

'Political leadership needs to support its own people,' urges UN mission chief in South Sudan



A WFP helicopter arrives Thonyor, Leer County, South Sudan, with supplies of nutrition items and vegetable oil, as part of an inter-agency rapid response mission to provide assistance to people threatened by famine. Photo: WFP/George Fominyen

3 March 2017 – The top United Nations official in South Sudan is calling on the country's political leadership to support its own people in the wake of a famine affecting some 100,000 people, and calling for local authorities to provide humanitarian access to those most in need.

David Shearer, the recently arrived UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General in the country, today voiced alarm "at how little a response to the plight of these people has been heard from their leaders."

On 20 February, famine was declared in parts of Unity state. Since then, humanitarian agencies and non-governmental organizations evacuated the heart of the afflicted-area, a town called Mayendit, due to the threat of resumed fighting between the Sudan Peoples' Liberation Army (SPLA) and the SPLA in Opposition.

"Those affected by the humanitarian crisis are still citizens of this young country, and they deserve protection," Mr. Shearer said in reference to the women and children most affected by the crisis. "But the constant fighting shows they are getting none. Instead, they are bearing the brunt."

Mr. Shearer, who is also the new head of the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), reiterated the UN's call for a complete cessation of hostilities between all those involved.