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***For immediate release***

**CHURCHES CALL FOR WARRING FACTIONS TO RESOLVE CONFLICT AS SOUTH SUDAN STANDS ON BRINK OF A HUMANITARIAN DISASTER**

Church leaders in South Sudan have called for greater urgency regarding delayed peace negotiations in Addis Ababa, as faith-based humanitarian agencies warn of an impending food crisis.

In just four months, more than one million people have been displaced from their homes and an estimated 4.9 million are currently in need of humanitarian assistance, yet the crisis response plan is still only 36 per cent funded.

In their latest pastoral statement, the ecumenical church leaders of South Sudan strongly condemn the ongoing violence and outline their vision for a strategy for peace, including an inclusive political dialogue and reconciliation process.

‘We are saddened by the delay and the lack of progress in the peace talks in Addis Ababa, and we are horrified by the ongoing armed mobilisation by the conflicting parties in and outside the country,’ the statement says.

‘We envision a country where justice, liberty and prosperity for all shall truly reign; a country where people will live long and children will not die young and senselessly.

‘The lesson from history is that the longer we wait to resolve issues, the more complicated they will become, and the suffering of people will continue.’

Christian Aid, Tearfund and CAFOD are responding to the crisis in South Sudan by working through national partners and the churches to provide humanitarian assistance in the most affected areas, including food distribution, nutrition, water, sanitation, child protection, and health.

‘As the rainy season rapidly approaches, we are extremely concerned about the implications for the seven million people who are at risk of food insecurity,’ warns Natalia Chan, Christian Aid’s senior advocacy and policy officer for East Africa.

‘Many families have missed the planting season because they have been displaced by the violence, and the conflict continues to impede humanitarian access to the most vulnerable.

‘Once the rainy season is upon us, two thirds of the country will be cut off - we need immediate action now or the situation will get much worse.’

CAFOD’s Country Representative for South Sudan, Jane Andanje says that ending the conflict through a sustainable, negotiated settlement is the only way to give people the security they need to return to their homes and fields, and begin to rebuild their lives.

‘We call for the continued prayers of the faith community over this Easter period for peace in South Sudan, she adds.

Andy Morgan, Deputy Head of East and Southern Africa Region within Tearfund highlights that this message also comes around Easter – a time of new life and new beginnings.

He refers to Ephesians 2:14-17 where it says: ‘For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility […] thus making peace.’