Deputy Secretary General Amina Mohammed leads a high level UN-AU visit to South Sudan

The Deputy Secretary General, Ms. Amina Mohammed led a joint UN and African Union high-level delegation from the region to South Sudan on 3 July to discuss women’s role in peace, security and development. They met with various partners including survivors of gender-based violence protection of civilian sites in Juba, Wau and Malakal.

The Deputy Secretary-General, a mother of six children herself, shared her own powerful message of hope and peace.

“So far, we have failed, there is no peace in South Sudan,” said DSG Amina Mohammed. “But as mothers, because of the children, we will not give up, not on peace. You must not be tired. You must have hope. You must find ways to close the gap between the tragedy today and your dream of tomorrow.”

The Special Representative for Sexual Violence in Conflict, Mrs. Pramila Patten called upon the warring parties in the current conflict in South Sudan to implement the joint communiqué on ending conflict related sexual violence in the country.

“I urge both the Government of the Republic of South Sudan and the Sudan People’s Liberation Army In Opposition to keep their promise to hold their troops accountable for sexual violence in their areas of command,” she said.

The Deputy Special Representative to the Secretary General, Resident Coordinator, Humanitarian Coordinator and UNDP Resident Representative, Mr. Alain Noudehou said that despite the ongoing conflict, the United Nations Country Team in South Sudan in collaboration with partners have continued to provide support to survivors and continue to engage with the government to put an end to the conflict.

South Sudan turns seven, as seven million people go hungry

If South Sudan were a child, she would have turned seven today. At that age, children would quite naturally be the apple of their parents’ eyes and a delight to onlookers alike. Running, full of life and gleeful, warming even the hardest of hearts.

But, therein ends the comparison. In the imagination. And reality sets in.

South Sudan is like no other 7-year-old. The country is still on its knees and on life-support.

Almost 2.5 million people have been forced to seek refuge in Uganda, Kenya, Sudan, Ethiopia, the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Central African Republic. A further two million are displaced inside the country’s borders. South Sudanese live in fear of violence, seven years after a peace deal ended 21 years of war between north and south, and gave birth to the world’s youngest nation in 2011 amid wild cheers, pomp and fanfare.

Fast forward to 2018, there are no celebrations for the 7-year-old country. The Government of South Sudan has indicated they will not mark Independence with the usual organized
festivities. And they are not the only ones forgoing the celebrations.

Nyagiech Deng Kuol, 36, from Wau but living in Jiech, some 750 km north of the capital Juba, will also not commemorate Independence Day.

She is raising her three children on the move in a rural outpost, accessible either by helicopter or light aircraft and by no other surface means.

She has lived most of her life as an ongoing challenge, always on the margins of society. Born away from home and raised as a refugee.

Fighting back tears she recounts horrific stories of arson, sexual violence, hunger and death that have punctuated her life. Thrice she has had to watch her huts in her home-village in Wau being burnt and thrice, she has had to run for her life. On her last flight in 2015, her husband did not make it and met his cruel fate in a violent take-over that lasted a week. She has not returned since but the memories remain raw.

“I am not celebrating Independence,” says Nyagiech. “What’s there to celebrate? What am I doing here (in Jiech)?” she asks in her native Nuer language through the help of a translator.

There is guarded optimism on the latest peace deal signed last month following marathon meetings across three African capitals, first in Addis Ababa, then Khartoum and most recently in Kampala.

Targeted humanitarian assistance has helped keep the country going for years but more aid is still urgently needed.

Without sustained humanitarian assistance, more than seven million people were at risk of severe food insecurity at the end of July. A brief famine was declared and reversed in two counties last year, thanks in part to international assistance, but the country is not out of the woods yet. Indications are that there could be some populations in catastrophe—just one step short from famine—in some counties.

“Of greatest concern is the former Unity State,” says Khan. “Armed clashes in Leer, Koch and Mayendit counties have resulted in mass displacements of populations, undermined people’s capacity to cope and feed their families, diminished humanitarian access and consequently reduced aid delivery to a bare minimum.”

WHO secures over 562 000 doses of oral cholera vaccine for pre-emptive campaigns in South Sudan in 2018

To mitigate the risk of cholera outbreaks in cholera transmission hotspots in South Sudan, the World Health Organization (WHO) secured over 562 000 doses of oral cholera vaccine in 2018 to conduct pre-emptive campaigns.

On 4 July 2018, the International Coordinating Group (ICG) released 96 285 doses of OCV for the second round of the vaccination campaign in Leer.

The vaccination campaign aims to mitigate the risk of cholera outbreaks in cholera transmission hotspots. With support from Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, over 3.1 million doses of vaccines have been deployed to Maban refugees and host communities, UN House Protection of civilians (PoC), Mingkaman Camp, Bentiu PoC, Malakal PoC, Bor PoC, Wau Shilluk, Melut, Leer County, Juba town since February 2014 as part of prevention and response activities of the deadly diarrheal disease.

“Cholera prevention is a priority in areas that have been mapped as transmission hotspots in South Sudan”, says Dr Wamala Joseph, Epidemiologist at WHO South Sudan. The OCV campaigns provide protection to the vulnerable population and are used as a bridge for launching sustainable and long-term water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) interventions.

Given the humanitarian crises in South Sudan and the several outbreaks of cholera the country faced in the past, the pre-emptive mass vaccination campaigns with OCV are being used to complement cholera surveillance, patient care, risk communication, and sustainable water, sanitation and hygiene interventions.

Cholera continues to be a public health threat to children, women, and other vulnerable groups in South Sudan. The recurrent outbreaks since 2014 including the longest and largest (18 June 2016 to 18 December 2017) demonstrate the continued vulnerability of the population to the disease, which is preventable and treatable.

“Although cholera is endemic in South Sudan, this time WHO and partners in support of the Ministry of Health are better prepared to reduce the risk of cholera outbreak through early targeted interventions”, says Mr Evans Liyosi, WHO Representative a.i. to South Sudan.

The interventions include pre-emptive OCV campaigns in vulnerable areas, updating cholera contingency plans at both national and state level before the onset of the rainy season, training state level rapid response teams (RRT) across the country and prepositioning diagnostic test kits and lifesaving supplies for managing patients, which have helped to enhance surveillance, while enabling prompt response to suspected cases, Mr Liyosi highlighted.
The ongoing preventive campaigns in South Sudan have been conducted by WHO, UNICEF, IOM, MSF, MedAir, and other health cluster partners, taking place in Malakal Town, Malakal protection of civilians (PoC), Aburoc internally displaced population sites (IDPs), Budi county, Wau PoC, Wau IDP sites, Juba, Panyijiar, Leer town, Lankien and Pieri.

200 women and girls in Bor PoC complete six month training programme in livelihood skills

Over 200 women and girls from the Bor Protection of Civilians site (PoC) celebrated their graduation from a six-month vocational training programme focused on boosting economic capacity as well as enabling those whose livelihoods were disrupted by conflict and insecurity to recover and rebuild their lives.

The training was conducted by Support for Peace and Education Development Programme (SPEDP), supported by UNDP’s Access to Justice and Rule of Law project, with funding from Germany.

A total of 221 women dedicated their time to learning vocational skills in tailoring, basic computer applications, bed sheet design, bakery, masonry and carpentry.

"I have learned new sewing tips and techniques, and I have been encouraged to continue practicing so I can get better at it," said Nyakum Malual, a tailoring trainee.

"I have also gained trade secrets that will make me successful, like how to sell and identify profit and loss of my business. At first I did not understand the mathematics but I am now able to do correct calculations in measurements and business," she added.

An additional group of 200 women were trained in business development skills and received start-up capital worth 1.5 million South Sudanese Pounds to embark on sustainable business activities. Among this cohort, Nyawech Tong, who is blind, launched a charcoal business with her start-up capital, and reports her business is thriving as she continues selling in the PoC.

89 kilometres of new roads connect farmers to markets in Greater Bahr el Ghazal

With a sign saying “Our road is our freedom” a group of singing students greeted representatives from UNOPS and local government during a handover inspection of the Gok Machar – Mayom Angok road. The brand new 35-kilometre road, funded by the European Union, now connects their school to the neighboring villages, and to Gok Machar, the nearest town in the area.

The project, Feeder Road Construction in Support of Trade Market Development, involves the construction of roads and market infrastructure in rural areas with the aim of connecting farmers to markets. In total, UNOPS is building 154 kilometres across four locations in the Greater Bahr el Ghazal region, 89 of which are now open to traffic.

In Gok Machar, traffic means an intermittent flow of pedestrians, bicycles, motorcycles and horse-drawn carriages slowly making their way down the road, only occasionally giving way to cars. But for the sellers in Mayom Angok market, transport options have noticeably increased and travel time is cut: “Before it could take a day to go from here to Gok Machar. Now it’s 30 minutes by motorbike,” says Shaibo Adam Hamid, a cow trader from Darfur, who crosses the border from Sudan to purchase cows to bring back north.

The project is part of a larger EU programme, Zonal Effort for Agricultural Transformation: Bahr el Ghazal Effort for Agricultural Development (ZEAT BEAD), which aims to improve the food security and income of the population. South Sudan has the highest relative food cost in the world and the fragmented transport infrastructure has impeded agricultural producers in remote areas from connecting to market centres. The roads are also meant to enable other programme activities, including agricultural development, support to teachers and health programming, mainly run by NGOs.

“It has made our work easier – in terms of access and travel time it’s great. And, we can see it in vehicle maintenance,” said a representative from the organization Health Net, working in Kangi, another location which received a new road.
More children released from South Sudanese armed groups

More than 100 children were last week released by two armed groups in South Sudan, bringing the total number released this year to over 900.

This was the fourth release ceremony in 2018 and like two previous events, it took place in the town of Yambio in the south of the country. Additional releases are expected in the coming months.

"The progress made this year gives us reason to hope that one day all of the 19,000 children still serving in the ranks of armed groups and armed forces will be able to return to their families," said Mahimbo Mdoe, UNICEF’s Representative in South Sudan. "Until that goal is achieved, the work to end the use and recruitment of must children continue."

During the ceremony, the children were formally disarmed and provided with civilian clothes. Medical screenings will now be carried out, and the children will receive counselling and psychosocial support as part of the reintegration programme, which is implemented by UNICEF and partners.

When the children return to their homes, their families will be provided with three months’ worth of food assistance by the World Food Programme to support their initial reintegration. The children will also be provided with vocational training aimed at improving household income and food security.

Being unable to support themselves economically can be a key factor in children becoming associated with armed groups. In addition to services related to livelihoods, UNICEF and partners will ensure the released children have access to psychosocial support, age-specific education services in schools and accelerated learning centres.

"These releases are a joint effort between UNICEF, UNMISS and government partners. Negotiations with the parties to the conflict require considerable energy and commitment from all involved," said Mdoe. "I am very grateful to our partners and our government counterparts for their efforts on behalf of the children of South Sudan."

UNESCO launches much-needed TVET CapED programme and rapid assessment in South Sudan

A high-level ministerial meeting on technical and vocational education and training (TVET) was held on 2 July 2018 in Juba. At the meeting, UNESCO launched its Capacity Development for Education (CapED) programme with the generous support from Finland, Norway and Sweden along with Dubai Cares to support the TVET sector, provide youth the skills they need to improve their livelihoods and deter them from being involved in conflict. Additionally, at the event, UNESCO shared its findings of its rapid assessment of the TVET sector.

The ground-breaking assessment is the first of its kind after many years of neglect to the sector. The much-needed report was a collaborative effort with national stakeholders, donor entities, NGOs/civil society, development partners and other relevant stakeholders. The assessment found that there are 21 government bodies working in the TVET sector along with many more development partners creating their own policies, programmes and interventions causing much duplication and confusion.

The report recommends a TVET governing body of authority to coordinate all efforts in South Sudan. The assessment will be used by all partners in South Sudan to address the challenges of the sector and their programme implementation.

"This meeting provides an opportunity for all stakeholders to solidify support in streamlining and strengthening the TVET sector to align with national developmental goals including economic and educational," said Sardar Umar Alam, UNESCO’s Representative to South Sudan, "We must all work together to strengthen and streamline TVET, so young people can improve their lives and each and every dollar spent goes a long way."

The report was greatly appreciated and welcomed by the Ministers of General Education and Instruction; Labour, Public Service and Human Resource Development; Culture, Youth and Sports; and Wildlife and Tourism as well as the EU Delegation to South Sudan and Ambassadors of Norway and Sweden.

The EU delegation and Ambassadors of Norway and Sweden stressed the need for stakeholders to work together and have a single TVET national policy and coordinated efforts to ease duplication and effective fund usage.
Door has been working at Rumbek Hospital as a midwife for the past two years. He says his large family is not the exception—in fact it is the norm. For Door, by deciding to have one child instead of eight is already a step in the right direction with regards to family planning.

“And that’s what we want to share with everyone,” he says. Through the SMS Project, awareness on family planning, antenatal and postnatal care increased.

In 2014, an average 40 mothers came to the family planning clinic every month,” says Judith Draleru, a midwife from Uganda who supports midwifery services at the Juba Teaching Hospital. “Now, between 150 and 170 mothers come monthly.”

Draleru says that when more women realize they have options, the more likely they are to talk to each other and spread the word.

Since working for the midwifery project, Draleru has witnessed a marked increase in the number of women and girls who avail of maternal health services. Midwives across the country echo her observation.

A father speaks up for family planning: I can’t afford too many children

In an attempt to not only impact but also empower the lives of women in South Sudan, the breadth of the programs developed by the midwifery project in South Sudan is intentionally widespread.

All the initiatives place a strong emphasis on gender equality and empowerment, with services included to provide easier access as well as further control for women, when it comes to taking charge of their health and, ultimately, their lives.

As South Sudan is predominantly a patriarchal society, many women are not aware that they have options when it comes to childbearing and health decisions. Even if they are cognizant of these, a lot of mothers don’t necessarily feel comfortable exercising these options. This is especially true among uneducated women living in rural areas.

The idea of family planning, the use of contraceptives and other maternal health care support are novel concepts in many communities across South Sudan.

“My father has eight wives and 24 children,” says Peter Door, a midwife working with the Strengthening Midwifery Services Project in South Sudan.

“He told me to marry and have lots of kids, but I thought educating one is better than educating many as you won’t be able to afford the latter.”

Having graduated from the scholarship programme in 2016, Door has been working at Rumbek Hospital as a midwife for the past two years. He says his large family is not the exception—in fact it is the norm. For Door, by deciding to have one child instead of eight is already a step in the right direction with regards to family planning.

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“In 2015, family planning increased by at least 20 per cent,” says Godon Magang Dhukpuou, a midwife at Kiir Mayardit Women’s Hospital in Rumbek. He has seen a huge surge in mothers coming for antenatal services.

With services in place and women accessing health care, the SMS Project builds on the momentum by supporting the rehabilitation and refurbishment of health facilities.