

Joint Statement on renewed attacks against the civilian population, especially women and children, in the widening armed conflict in South Sudan

Joint statement by UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Zainab Hawa Bangura, UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Leila Zerrougui, Executive Director of UN Women, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, UN Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, Adama Dieng and the UN Special Adviser on the Responsibility to Protect, Jennifer Welsh.

(New York, 28 May 2015) We are deeply concerned at reports of escalating violence against the civilian population in the context of the ongoing conflict in South Sudan, particularly against women and children. Since the middle of April 2015, reports have indicated that serious violations and abuses of international human rights and humanitarian law have taken place and are ongoing, as fighting intensifies between forces of the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) and Sudan People's Liberation Army–In Opposition (SPLA-IO) in Unity and Upper Nile States.

We are appalled at the large scale, widespread nature of the violations and abuses reported, including extra judicial killings, the abduction of women and children, rape and other forms of sexual violence, recruitment and use of children, looting and destruction of property. In addition, the fighting has exacerbated an already dire economic and humanitarian situation by reducing the humanitarian space, thus depriving thousands of South Sudanese of essential humanitarian assistance.

We continue to remind the political and military leadership of the SPLA and SPLA-IO of their responsibilities, in line with international law, including their responsibility to ensure the full protection of the civilian population, especially women and children, from violence and to spare them the effects of hostilities. The Government of South Sudan bears the primary responsibility for protecting its population from serious violations of international human rights and humanitarian law. We therefore call upon the Government to exercise that responsibility. The SPLA and SPLA-IO leaders must immediately put a stop to ongoing violations and abuses, issue clear orders for the immediate release of children associated with their forces and prohibiting sexual violence crimes. They must ensure the enforcement of these orders by field commanders, take concrete steps to identify and hold perpetrators accountable as well as facilitate access for humanitarian actors to continue providing life-saving assistance to the population.

We believe that a sustainable solution to the crisis can only be found through inclusive dialogue and that accountability is critical to obtaining lasting peace and in fostering reconciliation among communities in South Sudan. Women, as leaders and agents of change must be represented in peace talks and women's groups must be fully consulted in the process.

We urge the UN Security Council, African Union, the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD), neighbouring countries and other relevant stakeholders, especially those involved in the mediation process, to reinforce engagements with the SPLA and SPLA-IO in order to de-escalate the current situation, prevent further violations of international human rights and humanitarian law and move the mediation process forward.

It is the collective responsibility of the international community to take decisive steps to end the protracted suffering of the South Sudanese people, especially the women and children who are disproportionately affected by the recent clashes.

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