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REISSUE: South Sudan NGO Forum Statement on NGO Safety, Security and Hiring

October 28 2020 - NGOs respond routinely in South Sudan to humanitarian crises as objective, non-partisan actors. They provide critical goods and services to beneficiaries regardless of religion, ethnic affiliation, or political persuasion so long as the staff and assets of the respective NGOs are safe and secure. The NGOs are guests in a community and must be treated with the respect that one naturally affords a visitor. If community leaders and government officials cannot provide basic security and safety, the NGOs must, with great regret, suspend operations. It has occurred in several South Sudan localities in 2020.

The NGO Forum would like to clear up some misunderstandings that underlie much of the current tension between communities and NGOs. All NGOs operating in South Sudan, including INGOs, abide by all Ministry of Labor requirements. That includes the NGO Recruitment Guidelines, developed by the Ministry of Labor in consultation with RRC and the NGO Forum. These guidelines were rolled out in 2019 through a multi-day workshop with representatives from the state-level Ministry of Labor offices. To the greatest extent possible, NGOs show preference to local candidates when it comes to recruitment. However, the candidate has to go through the NGO's HR process and must meet the posted job requirements. In South Sudan, the Labor Law stipulates that at least 80% of the INGO staff members must be South Sudanese. However, the Law does not stipulate that the 80% of hires must be local. They simply must be from South Sudan. All INGOs comply happily with this requirement, with nearly 90%, on average, of employees of INGO staff being national staff, making certain that the process shows no preference to a particular ethnic group according to humanitarian principles.

There are mechanisms in South Sudan for expressing grievances. Those include the judicial system, the Ministry of Labor, the Relief and Rehabilitation Commission, and traditional routes. All NGOs commit to Accountability to Affected Populations guidelines and sensitize beneficiaries on feedback mechanisms through which they can seek redress with confidentiality and protection concerns considered. The NGO Forum welcomes conversations that flow through those mechanisms. However, grievances sometimes arise in the form of threats and ultimatums against NGOs. Those threats actually close off the possibility of dialogue and often lead to the suspension of life-saving activities. The NGO Forum encourages any party with a grievance to channel it through an established mechanism, not as a threat to the staff and assets of NGOs.

The way forward

- 1) The NGO Forum asks that local community leaders and local officials in areas of South Sudan where NGO staff and assets are threatened to reassert formally and clearly their obligation to provide basic security and safety for NGO staff members and assets. This is the first step in enabling NGOs to restart suspended activities.
- 2) The NGO Forum asks counterparts in the RRC and Ministry of Labor, locally and in Juba, to initiate a dialogue with community leaders in areas where NGOs are

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- threatened to clarify Labor Law requirements and to address the demands of the leaders. The Forum and the concerned NGOs will gladly participate in these dialogues.
- 3) Having seen local security formally and firmly reestablished and having reached a consensus on next steps with all relevant parties, the respective NGOs will revisit their decision to suspend their activities.
 - 4) The NGO Forum looks forward to seeing suspended humanitarian activities restart in all areas of need in South Sudan.
 - 5) The NGO Forum looks forward to continuing to abide by all the requirements of the 2017 Labor Law. Those include treating all South Sudanese staff members equally and allowing the citizens of South Sudan to work wherever they choose in their nation.

South Sudan NGO Forum

South Sudan NGO Forum comprises 122 INGOs and 407 NNGOs providing assistance to the people of South Sudan regardless of ethnic background, political affiliation or religious belief to save lives and improve lives. NGO Forum provides a platform through which NGOs, the Government of South Sudan, the United Nations, donors and other external stakeholders can exchange information, share expertise and establish guidelines for a more networked, efficient and effective use of aid resources in South Sudan.

For more information, contact:

Dr Pius Ojara, Director South Sudan NGO Forum, +211 920490156, director@southsudanngoforum.org