UN HUMANITARIAN CHIEF CONDEMNS VIOLENCE AGAINST CIVILIANS AND AID WORKERS IN SOUTH SUDAN

(Juba, 3 August 2016): United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Stephen O’Brien, concluded his three-day mission to South Sudan today, calling for all parties to uphold their responsibilities to protect civilians, amidst fresh fighting that has displaced tens of thousands of people in multiple locations across the country.

“The people of this country have suffered far too much, and for far too long,” said USG O’Brien. “I am outraged by the heinous acts of violence that have been committed against civilians, including by members of the armed forces, and call for swift and decisive action to halt these abuses and bring the perpetrators to account.”

The humanitarian situation in South Sudan is catastrophic. More than half of the population - some 6.1 million people - are in need of humanitarian assistance. An estimated 4.8 million people are severely food insecure across the country, with a quarter of a million children facing severe acute malnutrition. Forced displacement remains a defining feature of the crisis, with some 1.6 million people internally displaced, and more than 900,000 having fled to neighbouring countries, including more than 60,000 who fled to Uganda in July alone. Protection of civilians is a paramount concern, with extensive reports received of rape and other forms of sexual violence during recent fighting, including in Juba and Wau.

“My visit to Wau and Aweil was heart-wrenching,” said the Emergency Relief Coordinator. “The women I met in both locations told me that it is a daily struggle to keep themselves and their children alive, one for fear of violence, the other due to hunger.”

So far this year, aid workers have reached more than 2.8 million people with assistance and protection. However, the Humanitarian Response Plan for 2016 is only 40 per cent funded, leaving a gap of US$765 million. More funding is urgently required for the scale-up of the response across the country. Humanitarians from the UN and non-governmental organizations are ready to do so, but the resources are needed now. Moreover, violence against aid workers and assets remains prevalent in South Sudan, as evidenced by the looting of vital humanitarian warehouses during and after the fighting in Juba. Since December 2013, at least 57 aid workers have been killed in South Sudan, including one killed during the recent conflict in Juba. Many more are still missing.

“Despite the daily challenges they face, aid workers across South Sudan - particularly NGOs on the frontlines of humanitarian action - are working tirelessly and courageously to bring desperately needed relief to people in need,” said Mr. O’Brien. “I categorically condemn all attacks against aid workers and assets and call on all those in leadership positions to step up and take action against these wholly unacceptable incidents. It is imperative that humanitarian organizations are granted free, safe, and unhindered humanitarian access, to reach all people in need, wherever they are.”

During his three-day visit, Mr. O’Brien met with humanitarian partners and Government officials, and visited people affected by the crisis in Juba, Wau and Aweil. In his meetings, the Emergency Relief Coordinator stressed that, “We humanitarians are here in South Sudan to save lives and for no other reason. Our task and our demand by the UN and beyond is to impartially meet the urgent and severe humanitarian and protection needs of the millions of suffering people in this country.”

For further information, please contact:
Guiomar Pau Sole, OCHA South Sudan, pausole@un.org, +254 795742338, +211920100411
Amanda Pitt, OCHA New York, pitta@un.org, +1 917 442 1810

OCHA press releases are available at www.unocha.org/south-sudan or www.reliefweb.int

The mission of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) is to mobilize and coordinate effective and principled humanitarian action in partnership with national and international actors.