

Joint Statement for International Day of Peace 21st September

On International Day of Peace 21st September, we, the undersigned international NGOs, would like to draw attention to the urgent need for peace in South Sudan.

Peace is the first and foremost priority to our partners and the communities we work with in South Sudan. We want to reiterate our solidarity with South Sudanese women, men, boys and girls who bear the brunt of the devastating conflict which broke out in December 2013. We are gravely concerned about the continuation of violence which has forced more than 4.3 million people to flee their homes. The conflict has led to 7 million people in South Sudan requiring humanitarian assistance. Up to 2.4 million children are out of school in the country - the highest proportion of out of school children in the world.

In the wake of the signing of the peace agreement last week, all sides need to immediately stop all hostile and violent action. The implementation of the peace agreement should be a key priority for all parties and any other interests should be put aside.

While it is vital to secure an agreement to end armed conflict, there needs to be political will to engage positively in the support of peace. Securing long-term peace in South Sudan requires more than a formal agreement. Ultimately any signed agreement can only deliver lasting peace if it is supported and connected with long-term transformational changes at the community level, which address grievances fuelling conflict and the causes of disaffection and disenfranchisement.

Despite the devastating conflict in South Sudan, local-level peacebuilding takes place in South Sudan every day bridging divisions, bringing communities and individuals together and restoring relationships.

For instance:

- Following the outbreak of armed conflict in Wau in April 2017, an NGO helped bring together women from different sides of the conflict through dialogues, training and awareness raising campaigns. These women in Wau – living both in UN protection of civilian sites and in the town – went on to exchange gifts – of soap, salt and sugar – to build better relationships across conflict divides and promote peace.
- In October 2017, a community-based organisation persuaded women in Rumbek to cease composing war songs used to rally their communities and instead compose peace songs, which promoted reconciliation and understanding through words and dance.
- In July 2018, as a result of an NGO peace mediation between communities in Pibor whose relationship had been strained by cattle raiding and abduction of children, a number of children abducted by opposite communities were returned back to their families.

We acknowledge and celebrate the peacebuilding work undertaken by community groups and organisations, young people, peace activists, churches, faith-based organisations, NGOs, traditional leaders and others. The participation of various groups in the process – civil society, youth groups, diaspora communities, women's groups and faith-based organisations – can play a key role in the prevention and resolution of conflict in South

Sudan. Exclusion of these groups from peacebuilding efforts- at national, regional or local-level - marginalises the voices of ordinary South Sudanese.

Building sustainable peace is a long-term process and empowering people to reconcile their differences locally and end violence is an achievable and crucial step forward. Peacebuilding at the local level can create space and commitment which can strengthen the implementation of national level agreements and should form part of a comprehensive approach to lasting peace.

Thus, promoting sustained local capacity to manage conflict and security, fostering social interactions, encouraging transitional justice, supporting economic development and investing in long-term peacebuilding remain critical factors in South Sudan.

