It is one year since the armed conflict broke out in South Sudan. December 15 will mark one year on from the start of the brutal conflict that has devastated South Sudan; a conflict that has displaced more than 1.9 million people from their homes.

Over 100,000 people have sought refuge in UN bases because they have either been attacked or fear for their lives. Millions more fled into the bush and remain too fearful to return home. Countless civilians have been killed, some very brutally and some have suffered terrible crimes; homes have been torched; lives have been ruined.

I visited South Sudan from 19 to 21 November to assess the situation and the dire need of the people affected by the conflict.

In Lankien in Jonglei State, I met a young boy of thirteen who had lost both parents in the fighting and fled with his five younger siblings. He is just one of half a million children who have lost education completely during the past year.

I then visited Ethiopia, more specifically the western part of Ethiopia – Gambella - which has become home to over 190,000 South Sudanese refugees; almost 40 per cent of South Sudan’s 472,000 refugees from this conflict. The rest have crossed into Kenya, Sudan and Uganda.

In Gambella, I was impressed by the collaborative efforts of the Government of Ethiopia and humanitarian partners in helping South Sudanese, Eritrean and Somali refugees. There are more than 600,000 refugees currently in Ethiopia.

This is the largest refugee population in Africa. Resources and services are becoming stretched, and the scale is tremendous.

Even before the current crisis, South Sudan was one of the most difficult environments in the world in which to deliver aid.

Since the outbreak of hostilities last December, it has become even more difficult. Aid
workers have faced active hostilities, threats to their lives, as well as access and logistical challenges in reaching vulnerable communities. Thirteen aid workers have been killed since 15 December last year.

Nonetheless, aid organizations have reached more than 3.5 million people with assistance this year, have helped avert famine and brought a deadly cholera outbreak under control.

They have been able to achieve this thanks to the generous support of donors. But the situation remains bleak.

The number of people who are severely food insecure is projected to increase to 2.5 million people early next year.

Aid organizations are urgently calling for US$600 million to kick-start next year’s operations.

As the dry season unfolds, relief workers need to pre-position life-saving and livelihood supplies, and repair key roads and airstrips. It is crucial to start this work now, before the rains start in April, when up to 60 per cent of the country’s roads become impassable.

We are concerned that violence will further escalate in the upcoming weeks and months, as it has in past dry seasons.

Indeed, fighting has already started in Unity and Upper Nile states with military mobilization reported in Jonglei State. An estimated 4,000 people were recently displaced from fighting in Atar in Jonglei.

In Addis Ababa, I had an opportunity to brief Member States on the crisis in South Sudan. My message to them was that, first and foremost, the conflict must stop. Political leaders on all sides and stakeholders must redouble efforts to find political solutions.

And while peace is being sought, the parties to the conflict must respect their ceasefire commitments and their international legal obligations to protect civilians.

While the leaders of both sides continue to talk and negotiate peace, millions of South Sudanese are suffering.

Violations of human rights, including rape and sexual violence, murder and threats against humanitarian staff, the destruction of homes and livelihoods, and the recruitment of children, must be condemned and brought to an end.

The first message from the humanitarian community is the violence must end. We must be given unfettered access to people in need, and the conflict must stop.