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The South Sudan NGO Forum condemns violence against NGOs; stands in solidarity with affected NGOs

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The South Sudan NGO Forum strongly condemns the unacceptable attacks on South Sudanese international NGOs' and national NGOs' workers and the forceful entry into NGO compounds by unauthorised youth groups in Renk, Jamjang and Torit. We condemn this unacceptable behaviour, which seeks to interfere with NGOs' recruitment processes and outcomes. Such acts cause physical harm to NGO workers, vandalise humanitarian assets and disrupt the work of humanitarians. The NGO Forum does not condone harassment, threats and violence against NGO assets and personnel delivering assistance to communities.

NGOs strive to do fair and impartial recruitment that strictly adheres to the South Sudan Labour Law 2017 and follow the National Ministry of Labour's NGO Recruitment Guidelines 2019 that specifically states that lower-level workers such as cleaners, drivers, guards and cooks be selected from local communities. At the same time, South Sudan Labour Law forbids NGOs from discriminating against any South Sudanese if they fit the requirements of particular professional and technical jobs.

As long as the safety and security of NGO staff are not guaranteed, NGOs and UN Agencies in all affected areas will limit movements and will restrict operations to only life-saving interventions. Humanitarian assistance can only happen where staff are safe and are free to move to offer assistance where it is needed. On May 11, the Humanitarian Country Team agreed to a collective suspension of non-lifesaving activities in Renk and Jamjang, until there is: sufficient provision of assurance of safety and security of humanitarian workers and assets from the authorities; youth groups provide the formal withdrawal of any threats; and NGOs receive a guarantee of a non-interference policy of recruitment processes which follow the National Ministry of Labour NGO Recruitment Guidelines. The outcome of the May 11, 2021 meeting with State Authorities in Torit was sufficiently positive to allow for the resumption of activities, although clarifications are still needed on the Government's position on hiring practices and processes.

While we recognise that the Government has taken strong steps to hold perpetrators to account by arresting suspects in Renk, Jamjang and Torit in recent days, the NGO Forum calls for tangible and sustained proactive measures to ensure the safety of humanitarian staff and assets across the country.

"Violence against NGOs is a recurring issue. The NGO Forum calls for the Government to not only react to acts of violence, but to prevent them."

Pius D. Ojara, PhD, Director South Sudan NGO Forum

The South Sudan NGO Forum calls upon the Government of South Sudan at all levels to take on their responsibilities of supporting humanitarian agencies by providing protection to aid workers and their assets and ensuring that an enabling environment prevails for safe delivery of essential services in communities. Humanitarians depend on local authorities for their safety and security. The NGO Forum stresses that the suspension of humanitarian operations remains inevitable where humanitarians cannot work safely and do not have freedom of movements. Essential service provision by humanitarians across the country will become limited where humanitarians cannot work unimpeded and unhindered.

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