I condemn in the strongest possible terms the killing of six humanitarian aid workers in an ambush in South Sudan on Saturday, 25 March. This is the third serious attack against aid workers this month alone. Since the start of the conflict in December 2013, attacks against aid workers have continued with impunity and at least 79 aid workers have lost their lives. This is completely unacceptable and must stop now, especially at a time when humanitarian needs have reached unprecedented levels.

As a direct consequence of this conflict, famine is now ravaging parts of South Sudan. The humanitarian situation across the country is nothing short of catastrophic with five million people severely food insecure, and millions without access to water, healthcare and other basic services. It is essential that aid workers are able to access everybody in need, wherever they are.

This appalling incident highlights the unconscionable violence and abuses facing men, women and children each and every day in South Sudan which has forced some 3.5 million people to leave their homes, including over 1.6 million who have sought refuge in neighbouring countries.

I commend the courage and dedication of all aid workers in South Sudan and extend my deepest condolences to families and friends of the brave local aid workers from within our global humanitarian family. I remind the parties to the conflict of their obligations under International Humanitarian Law to respect aid workers and facilitate unimpeded humanitarian access. All attacks against aid workers must be investigated and those responsible must be held to account. Intentional attacks against humanitarian workers may constitute war crimes.

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