Maintaining momentum key to progressing peace process in South Sudan

While progress has been made, maintaining momentum is key to progressing the fragile peace process in South Sudan, said the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, David Shearer.

Speaking to the UN Security Council in New York, David Shearer described the recent meeting between President Salva Kiir and Opposition leader Riek Machar in Juba as an important development in the peace process.

“"The face-to-face meetings – which many of us believe are fundamental to moving forward – provided an opportunity to discuss critical unresolved parts of the peace agreement," he said. “The challenge remains, of course, to show tangible results.”

David Shearer pointed particularly to the need to progress the reunification of security forces and decisions on states and their boundaries. He urged the two leaders to make direct discussions a regular feature of the peace process going forward and said it was crucial that they meet their commitment to form a transitional government in November.

In his speech, the Head of the UN Mission in South Sudan also outlined the positive impact of the revitalized peace agreement which was signed by parties to the conflict a year ago.

He highlighted the ceasefire which continues to hold except for sporadic clashes in the south of the country, a slight improvement in food security, enhanced humanitarian access, 594,000 people returning to their homes as well as more than 130 peace meetings.

However, David Shearer also acknowledged that the situation for many people remains bleak because of the legacy of the five-year civil war. About 6.3 million people – 54 percent of the population – are food insecure and have limited access to healthcare. Child malnutrition has increased and, in terms of health, education and living standards, South Sudan ranks 187 out of 189 countries.

Given the precariousness of the peace process, David Shearer said it was vital to maintain momentum.

“That very much depends on the goodwill of the parties as well as the collective and unrelenting focus of the country’s international friends,” he said.