

**Briefing to the AU Peace and Security Council, Ministerial Meeting,
presented by Peter Ekayu, Head of Office, UNOCHA &
Representative to the African Union**

Addis Ababa, 19 June 2024

Your Excellencies, The Chairperson of the AU Peace and Security Council Chairperson for the month of June, Hon. General Abubaker Jeje Odongo, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Uganda; the Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security- Amb. Bankole Adeoye; Director- Health, Humanitarian and Social Affairs Dept- Prof. Julio Rakatonirina.

Thank you for this opportunity to brief you on the humanitarian situation in Africa.

Allow me to provide some context:

Home to world's largest humanitarian crises: 1 in every 100 persons needing humanitarian assistance on the continent. More than 140 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance in Africa. 46.93% of the people targeted for humanitarian assistance (globally) in 2024 are in Africa. The African continent continues to experience, recurring, and overlapping crises due to armed conflict and violence - compounded by the effects of climatic shocks and collapsing economies that are taking a heavy and devastating toll on the most vulnerable communities; and

leading to catastrophic hunger, massive displacement, irregular migration, disruption in learning and disease outbreaks.

Among world's hungriest and most malnourished: South Sudan, Somalia, Sudan, Ethiopia, DRC and the Sahel are hunger hotspots of the highest concern. In these countries and others in the region, some people are either already facing, or projected to face, starvation or are at risk of deterioration towards catastrophic levels of acute food insecurity. In Sudan, humanitarians have warned famine is closing in, while 1.7 million children suffer from acute malnutrition in Somalia, one of the highest in the world. Meanwhile, Southern Africa is on the grip of a severe drought with possible catastrophic consequences unless urgent action is taken to avert further deterioration before the lean season in July.

The world's largest displacement crisis. The largest internal displacement caseloads globally are in Africa. 47.7 million Africans are either internally displaced, refugees or asylum seekers. Sixty per cent were internally displaced. Sudan is world's largest displacement crisis, with nearly 9 million people uprooted and including 2 million who fled to neighboring states. The Sahel region is home to 5.6 million internally displaced persons and 1.7 million refugees.

Drivers of needs are worsening amid limited resources: Severely underfunded emergencies: Despite hosting close to 50 per cent of the global humanitarian caseload and two of the world's largest crises amid rapidly deteriorating contexts, humanitarian appeals in the region are severely underfunded. Currently only 11% of the ask for Africa is funded.

Your Excellencies, let me draw your attention on the two key drivers of humanitarian crisis in Africa and its impacts on the population.

1. Climate change

Climate change is becoming a major crisis multiplier. The African continent, which has contributed the least to climate change, is one of the hardest hit by its impact. Despite contributing only 4% to global emissions, the continent is home to 19 out of the 20 countries most impacted by climate change. Yet, it receives only 3% of global climate finance.

In 2020 alone, private and public losses from weather-related disasters exceeded \$258 billion globally. That is more than the entire global aid budget for a year. In the last decade alone, humanitarian needs grew by over 330%. As a result of multiplying conflict, extreme poverty, global instability and climate change. Climate change is destroying the way of life in many communities. Extreme weather events are exposing millions

to hunger, disease outbreaks, displacement and other threats. In Eastern Africa, heavy rains and floods have affected nearly 850,000 people, mainly in Kenya, Burundi, Somalia, Tanzania, Rwanda, and other parts of the region.

The extreme impact of the current El-Nino induced flooding in the Greater Horn of Africa and drought in Southern Africa are affecting communities that are already at breaking point and are likely to face deepening hunger and distress in the coming months. In Southern Africa, back-to-back episodes of cyclones and extreme drought conditions have led to at least 56 million people in need of urgent humanitarian support.

We call on Member states to strengthen disaster risk management efforts including early warning systems, preparedness, anticipatory approaches and early action. Putting in place early warnings systems for example, can reduce mortality up to 8-fold and reduce damage from disasters by 30%. Similarly, the benefits of investing in preparedness and resilience outweigh the cost by 10 to 1, sometimes more.

A lot of progress has been made in recent years to develop these approaches, but they are still overly underfunded, representing only 0.5% of global development assistance. Through stronger and better coordinated early action programmes, we must mobilize donors and investors to scale up funding in this area. We cannot waste this opportunity.

The Loss and Damage Fund: Its launch and the initial funding pledges made at the last COP represent a milestone for climate justice. But there is still a long way to go for it to become operational. It needs working ways that allow it to get resources to the community level including in fragile contexts. The current amount pledged, about 0.2% of the estimated loss and damage costs, is just a drop in the ocean of needs. We need much more, and urgently, to meet fragile countries' needs. Climate funds will only be one element of the equation.

On finance: we have to keep advocating for climate and development actors to crowd in and invest more significantly in crisis- and conflict-affected countries. Since 2016, low-income countries in conflict have received on average 2\$ per inhabitant through climate funds against 161\$ for countries at peace. This is simply unfair.

The annual climate financing gap is about \$2.4 trillion. Ironically, this is equivalent to the amount spent on military budget globally last year. The world clearly needs to shift its priorities.

It is estimated that Africa alone needs \$250-300 billion annually to meet its mitigation and adaptation goals. But the continent receives only about \$30 billion annually.

2. Conflict

Conflict remains a major driver of humanitarian need. Conflict is more protracted and deepening populations' humanitarian needs and leading to major displacement. In 2022, sub-Saharan Africa remained the region with the highest number of conflicts classed as full-scale wars.

Your Excellencies, we call upon you to ensure continued dedication and focus on the key crises on the continent and mitigating the of conflict impact on civilians.

Sudan: After more than one year of conflict, the crisis in Sudan has reached devastating proportions. Almost half the population – 25 million people – need humanitarian assistance and 9 million people have been displaced within the country and into neighboring countries. **Time is running out for millions of people in Sudan, who face an imminent risk of famine, indiscriminate violence, and disease.** Basic services are collapsing, including health care and water and sanitation systems.

The situation in El Fasher, the capital of North Darfur, is deteriorating following heavy fighting that erupted on 10 May. There are reports of heavy weaponry being used in densely populated areas across the city, resulting in civilian casualties and damage to civilian infrastructure. According to health partners, at least 1,300 civilians were injured between 10 May and 6 June. We have received extremely alarming reports of civilians being attacked, robbed and sexually harassed while trying to flee.

On 8th of June, Sudanese paramilitary forces (Rapid Support Forces – RSF) stormed El Fasher South Hospital the only working hospital in North Darfur using mortars killing two people and wounding fourteen more and looted vital medical supplies forcing its closure and the evacuation of patients by MSF and the Ministry of Health.

The RSF must step back from the abyss and work with mediators to de-escalate the situation in the city. The lives of more than 800,000 civilians hang in the balance. While fighting is ongoing, civilians must be protected and allowed safe passage within and out of El Fasher for those who wish to do so.

Systematic denials of access and aid obstructions hamstringing the delivery of lifesaving humanitarian assistance. Access continues to be a major challenge for the aid operation. Looting, insecurity and sustained obstructions have severely constrained humanitarian access. Since early May, the Sudanese authorities have provided increased facilitation, including through a significant rise in visa and travel permit issuance. This facilitation must be continued – with urgency and at a scale. About 73 per cent of people in need (almost 11 million people) reside in inaccessible or partially accessible areas. This level of systemic obstruction is a death sentence for people who desperately need lifesaving aid. The closure of the Adre border crossing from Chad in February has severely hampered our access to large parts of Darfur affecting 9 million people in need.

Your Excellencies, we thank the AU Peace and Security Council for their dedicated attention and focus on Sudan, in fulfilment of the Sudan roadmap adopted on 27 May 2024. We applaud the efforts of the High-Level Panel on Sudan. We call for more. We also need a nationwide ceasefire as an immediate action to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian assistance. We urge you to use all your influence – as forcefully as possible – to prevent a further stain on Africa and the world’s conscience. Without an immediate and major step change, we are heading into an absolute catastrophe, threatening millions of lives.

DRC: An alarming increase in protection of civilian violations. The crisis in Eastern DRC is first and foremost a protection crisis, with a significant lack of access to basic services. In 2024, DRC reported the highest increase (15 per cent) in protection violations since the start of the crisis. Some 219,104 victims of human rights violations and abuses were identified. The alarming increase in GBV trends, particularly sexual violence and exploitation targeting women and girls in conflict areas, is one of the most serious concerns. Some women and girls displaced have been forced to engage in transactional sex or survival sex. This situation is aggravated by the presence of armed actors, social gender bias, precarious living conditions, famine, and poverty. In Eastern DRC, the disengagement of the peacekeeping force MONUSCO further exacerbates the risk for protection of civilians, with violations already reported in

South Kivu, where MONUSCO has formally withdrew since the end of April 2024.

Protection of civilians

Your Excellencies,

Conflicts continued to have a grave and lasting impact on civilians in many parts of the continent, including Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Nigeria, the Sahel and Somalia. It is an opportune moment to reflect on the state of the protection of civilians and look at what is needed to ensure that international humanitarian law is upheld. Regrettably, the state of the protection of civilians is utterly grim.

The use of explosive weapons in populated areas had devastating impacts on civilians across numerous conflicts. In Sudan for instance, United Nations sources indicate that the use of explosive weapons in populated areas was the leading cause of civilian casualties. Across all conflicts, civilians accounted for 90% of those killed and injured when explosive weapons were used in populated areas.

Civilians were also severely affected by widespread damage and destruction to critical infrastructure. This disrupted the provision of electricity, water and healthcare to millions of people. Across several conflicts, more than 2,000 incidents of violence and other forms of

interference against medical workers, facilities, equipment, transport and patients were recorded.

Forced displacement also remained a defining feature of armed conflicts. The largest internal displacement caseloads globally are in Africa.

And conflict was the major driver of staggeringly high levels of hunger, across all conflict affected countries, with several experiencing crisis levels of acute food insecurity or higher.

In the middle of this, the efforts of the humanitarian community to support and provide for the needs of civilians are severely compromised by widespread constraints on access. Besides active hostilities and logistical challenges, chief among these were the parties' bureaucratic impediments and an unconscionable number of attacks harming humanitarian workers.

A significant challenge constitutes the widespread disregard for International Humanitarian Law (IHL) in conflict zones, also regarding the protection of aid workers. Despite clear mandates for their protection, attacks persist and often go unpunished. According to the Aid Workers Security Database, more than 260 aid workers were killed globally in 2023, double the previous year's count (2022: 118 killed). In Sudan 15 humanitarian workers were killed. Moreover, humanitarian staff face intimidation, arrest, and arbitrary detention.

Another pressing issue is the vulnerability of national staff, predominantly from NGOs, who represent 90% of attack victims. These frontline workers are typically the first to deliver aid in challenging environments, with often less measures to ensure their protection. While larger organizations, including the UN, have strengthened their Security Risk Management (SRM) tools, smaller NGOs and local partners remain exposed due to insufficient security measures. This highlights the urgent need to enhance protection for national staff, including NGO staff

Your Excellencies, the harm and suffering caused to civilians in 2023 signals an alarming lack of compliance with international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

It is time to complement existing measures by adopting a more holistic approach – one that considers the perspective of civilians and takes into account the complex, cumulative and long-term nature of the full range of civilian harm in conflict.

We have already seen some positive steps on this journey. The Political Declaration on Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas and the 2015 Safe Schools Declaration are both good examples of ways that States can commit to the greater protection of civilians in armed conflict, complementing their compliance with international humanitarian law.

We urge all States to endorse these instruments and implement them in full.

We urge them to follow the steps taken by some national and regional authorities in developing and adopting proactive protection of civilians' policies, processes and tools aimed at better understanding and mitigating a broader range of civilian harm.

A culture of protection has taken root, and a comprehensive protection framework now exists. AU Peace and Security Council- and UNSC mandated peace operations have protected and saved countless civilian lives. Additionally, UN Security Council resolutions on the protection of medical care in armed conflict and on conflict and hunger have given important focus and urgency to these issues.

Although allegations of serious violations of international humanitarian law outpace their investigation and prosecution, some important progress has been made in the pursuit of criminal accountability. The Central African Republic has established a Special Criminal Court; the Democratic Republic of the Congo has rolled out a mobile military court; German courts have convicted perpetrators of crimes committed in Syria. The International Criminal Court works actively to pursue international crimes while falling prey to unacceptable threats to its integrity.

Yet in too many conflicts, civilians continue to suffer unacceptable harm.

The Security Council and Member States must demand and ensure compliance with international humanitarian law, international human rights law and the Council's resolutions.

Thank you.

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Communiqué of the 1216th Meeting of the Peace and Security Council held on 19 June 2024 on the Discussion on Refugees, Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and Humanitarian Action in Africa.

Peace and Security Council

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