Mr. President,

Thank you for this opportunity to brief the Security Council on the humanitarian situation in South Sudan.

When I briefed the Council last month, I drew attention to the deepening humanitarian crisis in South Sudan. Some six million people, more than half of the population, are currently in need of humanitarian assistance, of these, a staggering 2.8 million people are severely food insecure; over two million people have been forced to flee their homes; and more than half of all school-aged children are not attending class.

Mr. President,

Despite the Council’s Presidential Statement on 17 March calling on all parties to protect civilians, allow people to move freely, and to facilitate timely, full, safe and unimpeded humanitarian access; yet again I have to report the situation remains dire. Civilians continue to be targeted, attacked and displaced, and acute humanitarian needs persist, exacerbated by recurrent access challenges.

In addition to the unimaginable individual and community abuses that the people of South Sudan have sustained, I must also highlight that despite the call for a Cessation of Hostilities in the Peace Agreement, the geographic scope of conflict has grown. In recent months, as we have just heard from SRSG Løj, we have seen new outbreaks of violence in areas around Western Bahr el Ghazal, Western Equatoria, Jonglei and Malakal. Such violence has resulted in the displacement of well over 150,000 people, with many forced to flee their homes repeatedly – some more than ten times.

By way of example, on the same day I briefed the Council last month, fighting erupted in Pibor and surrounding areas, resulting in the displacement of around 13,000 people. Further, some 8,000 internally displaced people seeking refuge in Mboro, Western Bahr el Ghazal, were forced to flee that area again when fighting erupted on 21 March. A woman who had sought refuge in
Mboro and then had to flee to Wau said, “We survived on leaves and turmeric; all our belongings, including food, were looted.”

Let us not forget that nearly 200,000 people continue to seek protection inside United Nations Protection of Civilians Sites, as they still do not feel that it is safe enough to return home. Regrettably, the sanctity of these sites has not been respected, and more than 25,000 people remain displaced as a result of the events in Malakal. Humanitarians and UNMISS continue to work together to make the conditions in these sites as decent as possible, however, the sites will never be a replacement for the places that people call home.

Children remain particularly vulnerable to the expanding conflict. In recent months, children have been separated from their parents while trying to flee the fighting, including at 84 documented cases following the events in Malakal. Moreover, schools and health facilities - inviolable under International Humanitarian Law - have been damaged or destroyed, denying children access to education and healthcare.

Mr. President,

These new conflict-afflicted areas are the same locations where people are most desperate for help. Displaced, food insecure and vulnerable, these are the populations we must be seeking to aid and protect. However they cannot be reached by aid workers due to a host of impediments that continue to hamper aid operations. In 2015, more than 900 access incidents were reported by humanitarian partners in South Sudan, representing a 14 per cent increase from the previous year and a 68 per cent increase from the year before that. This year, the trend continues.

In the 14 days since the Presidential Statement of 17 March more than 17 incidents of obstruction of access for humanitarian activities have been reported; comprising interference by parties from individual armed actors through to national authorities. The true number is likely to be far higher given some humanitarian partners are reluctant to report every incident out of fear of retribution or harassment.

For example, last week in Unity, local authorities demanded free transport to Juba aboard the contracted plane of an international NGO. When the pilots refused, citing their duty to uphold humanitarian principles, a truck loaded with armed men arrived at the airstrip and threatened to detain the pilots if they did not oblige. Such action compromises the ability of humanitarians to safely and effectively deliver humanitarian assistance, and is simply unacceptable.

In Malakal, after the horrific violence in mid-February, humanitarians were denied river access to Wau Shilluk for over one month, disrupting the delivery of life-saving assistance to over 27,000 people. In a location where homes and businesses had been looted or destroyed, leaving only minimal resources, the denial of access presents a genuine threat to lives. Access was finally granted when remaining water and nutrition supplies were days away from exhaustion and schools had already closed as supplies had run out. The lifting of restrictions came only after interventions from the humanitarian community, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG), the Chairperson of the Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission (JMEC), and visits by several Ambassadors from various countries to Malakal to speak with the Governor.
Mr. President,

Delays in delivery of assistance cost lives and expends precious resources. What humanitarians need is timely, unimpeded access to those we assess are in vital need. Not ad hoc, case by case considerations after much attention, pressure and persuasion.

The challenge in South Sudan is an increasing disconnect between the assurances of national and the actions of local groups. All too often, even when official assurances are received at the national level they are not respected by local actors. Illegal exactions and taxes remain rampant, and humanitarian convoys are consistently subjected to demands for payment at check points. Despite the Government’s statement that humanitarians should not pay at such points, authorities at the local level have conveyed a very different message, noting that humanitarians should “expect” to make such payments. Convoys travelling from Juba to Bentiu by road recently reported over 50 checkpoints, with each truck required to pay a total of more than 30,000 South Sudanese Pounds, that is about US$1,000, in exactions. Such extortions are unacceptable and must stop.

The United Nations Department of Safety and Security has also been denied access to conduct Security Risk Assessments in areas where fighting has taken place. Since January 2016, Security Risk Assessment Missions have been denied six times in Central Equatoria alone. These risk assessments are a critical first step to assessing, preparing and enabling effective humanitarian action.

In addition to the expanding geographic scope to the conflict, new drivers of crises are emerging and vulnerabilities are being exacerbated, resulting in additional humanitarian and protection needs. Most notably, the deteriorating economic situation is driving instability. As a result of the economic crisis, the monthly cost of food and clean water for an average family now amounts to more than ten times the salary of a teacher. Such pressures are felt most acutely in urban and population centres. In the north-western areas of Northern Bahr el Ghazal and Warrap, heightened food insecurity, compounded by economic downturn and growing unrest, has resulted in the flight of some 38,000 people into East and South Darfur since end of January.

Mr. President,

On average, more than half of the access incidents reported involve violence against humanitarian personnel or their assets. When I briefed the Council last month, I reported that 47 humanitarian staff had been killed since December 2013. I am appalled to report that this number has now risen to 49. The most recent case is that of Mr. Yien Malouth, an Integrated Community Case Worker for Save the Children, a husband and father of two children, who was tragically shot in Akobo, Jonglei. Greater action must be taken to ensure the safety of humanitarian workers.

Since the beginning of 2016, there have been at least four major instances of the destruction or looting of humanitarian supplies and facilities. These have taken place in Malakal, Pibor and Western Equatoria. Vital goods, such as nutritional supplements, education materials and water treatment supplies have been burned or deliberately destroyed. A conservative estimate places the
value of humanitarian losses since the beginning of 2016 at around US$10 million, including more than US$5 million in damages to the Malakal Protection of Civilians site.

Much more important than the monetary losses is the loss of human life that results from these wanton attacks against humanitarian facilities and assets. Each time a facility or compound is damaged or destroyed, and each time supplies are looted, vulnerable civilians are denied vital assistance.

Mr. President,

Despite the challenges, humanitarian partners continue to stand in solidarity with the people of South Sudan. In 2015, and despite the access challenges presented to them, partners were able to reach more than 4.5 million people with assistance, often in the most remote areas. In the first two months of 2016 alone, partners reached more than one million people. Humanitarians continue to find innovative ways to save lives, even in areas where formal access is not granted. For example, partners reached over 100,000 people with life-saving assistance in Unity last year amidst violent conflict and access denials.

However, despite the courageous efforts of our colleagues on the frontlines, and the intensive work of humanitarian partners to scale-up their capacity, a critical lack of funding continues to severely hobble the humanitarian effort today. Of the required $1.3 billion dollars earmarked to reach over 5 million people, only 9 per cent – yes only nine per cent - of the funding has been received from the international community. Amidst a food and nutrition security crisis, NGO partners are scaling down nutrition and health programmes because they simply have not received the funding needed to operate. The small window of opportunity afforded by the dry season will close in the coming weeks, and the funding received has only allowed humanitarians to pre-position 35 per cent of the required supplies across the country. As a result, more supplies will have to be moved by air during the rainy season, increasing the cost of delivery by up to six times.

Mr. President,

The Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights, Kate Gilmore, will speak in greater detail to the human rights violations and grave protection concerns in South Sudan, but what is clear from the humanitarian perspective is that both parties have failed to abide by their obligation to protect civilians and civilian facilities and simultaneously failed to allow full, safe and unimpeded humanitarian access to those in critical need.

Mr. President,

The terms of the peace agreement have clearly not been enough to halt the rapidly escalating and worsening situation and its implications for millions of civilians across the country. We need action. To this end, I ask the Council to call on the parties to the conflict and all armed actors operating in South Sudan to uphold their obligations under international humanitarian and human rights law to protect civilians, allow free and unhindered humanitarian access and to protect humanitarian workers and their assets.
Since my last report, since the peace agreement, let my message to this Council today be unequivocal: the hideous facts on the ground are that the humanitarian situation has severely worsened in that short time, it continues to worsen and the only measure I am using are the lives, the suffering and deaths of millions of innocent of women, girls, boys and men caught up in the horrendous fight between two sides who have no care for the people they claim to represent. In light of this, I call upon the Security Council to stand in solidarity with the people of South Sudan, and to advocate within your areas of influence to seek an end to the unfolding humanitarian catastrophe.

Thank you.