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## **In South Sudan, UN humanitarian chief calls on all parties to work together for peace**



UN Emergency Relief Coordinator Stephen O'Brien meets women displaced by recent fighting in Wau, South Sudan. Photo: IOM/Mohammed

**2 August** – United Nations Emergency Relief Coordinator, Stephen O'Brien today called on all actors in South Sudan, including the international community supporting the country, to work together for a peace that will enable the nation and its people to realize their hopes for a better future.

"We all need to work together, fast and hard to create peace," said Mr. O'Brien, speaking with *UN Radio* halfway through his three-day mission to crisis-torn South Sudan, where the humanitarian situation has worsened after fighting broke out three weeks ago in and around the capital, Juba, between rival forces backing President Salva Kiir and First Vice-President Riek Machar.

"There is no better platform for people to have hope, to be able to invest in their future, and to be able to [...] to utilize the undoubted assets – not just the people of the country but also the land," he

emphasized.

Noting that though rains had been unpredictable, he said that the land offered a lot of promise.

"There is opportunity for people [...] to fend for themselves and to grow [crops], have an agricultural future [and to] supply others within the country [as well as] to create markets and [...] help everybody start generating the opportunities for prosperity," he noted.

Underlining that people are compelled to make difficult choices and take incredible risks, such as having to flee their homes when their safety and security or the future of their children is threatened, he noted: "It directly flows from conflict."



“Just as you and I would, if you can’t feed your children, get them to education, [find] necessary medicines, or have a baby safely if you are [pregnant],” he added, outlining the severe challenges that people have to face because of conflict.

Turning to the challenges humanitarian workers have to contend with on a daily basis, Mr. O’Brien, who is also the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, underscored that access for humanitarian workers and those on a humanitarian mission is a right that is guaranteed under international laws.

He added that conflict had severely restricted aid access – if not prohibited it altogether, in some instances.

Mr. O’Brien further emphasized that humanitarian workers are driven by humanitarian needs. They operate on the basis of independence, impartiality and neutrality, and must be given free, unimpeded access to reach all people in need, wherever they may be.

Furthermore, he said that attacks on humanitarian workers or facilities, such as the recent looting of a UN World Food Programme (WFP) warehouse, severely impact the availability of food and relief material for those in need as well as the ability of humanitarian workers to deliver such items to those desperately needing the support.

“[The people who looted that warehouse] have removed the chance for others to survive and to be protected,” Mr. O’Brien emphasized, adding that those who committed that criminal act must be held accountable.

The top UN humanitarian official also underlined the importance of partnerships and coordination with the Government and relief actors on the ground, stressing that harnessing such partnership further strengthens the humanitarian support and makes it more cost effective.

He added that by working with the State authorities in order to help them deliver on their obligations and provide basic services to the people of the country, both at the local and at the federal level, fosters the conditions for peace to grow and consolidate.

Such a situation, he said, would allow the people of South Sudan, the world’s youngest country, to build a confident country with hopes for the future.

## Colombia peace accord offers chance to ‘close chapter of war once and for all’ – UN envoy

**2 August** – The head of the United Nations new political mission in Colombia today pledged the world body’s steadfast support for the full implementation of the accord reached by the Colombian Government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia - People’s Army (FARC-EP), which seeks to bring an end the longest-running conflict in the Western Hemisphere.

“As the United Nations, we are convinced that this long negotiation offers a real chance to close the chapter of war, once and for all. And that opinion is also shared by the parties,” Jean Arnault, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Colombia said, meeting reporters for the first time in Bogota, where the mission is located.

In late January 2016, the UN Security Council unanimously adopted a resolution to establish a political mission of unarmed international observers to monitor and verify the laying down of arms and, as part of a tripartite mechanism, a definitive bilateral ceasefire and cessation of hostilities following the signing of a peace agreement.

The parties, engaged in peace talks in Havana since 2012, agreed on 19 January to jointly request the Council to establish the mission. On 23 June in Havana, they concluded the agreement on the definitive bilateral cease fire and cessation of



Jean Arnault of France, head of UN Mission in Colombia. UN Photo/Ryan Brown (file)

hostilities and the laying down of arms.

The UN Department of Political Affairs has started the planning process in order to be ready to deploy the mission as soon as the peace agreement between the Government of Colombia and the FARC-EP is concluded. The first 80 observers arrived in Colombia by the end of July and were engaged in preparatory activities.

In his remarks today, Mr. Arnault stressed: “We do not intend to impose upon you a peace accord. We want to guarantee, to the best of our abilities, to both parties and to all Colombians, that whatever was discussed and was agreed upon in Havana, will in fact be carried out in the field.”

Laying out some of the details of the work ahead, He noted that the observers would hail from civilian and military institutions from Latin American countries.

In addition, he said the Mission’s two primary mandates were “complex,” as one aim would be to verify the ceasefire and the other would be focused on disarmament verification.

As such, he explained that while the mission would directly conduct the verification of disarmament, the UN and the parties themselves would be involved in verifying the ceasefire. He went on to note that when compared to previous processes of this sort, this tripartite arrangement is useful, since each individual party will be able to witness the implementation of the accord by the other.

This, Mr. Arnault underscored, would contribute to an “additional layer of trust” between the Government and the FARC. He further spotlighted the Mission’s temporary character and stressed that the presence of military observers in no way should be perceived as a “foreign presence” in Colombia.

“This mission has a different profile both, because of its mandate and also because of its duration. This is a temporary, provisional mission that will remain in the Colombia as long as the ceasefire and disarmament process is implemented. When these processes are completed, the mission will be withdrawn. And with this, I hope this will help dispel any idea that in any way the UN is attempting to have an extended presence here,” he stated.

Mr. Arnault said it should be possible for the mission to be fully operational on the ground within 15 days of the signing and announcement of the final accord.

“We have taken all the necessary steps so that at the time that the ceasefire is announced; the only pending procedure would be buying air tickets for the remainder of the mission,” he explained, adding: “With the preparations we have made, we hope that it will not take us more than two weeks between the announcement of the final agreement and the time for full deployment on the field.”

Throughout the discussions between the FARC-EP and the Colombian Government, which started in Havana in 2012, negotiators have reached agreement on key issues such as political participation, land rights, illicit drugs, gender equality and transitional justice.

In an opinion piece for the Colombian newspaper *El Tiempo* Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said deployment of the mission in Colombia would be an “unprecedented experience” in the country, as well as in the history of UN ceasefire observations.

He stressed that the international observers working under the UN flag would not carry weapons or engage in armed action of any kind, nor would their role be to carry out cooperation projects, as is the case with UN agencies, funds and programmes in the country.

“The sole purpose of this international observation mission is simple: to help ensure that what has been agreed in Havana with respect to the ceasefire and laying down of arms will be carried out in Colombia; and that the commitments made by the Government of Colombia and the FARC-EP, to each other and to society are fully implemented,” Mr. Ban said.

## Syria: UN 'deeply disturbed' by reports of airstrikes on hospitals, other civilian infrastructure

**2 August** – Deeply disturbed by reports of five hospitals and a blood bank hit by airstrikes in Syria, the United Nations today reiterated a call on all parties to the conflict to end the destruction of medical facilities and other civilian infrastructure.

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) warned that many of these facilities that had provided life-saving healthcare to tens of thousands of people are no longer functioning.

According to updates from OCHA, three hospitals in Andan town, Hor village and Haritan sub-district in Aleppo governorate were reportedly damaged by airstrikes on 30 and 31 July.

Jasim hospital in Dara'a was reportedly also hit on 31 July and a maternity hospital in Idleb was also reportedly struck on 30 July. In addition, a blood bank in Atareb, Aleppo governorate, was reported hit on 31 July.

Dozens of casualties and injuries resulting from these strikes have been reported, including to pregnant women and children.

OCHA also reported that attacks on civilian infrastructure include those on 31 July and 1 August that reportedly damaged Aleppo's electricity and water distribution infrastructure. This has resulted in an electricity blackout throughout the city and has left residents throughout Aleppo with no access to water through the public water network, although some water is still available through wells and tanks.

An aerial bombardment on Saraqab city in Idleb on 30 July reportedly struck a university, resulting in partial damages to infrastructure, and on 1 August, shelling on Aleppo University in western Aleppo city reportedly injured about 11 students.

The UN continues to call on all parties to the conflict to end the destruction of hospitals and other civilian infrastructure that is essential for the civilian population, and to respect their obligations under international humanitarian law and the international human rights law, OCHA said.

In related news, the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) Regional Director for the Middle East and North Africa, Saad Houry, also called for the protection of all children in Aleppo.

A press statement from UNICEF said the agency is extremely concerned for the safety and wellbeing of all children caught up in the escalating violence in the city of Aleppo in northern Syria.

"The escalation of this conflict puts children in horrific circumstances and will have dire consequences for them for years to come," said Mr. Houry.

Heavy fighting in densely populated areas in the west of the city has forced the displacement of 25,000 people. Families are sheltering in mosques, university campuses and public gardens.

Moreover, in the east of the city, 300,000 people, a third of them children, have been trapped since early July.

"We call on all parties to the conflict to grant us unhindered humanitarian access to children and families wherever they are located across the city, he said, adding: "UNICEF urges the warring parties in Syria to abide by their legal obligations to



A girl, who fell and struck her head in her home, awaits medical examination, at Dar El Shifa Hospital in Aleppo, Syria. Photo: UNICEF/Alessio Romenzi



protect children and all civilians.”

## **‘If you want to protect your image, protect children,’ Ban tells debate on war-affected children**

**2 August** – With children continuing to be tortured, maimed, imprisoned, starved, sexually abused and killed in armed conflict, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today called on all countries to back their words with concrete actions to end such violations.

“In places such as Iraq, Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan, Syria and Yemen, children suffer through a living hell,” the UN chief said as he opened the Security Council’s debate on children and armed conflict.

According to a concept note issued by Malaysia, which holds the Council’s presidency for August, the open debate is intended to provide a platform for Member States to discuss, among other issues, the Secretary-General’s latest report on children and armed conflict, and chart the progress that has been made throughout 2015 in combating grave violations against children in armed conflict.

Also addressing the Council today were Leila Zerrougui, the Secretary-General’s Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, and Anthony Lake, Executive Director of the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF).

Mr. Ban said that more than half of the world’s refugees are also children, underscoring the need to urgently address the root causes of displacement while at the same time tackle the crisis.

The Secretary-General drew attention to a UN summit on refugees and migrants set for 19 September, urging all governments to bring ideas and commitments – with a special focus on protecting children.

Mr. Ban noted that children are victimized in counterterrorism operations and aerial bombardments.

Even wars have rules. Hospitals and schools should be protected. Civilians should be spared. Children should not be used to fight

“Even wars have rules. Hospitals and schools should be protected. Civilians should be spared. Children should not be used to fight,” he said.

Turning to his annual report on children and armed conflict, he said that once again this year, objections to the annual report forced him to make a difficult decision. After “very careful consideration,” the Saudi Arabia-led coalition in Yemen was removed from the report’s annexes, pending the conclusions of a review, the UN chief said, reiterating however that “the content of the report stands.”

The annexes list parties committing violations against children in situations of armed conflict.

Mr. Ban said that he held talks with Saudi Arabia at the highest level possible and that he has since received information on measures taken by the coalition to prevent and end grave violations against children. “But I still have very strong concerns about the protection of Yemeni children,” he said.

The UN will continue its engagement to ensure that concrete measures to protect children are implemented.

“If you want to protect your image, protect children,” he said, urging every Member State and every party to conflict to



Children affected by violence attend temporary schools in the refugee camp of Kabelewa. Forced displacement in the Diffa region, Niger's poorest, is becoming regular and is conducted by the armed group Boko Haram. Photo: UNICEF/Sylvain Cherkaoui

protect children.

Noting that this year marks the 20th anniversary of the Office of the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, he acknowledged the work done by incumbent Leila Zerrougui and her predecessors.

In 2015, more than 8,000 child soldiers were released, and many countries have also passed laws to add new safeguards for children against recruitment, Mr. Ban said, emphasizing that the ultimate goal of ending these grave violations against children demands ending conflicts and establishing peace.

Ms. Zerrougui noted that the Secretary-General's report documented over 2,000 attacks on schools and hospitals documented in 19 out of 20 situations. In addition, abduction remained a widespread concern, exceeding 4,000 incidents in 2015.

"Conflict also impacts children in ways that are not captured by the report's statistics," she said, noting that youngsters lose their parents, are disabled due to easily curable illnesses and suffer long-term psychological trauma.

Since the Secretary-General's first report to the Council, more than 115,000 children associated with parties to conflict have been released as a result of dialogue and Action Plans. To date, 25 Action Plans have been signed with parties to conflict. Nine parties in Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Uganda have fully complied and were delisted.

The 'Children, Not Soldiers' campaign has since its launch led to a significant reduction in verified cases of recruitment and use of children by national security forces, especially in Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Myanmar, she said.

The UN is also engaged in dialogue with listed armed groups in the Central African Republic, Mali, Myanmar, the Philippines, Sudan and South Sudan. Years of work with Governments to improve legislative frameworks, to build institutional capacity, and to address challenges such as birth registrations are bearing fruit, she added.

We cannot make up for the lack of political will

Despite successes over the years, Ms. Zerrougui went on, "there is no denying that the overall picture of violations in situations of armed conflict is extremely worrisome." Concerned Governments bear the primary responsibility for the protection of civilians, and the UN stands ready to support them. But "we cannot make up for the lack of political will," she stressed.

Ms. Zerrougui called for greater efforts to prioritize conflict prevention and support peace processes, and seek accountability, emphasizing the role of the Council in ending impunity.

"This mandate, and the action it continues to generate, represents a beacon of hope for millions of children affected by war," she concluded.

Mr. Lake, the UNICEF chief, said that nearly 250 million children are living in countries and areas affected by war, with over 30 million displaced by conflict.

"These numbers alone, and the many others outlined in the Secretary General's report, paint a devastating picture," he said.

He highlighted the usefulness of the UN's Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism on grave violations against children in armed conflict, which helps define the full scale of the crisis.

The information provided by the mechanism points to focused action in three key areas, he said.

The use of explosive weapons accounted for almost 44,000 deaths and injuries last year alone. When used in densely populated areas, nine out of 10 victims were civilians. All parties to conflict must commit to protecting children by changing the way they wage their wars, including a ban on using explosive weapons in densely populated areas.



Attacks against health workers and facilities have far-reaching consequences for children and their communities, he noted. All parties to conflict must protect, and allow for the safe delivery of health care to these children and their families, he said.

The 'Education Cannot Wait' fund, launched at the World Humanitarian Summit in May, aims to reach those millions of young people whose education has been disrupted by crises, including by attacks on schools. "Education improves their futures, and, thus, the futures of their communities and societies," he said.

## In Iraq, UNICEF Ambassador Ewan McGregor urges help for children 'ripped from their homes'



UNICEF Ambassador Ewan McGregor meets displaced children at the Debaga IDP camp in northern Iraq. Photo: UNICEF/Siegfried Modola

**2 August** – Just back from crisis-riven northern Iraq, where he visited refugee camps for Iraqi and Syrian families and children, actor Ewan McGregor, an Ambassador for the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has called for more action to save children suffering the devastating effects of brutal conflicts and crises.

"Many of the children I've met in Iraq have been forced to flee their homes, risking their lives on dangerous journeys and have been exposed to unimaginable horrors," said the UNICEF Ambassador in a press release issued today by the agency.

"The world is facing an unprecedented refugee crisis and we must do more to protect the extraordinary number of children who have been torn from their homes by violent conflict," he added.

Last week, Mr. McGregor travelled to Debaga camp in northern Iraq where he met with families that have escaped the violence currently taking place in areas surrounding Mosul in the north of the country. He also spent time with Syrian refugees and displaced Iraqi families in camps and communities around Erbil.

This act of humanity should be replicated everywhere, especially on our own doorsteps. It's up to us to tell our friends, our neighbours and our governments that refugees are welcome

Due to the conflicts sweeping across Iraq and Syria, tens of thousands of children have been killed, injured, separated from their parents, forced to work, tortured and recruited into fighting.

"No child should be alone," stressed the UNICEF Ambassador noting that children uprooted by conflict find themselves alone, without family and in grave danger.

In the press release, the agency added that the situation for children in Iraq is becoming increasingly desperate. Around 3.6 million children – one in five – are at serious risk of death, injury, sexual violence, abduction and recruitment into armed groups.

Many of the children are being ripped from their families and forced to flee on their own, often making dangerous journeys and falling into the hands of traffickers, the agency added in the release.

During his visit, Mr. McGregor witnessed how UNICEF is supporting families fleeing the Mosul area with lifesaving food and water, child protection services and healthcare. Many of the people he met had been previously trapped and had not had access to healthcare, education or basic services for over two years.

"One girl I met called Mirna told me how her family slept in a disused, half-constructed shopping mall for over a year," recalled Mr. McGregor, praising the local community that donated food, clothes and supplies to her family and really came together to welcome displaced people.

"This act of humanity should be replicated everywhere, especially on our own doorsteps. It's up to us to tell our friends, our

neighbours and our governments that refugees are welcome,” emphasized the renowned Scottish actor who in mainstream and indie films alike, from *Trainspotting* and *Beginners* and *Moulin Rouge*.

Mr. McGregor's visit comes ahead of the Summit on Addressing Large Movements of Refugees and Migrants, to be held on 19 September at the UN Headquarters, in New York.

## Some 60,000 flee recent South Sudan violence, bringing exodus to 900,000 since 2013 – UN



Refugees from South Sudan arrive in Elegu, northern Uganda Photo: UNHCR/Will Swanson

**2 August** – Some 60,000 people have fled South Sudan's recent violence in the capital city of Juba, bringing the overall number of South Sudanese refugees in neighbouring countries since December 2013 to nearly 900,000, the United Nations refugee agency said today.

Refugee flows from South Sudan into Uganda have doubled in the past ten days, bringing the total to more than 52,000 since violence escalated three weeks ago. Kenya has reported the arrival of 1,000 refugees in the same period, while 7,000 have fled to Sudan, according to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

“The refugees bring disturbing reports that armed groups operating on roads to Uganda are preventing people from fleeing South Sudan,” Melissa Fleming, UNHCR chief spokesperson, told reporters in

Geneva.

The recent fighting between rival forces – the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) loyal to President Salva Kiir and the SPLA in Opposition backing First Vice-President Riek Machar – erupted in and around Juba, on 7 July.

New arrivals from Yei say they received letters warning them to evacuate the town in anticipation of conflict between rebel and government forces, the spokesperson said. Refugees have also reported that armed groups operating across different parts of South Sudan are looting villages, murdering civilians and forcibly recruiting young men and boys in to their ranks.

More than 85 per cent of the refugees arriving in Uganda are women and children under the age of 18, she added. Many children have lost one, or both of their parents. Most are from Eastern Equatoria, with smaller numbers from Juba and Upper Nile state. Many took advantage of the opportunity to flee alongside Ugandan military convoys evacuating Ugandan nationals.

“Improving conditions and capacities at existing reception facilities in Uganda is a key priority,” Ms. Fleming said. Collection points in border areas have now been significantly decongested, although transit centres and reception centres remain severely stretched. Efforts are underway to rapidly open a new 100,000 capacity refugee settlement area in Yumbe district.

Both Kenya and Uganda are reporting rising cases of severe malnutrition, particularly among very young children, she said. Those found to be suffering are being placed on food nourishment programmes to bring them back to health.

The spokesperson said that UNHCR is reminding all parties to the conflict in South Sudan of a fundamental human right to seek asylum and urging them to ensure that civilians are provided with unhindered access to safety as the number of refugees crosses a worrying milestone.

With over 2.6 million of its citizens forcibly displaced, the world's youngest nation currently ranks among the countries with the highest levels of conflict-induced population displacement globally, she said, warning that half the population relies on humanitarian aid.



South Sudan was founded in July 2011, after it gained independence from Sudan. The country descended into conflict in December 2013 due to internal struggles between rival factions.

## Undernutrition in Ghana takes huge human and economic toll – new UN study



Child malnutrition costs Ghana more than \$2 billion annually. Photo: WFP West Africa

**2 August** – The economy of Ghana has been losing some \$2.6 billion annually – or 6.4 per cent of its gross domestic product (GDP) – due to child undernutrition, according to a new United Nations study launched today in the country’s capital, Accra.

“In the Northern Region of Ghana, 30 per cent of children under five are stunted or chronically malnourished. This not only affects their growth but also their educational development and economic potential, and consequently the future of the country,” said Margot van der Velden, the World Food Programme (WFP) Deputy Regional Director for West and Central Africa said in a press statement.

According to the report, *The Cost of Hunger in Africa: the Social and Economic Impact of Child Undernutrition on Ghana’s Long-Term Development (COHA)*, vast amounts are being lost through increased healthcare costs, additional burdens on the education system and lower productivity by its workforce.

When children miss out on critical nutrients, including proteins, vitamins and minerals, it hinders growth while in the womb and during the first two years of life – and causes stunting, which is of particular concern.

“People affected by stunting face lifelong consequences starting in childhood, such as frequent illness, poor school performance, having to repeat classes or dropping out altogether, and low workplace productivity,” the report elaborated.

Among other findings, the COHA report revealed that 37 per cent of the adult population in Ghana suffered from stunting as children; 24 per cent of all child mortality cases there were associated with undernutrition; and child mortality associated with undernutrition had reduced the country’s workforce by 7.3 per cent.

While Ghana has made some progress in improving child nutrition over the past two decades – such as reducing chronic malnutrition or stunting from 23 to 19 per cent – the study highlighted the critical need for further progress.

The report pointed out that stunting was more than a health issue – it needs to be addressed through a multi-sectoral approach and prioritized in all development programmes, from community to national levels.

“At the African Union (AU), we believe that the realisation of Agenda 2063 [the AU’s vision and action plan for the next 50 years] and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) will not be possible without fully harnessing the potential of all sectors of the population and this includes our children,” said Dr. Margaret Agama Nyetei, the AU Commission’s Head of Health, Nutrition and Population Division.

“The goal of eliminating stunting is key to achieving Zero Hunger, Sustainable Development Goal 2,” added Thomas Yanga, Director of the WFP Africa Office. “The losses to the economy can be averted through strategic interventions which ensure adequate nutrition for mothers and young children.”

For his part, Professor Takyiwaa Manuh, Director of the Social Development Policy Division at the UN Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) underscored, “Ensuring a generation free from malnutrition requires significant investments in nutrition strategies and interventions. There is, therefore, a need for Ghana to forge strategic partnerships with key stakeholders, particularly the private sector and non-State actors, to combat undernutrition holistically,” said.

The COHA report was led by the AU Commission, in partnership with African governments, the New Partnership for

Africa's Development Planning and Coordinating Agency; UNECA; and WFP. So far, studies have taken place in Egypt, Ethiopia, Swaziland, Uganda, Burkina Faso, Malawi and Rwanda – with Chad, Lesotho, Mozambique, Madagascar and Mauritania slated to be carried out.

The COHA National Implementation Team, which was responsible for collecting, processing and presenting results from Ghana, was composed of Ministries, Departments and Agencies, UN agencies, civil society organizations, non-governmental organizations and international organizations concerned with eliminating child stunting. The study was launched under the auspices of the National Development Planning Commission.

The Government of Ghana, the African Development Bank, the French Development Agency, the Office of the UN Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the Rockefeller Foundation, and WFP contributed financially to the realisation of this study in Ghana.