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Deeper divisions continue to 'cleave' the people of South Sudan, warns UN peacekeeping chief

21 June – 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, a senior United Nations 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.



Jean-Pierre Lacroix, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, briefs the Security Council on the situation in South Sudan. UN Photo/Manuel Elias

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 – 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.



Much of Taiz, Yemen, has been destroyed by two years of fierce fighting. Photo: ICRC/Khalid al-Saeed

“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 – 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.

“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.



Tadamichi Yamamoto, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), addresses the Security Council. UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe

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, UN warns millions still face 'extreme hunger on the edge of a cliff'

21 June – 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 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.”

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



In Pathai, a settlement in Jonglei State, South Sudan, persons displaced by conflict await registration for food distribution. Photo: UNICEF/Jacob Zoeherman

- 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



A view of passengers aboard trains connecting the suburbs of Kolkata, India. UN Photo/Kibae Park.

21 June – The world population is now at least 7.6 billion, up from 7.4 billion in 2015, 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 populations in 26 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 from 2000-2005 to 4.7 births from 2010-2015.

In contrast, the birth rate in Europe was 1.6 births per woman in 2010-2015, up from 1.4 births in 2010-2015.

“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 the flows 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 2010-2015.

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.

As crises multiply, UN revises annual aid appeal to assist over 100 million around the world



A medical worker registers young patients in the small rural village of An-Nassiri, located about 60 km from Al Hudaydah, Yemen. Only 45 per cent of health facilities in the war-torn country are currently functioning. Credit: OCHA/Giles Clarke

21 June – As the number of people in need of humanitarian assistance around the world reach record levels, United Nations and relief partners have revised their global aid appeal to \$23.5 billion – up nearly 6 per cent from the original \$22.2 billion announced late last year.

According to a news release issued by the UN Office for Coordination for Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), new natural and man-made disasters as well as deteriorating protracted emergencies have resulted in an additional 8 million people around the world needing assistance.

Since its launch on 5 December 2017, donors have provided about \$6.2 billion for the 2017 global appeal. However, with more than half of the year still remaining and needs rising, more is needed.

“With generous donor support, humanitarian partners have swiftly scaled up to deliver record levels of life-saving assistance in challenging and often dangerous environments,” Stephen O’Brien, the UN Emergency Relief Coordination and head of OCHA, said on the first day of the annual Economic and Social Council Humanitarian Affairs Segment in Geneva.

“[But] we are in a race against time. People's lives and well-being depend on increasing our collective support,” he added.

Some of the crises that pushed up the requirements include the rapid escalation of violence in Kasai province in the Democratic Republic of Congo as well as a drought in Kenya, tropical cyclones in Madagascar and Mozambique, and flooding in Peru, as well as looming famines across north-eastern Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan and Yemen.

The revised appeal aims to reach over 101 million highly vulnerable people among the estimated 141 million people across 37 countries in need of humanitarian assistance.

“Funding to response plans is a high-impact investment as they are prioritized on the basis of thorough needs assessment and analysis. Supporting the plans also provides the most neutral and impartial aid,” Mr. O’Brien noted, calling on the international community to step up assistance: “We now need donors to set the bar higher and increase their support.”

The Humanitarian Affairs Segment, being held from 21-23 June is a major global platform to discuss activities and issues related to strengthening UN's humanitarian response around the globe.

The forum also provides a key opportunity for UN Member States, Organizational entities, humanitarian and development partners and the affected communities to discuss emerging and pressing humanitarian issues.

Coinciding with the Humanitarian Affairs Segment, OCHA today also launched the Global Humanitarian Overview 2017 Status Report, which documents evidence humanitarian efforts to assist the world's most vulnerable people.

According to the Status Report, UN and partners have provided life-saving assistance to 5.8 million people in Yemen and over 3 million people in South Sudan. Also 2.7 million people in Somalia and 2.2 million affected by the Syria crisis have received food. In north-eastern Nigeria, over 2.3 million people have received both emergency food assistance and livelihood support through UN-coordinated plans.

Nigerian refugees returning to “dangerously unprepared” situation, UN agency chief warns



Nigerian refugees returning from Cameroon wait to register at Banki camp in northern Nigeria. Photo UNHCR/Romain Desclous

21 June – Large numbers of Nigerian refugees hosted in Cameroon are returning to northeast Nigeria, into a situation the United Nations refugee chief calls “dangerously unprepared to receive them.”

“It is my firm view that returns are not sustainable at this time,” said UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi, in a press statement today.

Three weeks ago the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) warned about the situation in the Nigerian border town of Banki, where thousands were returning.

“Shelter was lacking, there was severe overcrowding, water supplies and sanitation facilities were wholly inadequate, humanitarian aid was in short supply, and with the rainy season approaching, there was a risk of disease. Even before the returns, Banki was hosting some 45,000 internally displaced people,” Mr. Grandi stressed.

“Now,” he continued “a further 889 Nigerian refugees, most of them children, have arrived. Having travelled from Minawao camp in Cameroon they reached Banki on 17th June.”

The High Commission explained that UNHCR has already stepped up information efforts in Minawao camp to ensure that refugees are given accurate information on the conditions in Banki before they make the choice to return.

“In Banki a strengthened inter-agency effort to address the existing situation must be a priority,” he continued. “We are working with the authorities and humanitarian actors to ensure that returnees are quickly screened, and receive food, shelter and other basic household support.”

Mr. Grandi pointed out, “The new arrivals – and we hear reports of more refugees seeking to return – put a strain on the few existing services. A new emergency, just as the rainy season is starting, has to be avoided at all costs.”

He concluded by stressing that the Tripartite Commission, established with UNHCR and the governments of Nigeria and Cameroon, needs to hold its first meeting as soon as possible to outline the minimum conditions needed for returns and discuss how to address these spontaneous movements.

Protection of civilians in Syria must be ensured, stresses UN chief Guterres

21 June – Expressing alarm over the suffering of people Syria, in particular those in Raqqa and in other locations where fighting continues, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres has called on all those conducting military operations in the country to ensure the safety and protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure.

“Civilians continue to be killed, injured and displaced at a terrifying rate [and] places of refuge, such as hospitals and schools continue to be targeted,” said the Secretary-General in a statement today.

“I make an urgent appeal to all those conducting military operations in Syria to do everything in their power to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure,” he added.

In the statement, the UN chief voiced particular concern for the civilians in Raqqa as well as those stuck in other besieged and hard-to-reach areas, some of whom have been deprived of food and basic medical assistance for years on end.

According to estimates, more than 430,000 civilians are in need across the larger Raqqa governorate, in areas either cut off from relief or where transporting aid is extremely difficult. In all, the crisis – now in its seventh year – has left more than 13.5 million people in need of humanitarian assistance, displaced 6.3 million internally, and forced more than 5.1 million to flee across Syrian borders.

Further in the statement, Mr. Guterres hailed the efforts of UN and humanitarian workers, who he said are “all they can to stem the suffering in Raqqa and across Syria, often at great personal risk.”

“It is critical for all parties [to the conflict] to facilitate improved humanitarian access to allow aid to reach those in urgent need of life-saving assistance without delay,” he said.

UN Security Council welcomes deployment of regional force to restore stability in the Sahel



A displaced woman from northern Mali in the Sahel, waits at a temporary shelter near Mopti's main bus station. Photo: UNDP/Nicolas Meulders

21 June – The United Nations Security Council today welcomed the deployment by the so-called Group of Five (G5) – Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger – of a joint force to tackle the threat of terrorism, as well as the serious challenges posed by transnational organized crime in Africa's restive Sahel region.

Unanimously adopting a new resolution, the Council welcomed the joint force's strategic concept of operations, saying it intended to review the deployment in four months' time. It requested that the Secretary-General, in close coordination with the Group of Five (G5) Sahel States, as well as the African Union – to provide an oral update within two months.

Also by that text, the Council urged the joint force of up to 5,000 military and police personnel, as well as the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) and French forces in that country to ensure adequate coordination and exchange of information regarding their operations, within their



United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres. UN Photo/Jean-Marc Ferré (file)

respective mandates. In that regard, it reiterated its request that the Secretary-General enhance cooperation between MINUSMA and the G5 Sahel States through the relevant intelligence and liaison officers.

The resolution also urged the G5 Sahel States to continue efforts to make the joint force operational in a sustainable, viable and effective manner. It also welcomed the European Union's commitment to provide €50 million in financial support, and encouraged further support from bilateral and multilateral partners.

Emphasizing the important role of women in preventing conflict and peacebuilding, the Council underlined the need to take a gender perspective into account in implementing all aspects of the strategic concept of operations.

According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), in the Sahel, abject poverty, fast population growth, climate change, recurrent food and nutrition crises, armed conflicts and violence converge dangerously and undermine the lives and assets and future prospects of millions of families across the region. More than 30 million people face food insecurity, one in five children under the age of five suffers from acute malnutrition and at least 4.9 million are displaced by the effects of conflicts.