Today I conclude my four-day visit to South Sudan where I had the opportunity to see for myself the impact of the devastating crisis. This is my first visit to South Sudan since I began my role as the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator that was almost two months ago. But I have been here few times before. My last visit to South Sudan was in April 2012 to assess the humanitarian situation then, in my capacity as an Under-Secretary of State for International Development in the United Kingdom.

On Thursday, I met with His Excellency the President of the Republic of South Sudan, Mr. Salva Kiir Mayardit, to discuss the humanitarian crisis. I shared with him our collective great sadness and disappointment that the hopes and dreams of the people of South Sudan at its birth four years ago –which I witnessed- are shattered. I made it clear that the most important, urgent, best benefit for the people of South Sudan is for the violence to end now for the people and indeed for the future of South Sudan. I urged His Excellency to help ensure the restrictions on barges transporting vital life-saving supplies on the River Nile be lifted without delay.

I also met with humanitarian partners and members of the diplomatic community here in South Sudan to discuss the situation and to examine the ways of improving and up-scaling the humanitarian operation. Most importantly, I also had the opportunity to meet and speak with South Sudanese families affected by the war.
Yesterday, I travelled to Bentiu and Nyal in Panyijiar County, Unity State, where I spoke with communities in dire need. They told me that above all, even when they have nothing, they want peace. They depend hugely every day on the humanitarian assistance to survive. They told me they walked for many days, now often in this season through water and marsh, looking for a place where they could feel safe. They are tired of living in fear, they want to rebuild their lives. They have lost husbands, wives and children. Their homes and livelihoods have been destroyed. Their children are not in school and thousands have been taken by armed elements. Women and girls have been targeted throughout the conflict - they have been beaten, abducted, raped and set on fire.

In Nyal yesterday, Rebecca, Anna, Elizabeth, all had harrowing testimonies, who had fled the violence, they had 16 children between them, arriving a week ago, four days ago and one day ago, even one sleeping under the tree we were speaking under. They are all being hosted generously by the local community who are using up their own resources and sharing shelter in their tukuls and now needing support themselves.

I call on the leadership of the warring parties to listen to the people of South Sudan and to lay down their arms, stop the violence, reconcile their differences and commit to sustainable peace. If the violence continues, the already vast number of people suffering will continue to rise appallingly. As is true the world over, leaders must take responsibility for their own actions and for those who act in their name.

I am very proud of the humanitarian workers who continue to brave the dangerous and difficult environment to stand in solidarity with those who suffer and bring them this urgently needed aid.

So far this year, let it be said and you should report this loudly, even in the most difficult circumstances, extraordinarily and for whom there is no praise big enough, aid workers have reached more than one million people with food assistance and 1.8 million with livelihoods support, they treated 62,400 children suffering severe acute malnutrition, provided access to education for hundreds of thousand children, and facilitated about 1.1 million outpatient consultations in conflict-affected states. Every day, relief workers are providing assistance to
over 166,000 people who are sheltering in Protection of Civilian sites in UN bases across the country. I had the opportunity to see this with my own eyes in Bentiu and in Juba. The UN and the NGOs are doing a great job improving the living conditions of the displaced people, offering services and offering protection.

I am also deeply shocked and saddened that aid workers are being harassed, targeted and killed. 27 of our colleagues have lost their lives and many more are missing and unaccounted for. This must stop. It is unacceptable. I call on all parties to uphold their obligations to comply with the principles of international humanitarian law, real law, and ensure the safe passage of humanitarian assistance. We need rapid and unhindered access to provide assistance to conflict-affected communities by the most efficient means possible, be that air, road or river.

The humanitarian consequences of fighting in South Sudan are, of course, visible for everyone to see, who cares to see it. Civilians - especially women and children - bear the brunt of this senseless war. The unchecked atrocities taking place across the country amongst all communities contradict the spirit of unity that led to South Sudan’s independence and which so many of us worked so hard to achieve.

Over two million people, half of whom are children, have fled their homes. Some 1.6 million people are displaced inside South Sudan, with more than 600,000 people having fled to neighbouring countries. Some 4.6 million people are severely food insecure, with a quarter of a million children at risk from rapidly worsening nutrition situation. We are battling a cholera outbreak. The fighting must stop and the atrocities must end immediately. Parties to the conflict need to urgently forge a sustainable political deal and deliver on their promises of peace to their people, the people of this country who have suffered already so much and for whom that suffering continues.

I thank the international community for their continued generosity to South Sudan. Already this year, donors have given US$684 million for the Humanitarian Response Plan. But we still have a $1 billion gap. Needs are higher than ever and we cannot wait to respond, to increase the already given humanitarian assistance. During my meetings with aid agencies, they assured me that they
are ready to deliver. Systems and structures are in place to enable them to move quickly to get much-needed assistance to affected communities. I call on the international community to stay the course and support us in averting an even worse humanitarian tragedy here in South Sudan.

Ladies and gentlemen, peace is paramount; the State must of course step up to its responsibilities; and above all the innocent civilians of South Sudan must be protected, sheltered, fed and allowed to have hope for the future.

Thank you.