

Senior UN official in South Sudan warns women and girls face 'extremely high risk' of sexual assault risk

19 April 2017 – Without peace in South Sudan, millions of people will go hungry and millions of women and girls could be raped as they try to go about their daily lives, including as they search for food, a senior United Nations official today warned.

"While humanitarianians will continue to do all that is possible to alleviate suffering, the fact remains that unless the guns fall silent, the humanitarian situation will continue to deteriorate," said Eugene Owusu, Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General and UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator in South Sudan.

Speaking to journalists in Juba about the violence and related food insecurity facing the country, Mr. Owusu noted that 7.5 million people are in need of humanitarian aid and an estimated 3.5 million have been uprooted from their homes.

That figure includes many women and children, who have sought shelter in places such as swamps and subsisting on water lilies, to get away from fighters.

Cases of sexual assault and gender based violence increased by 64 per cent in 2016 compared to the previous year, according to a recent survey cited by Mr. Owusu.

"Against a backdrop of prevailing impunity, a major fear for women and children in this country is, sadly, the fear of being raped," he told the press.

Violence is also a concern for humanitarian workers seeking to deliver aid, the senior UN official said, urging officials to ensure "free, safe and unhindered access to all areas of this country in order to avert the spread of famine."

He noted "repeated" challenges to reaching people in need as a result of insecurity and access denials at the sub-national level.

In addition, at least 83 aid workers have been killed since the latest outbreak of violence in December 2013, with three contractors killed just last month.

Funding is another concern, with only about 27 per cent of the \$1.6 billion appeal met so far, according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs ([OCHA](#)).

Despite these challenges, UN and international donors have worked with the

Government to deliver lifesaving aid to at least 1.6 million people, including to some 400,000 people affected by the famine in Leer and Mayendit.

“Our response has focused on scaling up food assistance, nutrition and health provisions, WASH [water, sanitation and hygiene], and enhancing livelihood opportunities for those unfortunate citizens in those parts of the country,” Mr. Owusu said, using the common acronym in the humanitarian community for water, sanitation and hygiene.

Ultimately, he noted, the long-term answer to the humanitarian situation is recovery, stabilization and development.

He called for investment in livelihoods, tightly linked to peace and relative security at community levels, to build up resistance and support basic social services to the most vulnerable in society.

Peacekeepers in South Sudan working to strengthen protection of civilians – UN chief

19 April 2017 – The United Nations peacekeeping mission in South Sudan has done “significant work” to more effectively protect civilians and respond in case of a crisis, [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres has said in a letter to the President of the UN Security Council.

The letter summarizes the progress made in implementing the recommendations of the independent special investigation into the violence in Juba in July 2016 and the actions of the UN Mission, known as UNMISS.

“[Significant work has been undertaken](#) over the last five months to enhance the ability of UNMISS to protect civilians, better plan and prepare its response to crisis situations and increase staff safety and security,” the Secretary-General wrote in the letter to Ambassador Nikki Haley, the Permanent Representative of the United States to the UN, in her capacity as President of the Security Council for April.

In particular, Mr. Guterres noted the establishment of a weapons-free zone around the Protection of Civilians (POC) sites and UN House in Juba, which he said “has contributed to a significant drop in reported crime and violence, including sexual and gender-based violence.”

In addition, UNMISS peacekeepers are conducting dismounted patrols within the area throughout the day and night, as well as cordon-and-search operations within the POC sites to disrupt arms trafficking.

The observations in the letter are based on an independent follow-up mission last month led by Major General (retired) Patrick Cammaert. He was looking into how the UN handled its response to fighting that occurred between 8 and 12 July 2016 between the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army in Opposition (SPLM/A-IO). Hundreds of people were killed and more than 200 raped during that time period.

Among other observations, the letter noted a "positive change" in the operations and posture of military and police components as a result of corrective actions taken by UNMISS as well as troop and police contributing countries.

The Departments of UN Peacekeeping Operations and Field Support have also made "important changes" in more thoroughly training and monitoring performance of peacekeepers.

Mr. Guterres noted that "while much has been achieved, more needs to be done to raise and sustain the performance bar," including through ongoing reviews and revise strategies.

Progress against tropical diseases must be backed by poverty alleviation efforts – UN health agency

19 April 2017 – The United Nations today cited "record-breaking" progress in controlling neglected tropical diseases – which blind, maim, disfigure and debilitate millions of people worldwide, especially in its poorest areas – as an estimated one billion people were reached with treatment for at least one of these diseases in 2015 alone, according to the Organization's health agency.

"[We have] observed record-breaking progress towards bringing ancient scourges like sleeping sickness and elephantiasis to their knees," said Margaret Chan, the Director-General of the UN World Health Organization in a [news release](#) today on efforts to tackle the diseases, known as NTDs.

"Over the past 10 years, millions of people have been rescued from disability and poverty, thanks to one of the most effective global partnerships in modern public health."

The UN agency's new report, [Integrating Neglected Tropical Diseases into Global Health and Development](#), shows how political support, improvements in living conditions and supply of medicines have led to sustained expansion of disease control programmes in countries where these diseases are most prevalent.

Another major milestone was the endorsement of a NTD roadmap in 2012, in which WHO partners committed additional support and resources to eliminating 10 of the most common NTDs.



Remarkable progress has been made against neglected tropical diseases (NTDs) over the past 10 years. Photo: WHO

For sustaining this momentum, experts believe that wider progress towards realizing the [2030 Agenda](#) for Sustainable Development will be crucial.

Meeting global targets for water and sanitation, such as those under the global Sustainable Development Goals ([SDGs](#)) will be key.

WHO estimates that 2.4 billion people still lack basic sanitation facilities such as toilets and latrines, while more than 660 million continue to drink water from “unimproved” sources, such as surface water.

“Further gains [...] will depend on wider progress towards the [SDGs](#),” said Dirk Engels, Director of WHO’s Department of Control of Neglected Tropical Diseases.

Once widely prevalent, diseases are now restricted to tropical and sub-tropical regions with unsafe water, inadequate hygiene and sanitation, and poor housing conditions. More than 70 per cent of countries and territories that report the presence of NTDs are low or lower-middle income economies.

RELATED: [FEATURE: Eradication of yaws – a disease that ‘begins where roads end’ – is within sight, WHO doctor says in film](#)

The class of these illnesses include diseases such as [dengue](#), [rabies](#), [trachoma](#), [Buruli ulcer](#), [yaws](#), [leprosy](#), [human African trypanosomiasis](#) (sleeping sickness), [dracunculiasis](#) (guinea-worm disease), [schistosomiasis](#) (larval worm infection) etc.

Poor people living in remote, rural areas, urban slums, or conflict zones are most at risk.

[Discovery of more mass graves reveal ‘unfolding horror’ in DR Congo – UN rights chief](#)

19 April 2017 – Raising alarm over increasing reports of serious human rights violations in the Kasai Central and Kasai Oriental provinces of Democratic

Republic of the Congo, the United Nations human rights chief underscored that the scale and nature of the allegations could warrant an investigation by an international mechanism, such as the International Criminal Court ([ICC](#)).

[According](#) the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights ([OHCHR](#)), between 5-7 April, a team of UN [human rights](#) and [police](#) officials found 17 further mass graves in the Kasai Central province, which had been the location of clashes between security forces and the Kamuina Nsapu, a local militia.

The discovery of yet more mass graves and the reports of continued violations and abuses highlight the horror that has been unfolding in the Kasais over the last nine months, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein said in a [news release](#), highlighting the need to monitor the situation closely.

Should there be no effective national investigation, I will not hesitate to urge the international community to support an investigation by an international mechanism, including the International Criminal Court, he added.

Fifteen of the recently discovered mass graves were in a cemetery in the town of Tshimbulu and two in the locality of Tshienke.

According to information received by the UN investigators, soldiers from the *Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo* (FARDC) had reportedly dug the graves, after clashing with presumed elements of the Kamuina Nsapu between 26-28 March. At least 74 people, including 30 children, were reported to have been killed by soldiers as a result of these clashes.

The militia, loyal to a local customary chief who was killed in August last year, has been accused of a number of crimes and human rights abuses, including killings and abduction, recruitment of children, and targeting schools, hospitals and churches.

Should there be no effective national investigation, I will not hesitate to urge the international community to support an investigation by an international mechanism, including the ICCHigh Commissioner Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein

It is absolutely vital that the Government takes meaningful steps, which to date have been lacking, to ensure that there is a prompt, transparent, and independent investigation to establish the facts and circumstances of alleged human rights violations and abuses perpetrated by all parties, underscored the UN rights chief.

The UN team also visited Kananga, a town in Kasai Central, where between 28-30 March, FARDC soldiers were reported to have shot dead at least 40 people, including 11 children and 12 women, in the town's Nganza commune, and injured at least 21 others. There are also allegations that at least two women and three girls had been raped by the soldiers during that operation.

The UN investigators were also informed of the killing of three individuals, including a 17-year-old boy and a one-month-old baby during search operations by the *Police Nationale Congolaise*.

Also in the statement, High Commissioner Zeid offered his Office's assistance in conducting a credible investigation into the reports and allegations but underscored that it must be provided with unfettered access.

We reiterate our request for access to all sites of mass graves, as well as to all witnesses, including those in detention, and other relevant information necessary to determine responsibility at all levels," he added.

UN envoy urges Palestinian unity to resolve electricity crisis in Gaza

19 April 2017 – The United Nations envoy for the Middle East peace process today called on authorities in Gaza to work together with the international community to resolve a new energy crisis after the area's only power station shut down, saying the consequences of the crisis "should not be underestimated."

All in Gaza must share the burden by [paying their bills](#). It is the poorest Palestinians in Gaza who pay the price for exceptions and privileges that others enjoy," said Nickolay Mladenov, the UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process.

He urged the "de facto" authorities in Gaza to ensure that collection rates are improved and that revenue collected in Gaza is returned to the "legitimate" Palestinian authorities in order to keep fuel and electricity supply flowing.

According to media reports, the two factions have been fighting over unpaid bills and taxes, forcing the local energy authority to shut down power.

Mr. Mladenov noted that Palestinians in Gaza have lived in a protracted humanitarian crisis and should not be held hostage by disagreements, divisions and closures.

"The social, economic and political consequences of this impending energy crisis should not be underestimated," he stressed.

The UN envoy said the international community can finance and support investment in upgrading the electrical grid "but it cannot do it alone." He urged the Palestinian Government to facilitate buying fuel for the Gaza Power plant, and voiced support for reforming the Gaza

Electricity Distribution Company.

He also called on Israeli authorities to facilitate the entry of materials for repairs and maintenance of the power grid and plant, and noted the need to also upgrade Egyptian power lines.