

Outrage over killing of six aid workers in South Sudan

JUBA, South Sudan - At a time when humanitarian needs have reached unprecedented levels, it is entirely unacceptable that those who are trying to help are being attacked and killed, said the humanitarian coordinator for South Sudan, Eugene Owusu. He strongly condemned the killing of another six aid workers in an ambush on 25 March 2017.



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“I am appalled and outraged by the heinous murder yesterday of six courageous humanitarian workers in South Sudan,” said Owusu on Sunday. The aid workers were travelling from Juba to Pibor.

The ambush – which represents the highest number of aid workers killed in a single incident since the conflict began – comes after two other grave attacks on aid workers this month.

A humanitarian convoy was attacked in Yirol East on March 14, while responding to a cholera outbreak in the area. Tragically, one health worker and one patient were killed and at least one other health worker was injured. Separately, during fighting in Mayendit town on March 10, local staff of an international NGO were detained by non-state armed actors and released four days later. Already in March, there have been multiple instances of looting of aid supplies, including in two areas in Mayendit which are top priority locations for the famine response.

“These attacks against aid workers and aid assets are utterly reprehensible,” said Owusu. “They not only put the lives of aid workers at risk, they also threaten the lives of thousands of South Sudanese who rely on our assistance for their survival.”

For us to continue to provide life-saving relief to the civilians suffering immensely across this country, the safety and security of aid workers must be upheld, the impunity that has prevailed to date must end, and perpetrators must be held to account.”

At least 79 aid workers have been killed in South Sudan since the beginning of the December 2013 crisis, including at least 12 killed in 2017, and at least eight humanitarian convoys have been attacked already this year. Under International Humanitarian Law, intentional attacks against humanitarian relief personnel may constitute war crimes.

“I send my deepest condolences to the families, friends and colleagues of those impacted by these abhorrent incidents,” added Owusu. “Every time an attack of this nature happens, we say that it must never happen again. And yet it does. I implore all those in positions of power to step up to their responsibilities and stop this, as they are ultimately accountable for what happens under their watch. There is no safety when attacks are met with silence and inaction.”

More than three years of conflict have taken a devastating toll on the people of South Sudan. Around 7.5 million people across the country are in need of humanitarian assistance and protection and localised famine has been declared in parts of Unity.

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