement similar to the one reached last year with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), to end a five decade-long conflict.

“Resolving this conflict is essential to achieving a comprehensive peace in Colombia, to saving lives and to advancing sustainable development across the whole country,” said the statement.

"The Secretary-General takes note of the commitment of the parties to listen to the voices of the communities affected by the conflict," it stated, adding that the UN chief commended Brazil, Chile, Cuba, Ecuador, Norway and Venezuela for their commitment as guarantors, as well as the other accompanying and supporting countries.