Safety of UN Volunteers in South Sudan amidst fighting

UNV continues to monitor the safety of its UN Volunteers in South Sudan amidst recent violence. For the past 25 years, UN Volunteers have supported peace processes in multiple societies and countries in complex political transitions around the world. Over 14,000 UN Volunteers have been deployed to support peace processes in more than 40 different peacekeeping and political UN missions, as well as UN peacebuilding offices around
the world.

Between Friday 8 July and Sunday 10 July, heavy fighting broke out in Juba which had consequences for the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) and the Agencies, Funds and Programmes active in the country.

A ceasefire was declared on Monday 11 July 2016. At least 272 people have been killed in the recent violence. Two peacekeepers and one United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) staff lost their lives while several other peacekeepers have sustained injuries.

UNV headquarters received regular updates on UN Volunteers, both national and international, in terms of their locations, conditions, security and safety, thanks to the work conducted by its personnel in the country.

Despite considerable constraints and pressure, the UNV Field Unit successfully ensured that all international and national UN Volunteers were accounted for, safe and uninjured during the troubled days. UNV has 108 UN Volunteers – 22 national and 86 international –deployed with UN agencies such as UNDP, UNESCO, UNFPA, UNHCR, WHO and UNICEF. A further 404 UN Volunteers are deployed with UNMISS in South Sudan.

UNV has learned, with deep regret and empathy, that national UN Volunteers have experienced displacement, lootings and significant personal distress. Their commitment and dedication to serving peace and development as volunteers despite this is all the more valued and appreciated.

Executive Coordinator Richard Dictus was recently in Juba in December 2015 to mark International Volunteer Day with UN Volunteers in South Sudan. In light of recent events, he offered his support and encouragement to UN Volunteers in South Sudan: “I would like to praise the cohesiveness that you have shown as part of the UNV family, looking after each other and providing mutual support to cope with the stress you are experiencing. During these difficult times, your solidarity and dedication embody the true volunteer spirit and I am very proud of you. I thank you for upholding the mission of UNV and that of your host agencies. I also sincerely thank the UNV Field Unit personnel who keeps on ensuring excellent coordination and provided much support to you UN Volunteers and to us at Headquarters.”

Many UN Volunteers have remained in this volatile situation to ensure their host entities are able to continue delivering on their mandates. True to their
nature, several UN Volunteers who are currently being mandatorily evacuated have already expressed the hope to return soon to support local communities and visit local areas, including continuing the volunteer activities they supported in their free time, such as one of Juba’s orphanages.

The UN Security Council and UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon joined in condemning the violence and urged for a swift end to the fighting. UNV continues to monitor the situation and hope that it becomes increasingly safer and more stable. Our thoughts go out to all our UN Volunteers, their families and the South Sudanese population.

• South Sudan • UNMISS • peace

Sustainable Development Goal: SDG 16: Peace, justice and strong institutions