Poor water, hygiene and sanitation conditions in Internally Displaced Persons camps, a looming risk of disease outbreaks.

JUBA, 31 December 2013 – The humanitarian situation in South Sudan has further deteriorated in the past two weeks. Since the outbreak of violence in South Sudan on 15 December 2013, the humanitarian needs have quickly been growing with a total of 195,416 persons have been displaced from the four states of South Sudan, namely; Central Equatoria, Jonglei, Unity and Upper Nile, and 75,171 of them taking shelter in the UN peace keeping bases in Juba, Bor, Malakal, Bentiu, while an estimated 58,000 others are displaced in Aweriel County Lakes state.

As a result of this population displacement, there is a looming risk of disease outbreaks especially for water borne diseases, warns the World Health Organization. “The poor water, sanitation and hygiene conditions in the camps, coupled with a shortage of health workershealth care providers, poses health risks to thousands of displaced persons in the UN camp bases,” says Dr Abdi Aden Mohammed, the WHO Country Representative in South Sudan.

“Even with the tremendous efforts made by health partners, sanitation conditions are still inadequate largely due to the large number of people sheltering in UN bases which have insufficient space to house these numbers. Coupled with poor water and sanitation conditions, overcrowding in the camps may create conditions ripe for disease outbreaks,” added Dr Abdi.

In order to minimize the risks of potential outbreaks, WHO is working closely with health authorities and other health partners including the UNMISS medical team, to identify health workers in the displaced camps who can provide primary health care services, as well as support health education and promotion to all displaced persons.

To immediately respond to the ongoing crisis, the World Health Organization has provided trauma management and emergency health kits to the UNMISS clinics and to other partners engaged in management of trauma cases in the four states. WHO has also provided essential drugs and medical supplies to UNMISS clinics to help them in the management of common illnesses. Over 894 wounded people have been treated at Bor, Malakal and Unity UNMISS clinics and other major referral hospitals in the past two weeks. Besides trauma, diarrhoea and malaria are the most common illnesses reported from the IDP camps.

A shortage of health care workers in states affected by conflict makes provision of quality primary health care a challenge. Many health care workers and NGO partners supporting health services have fled their homes for safety. For example Bor State Hospital in Jonglei State is closednon functional due to insecurity and displacement of all health workers. There is now a significant gap in health service delivery for communities in conflict areas especially for those patients requiring acute care for their survival, such as trauma patients, pregnant women,

young, childrenunder five and the elderly. WHO is working hard to cover the existing gaps in collaboration with health cluster partners including UNMISS medical teams. The agency calls for more health partners to deploy and support the displaced and needy persons in South Sudan.

WHO also calls on donor agencies to provide more financial resources to health partners to ensure that all vulnerable populations in the Republic of South Sudan can live in a safe and healthy environment and continue to receive lifesaving health care services.