

Brief on Violence Affecting Civilians

HIGHLIGHTS

- ❖ Between April and June 2023, the UNMISS Human Rights Division (HRD) documented at least 222 incidents of violence affecting 871 civilians (395 killed, 281 injured, 166 abducted, and 29 subjected to conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV)).
- ❖ This represents an 18 per cent increase in violent incidents compared to the same reporting period in 2022 (from 188 to 222) and a six per cent decrease in number of victims (from 922 to 871). The number of civilians killed decreased by 28 per cent (from 549 to 395), while the number of victims injured increased by 54 per cent (from 183 to 281). Abductions increased by 141 per cent (from 69 to 166), while CRSV decreased by 76 per cent (from 121 to 29).
- ❖ In comparison to the previous quarter, there is a 14 per cent increase in violent incidents (from 194 to 222) and a five per cent decrease in civilians harmed (from 920 to 871). The number of civilians killed decreased slightly by two per cent (from 405 to 395), while injuries increased by 20 per cent (from 235 to 281). Abductions decreased by 38 per cent (from 266 to 166), while the number of victims subjected to CRSV increased by 107 per cent (from 14 to 29).
- ❖ Violence involving community-based militias and/or civil-defense groups accounted for 87 per cent of civilians harmed (or 757 civilian casualties), while nine per cent (or 79 civilian casualties) was attributed to parties to the conflict.
- ❖ The scope of the brief includes data and trends on sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV).

CONTEXT

This quarterly brief presents an overview of trends in violence affecting civilians between April and June 2023, by assessing four major forms of individual harm experienced throughout the conflict (killing, injury, abduction, and conflict-related sexual violence). While the impact of violence extends beyond these forms of harm, they have been the most common incidents documented throughout the conflict in South Sudan.

Since the signing of the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS) in September 2018, the overall number of civilian casualties (defined as killed or injured civilians) attributed to conventional parties to the conflict has declined. However, entrenched patterns of violence involving community-based militias and/or civil defense groups have persisted. This includes incidents commonly referred to as “intercommunal violence” or “intracommunal violence”.

In addition, the brief highlights key human rights concerns monitored by the UNMISS Human Rights Division during the second quarter of 2023, including sexual and gender-based violence, and their impact on civilians.

In accordance with its mandate, UNMISS has issued this brief as an advocacy tool to reduce the impact of armed violence on civilians. UNMISS also continues to urge national authorities to hold all perpetrators accountable.

South Sudan is a State Party to the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights and has ratified three core international human rights treaties. Under this framework, South Sudan is legally bound to respect, protect, promote, and fulfill the human rights of all persons within its territory or under its jurisdiction or control.

International human rights law applies both in times of peace and armed conflict. South Sudan is also bound by norms of international human rights law that have attained the status of customary law.

International humanitarian law applies to the non-international armed conflict in South Sudan. All parties to the conflict are obligated to abide by the relevant rules of customary international law applicable in non-international armed conflicts, including the principles of distinction, proportionality, and precaution.

In addition, in 2012, South Sudan incorporated the provisions of the four Geneva Conventions and its Additional Protocols into domestic law. As a result, there can be prosecutions for acts that have a nexus with a non-

international armed conflict before the South Sudanese courts for breaches of Common Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions.

METHODOLOGY

The UNMISS Human Rights Division (HRD) has developed an incident-based tracking mechanism to document conflict-related violations and abuses. This data is disaggregated by the sex and age of victims. Sources of information include victim and eyewitness accounts, as well as reports from secondary sources identified during field missions, including service providers, community leaders and local authorities. All incidents, particularly those involving intercommunal violence, are deconflicted with incidents documented by the UNMISS Civil Affairs Division (CAD). Incidents determined as cases of conflict-related sexual violence are corroborated in consultation with the Office of the Senior

Women’s Protection Advisor. Nevertheless, the data presented in this brief should not be considered as comprehensive due to challenges faced by HRD in monitoring and reporting on violations and abuses of international human rights and humanitarian law. These include limited access to various locations due to security considerations, access denials by parties to the conflict, as well as inaccessibility due to road conditions. Challenges also include victims and eyewitnesses’ unwillingness to speak due to fear of reprisals and underreporting of sexual and gender-based violence due to associated stigma.

GENERAL TRENDS

Between April and June 2023, HRD documented more than 222 incidents involving at least 871 civilians who were subjected to one of the four major forms of harm (395 killed, 281 injured, 166 abducted, and 29 subjected to CRSV). Out of these incidents, 23 occurred during the previous quarters, though recorded in the current reporting period.

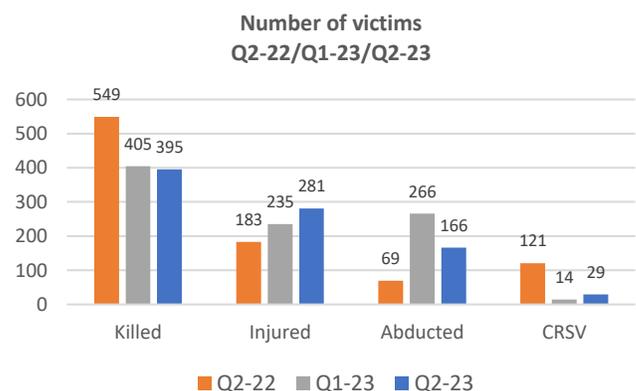
By comparison, between April and June 2022, 188 incidents were documented, involving at least 922 civilian victims (549 killed, 183 injured, 69 abducted, and 121 subjected to CRSV), 91 per cent of the casualties arising from inter-communal or intra-communal violence involving community-based militias and/or civil defense groups. This reflects an 18 per cent increase in violent incidents (from 188 to 222) and a six per cent decrease in the number of victims (from 922 to 871), when comparing the second quarter of 2023 and the same period in 2022.

In comparison to the previous quarter, between January and March 2023, there is a 14 per cent increase in violent incidents (from 194 to 222) and a five per cent decrease in the number of victims (from 920 to 871).

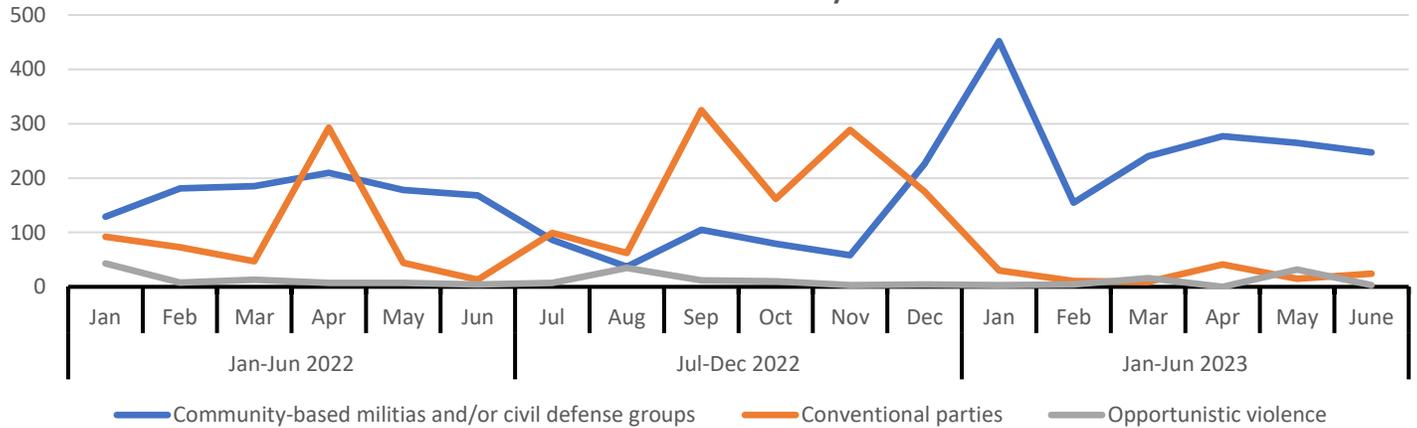
✓ ***Community-based militias and/or civil defense groups***

Consistently, during the second quarter of 2023, intercommunal violence, mainly by community-based militias and/or civil defense groups constituted the

primary source of violence affecting civilians and accounted for more than three quarters (87 per cent) of civilians harmed (382 killed, 236 injured, 129 abducted and 10 subjected to sexual violence), including 65 women and 128 children. This evolving nature of intercommunal and intracommunal conflict, which is at times conducted using military-style tactics and military-grade weapons, contributes to significant variations in the intensity and scale of this type of violence, and consequently its impact on civilian casualties. Seasonal variations, competition for the shrinking grazing lands, dire humanitarian situation, and frequent border dispute, contributed to the fluctuations in the frequency of intercommunal violence. This localized violence, exacerbated by pre-existing communal tensions over access to natural resources, constitutes a destabilizing factor undermining peace in South Sudan.



Trends in the number of victims January 2022 to June 2023



For instance, in Warrap State, the protracted border dispute between the Dinka Ngok of Abyei Administrative Area and the Dinka Twic Mayardit of Twic County persisted and impacted the civilians in the area, undermining the Inter-Communal Peace Conference organized in early April 2023. Likewise, the recurring incidents of cattle-related cross-border violence and inter-ethnic attacks between the armed Nuer from Mayom County in Unity State and armed Dinka from Gogrial East and Tonj North Counties in Warrap remained a challenge to the civilian communities. Most of the violent incidents reported in this region involved cattle raids and retaliatory attacks allegedly perpetrated by armed Dinka from Warrap State or armed attackers reportedly aligned with the South Sudan People’s Movement/Army - a rebel group under the command of General Stephen Buay Rolnyang, whose areas of operations reportedly expanded in Warrap State. Similarly, sporadic tension between Dinka Luanyjang from Tonj East County, Warrap State and Dinka Pakam in Rumbek North County in Lakes State remained a concern.

Concurrently, intercommunal violence related to cattle raiding perpetrated by different community armed groups persisted during the reporting period such as the attacks against civilians by the armed Murle elements in the areas of Akobo, Duk, Nyirol and Uror among others in Jonglei State. In May 2023, armed Murle elements accounted for the majority of civilians harmed in Jonglei State (65 killed, 36 injury and 88 abductions), including 28 women and 75 children. In one of its attacks, 35 women and children were abducted in Duk County. Additionally, HRD also documented attacks targeting humanitarian properties and convoys, disrupting the delivery and transportation of food aid and other lifesaving supplies to the community.

Incursions and cattle-related violence perpetrated by cross-border foreign armed elements such as the

Misseriya pastoralists from Western Kordofan in the Republic of Sudan, the armed Turkana elements from the Republic of Kenya and the Ambororo Nomads from the Central African Republic, also undermined the welfare and security of local communities.

✓ *Conventional parties*

Meanwhile, as a result of the relatively low number of clashes between Government forces and organized armed groups, violence by parties to conflict affecting civilians remained comparatively low, accounting for nine per cent of all victims. The cessation of hostilities and the Government’s advocacy in respect to the R-ARCSS is one of the main factors explaining this nationwide reduction. However, exceptions were documented in specific counties in Greater Equatoria such as the continued allegations of abductions perpetrated by the National Salvation Front (NAS) in Central Equatoria State which remain a threat to the protection of civilians in Yei and Morobo Counties and undermine the locally initiated cease-fire agreement between the South Sudan People’s Defense Forces (SSPDF) and the NAS. The collapse of the agreement intensified the human rights abuses, mainly by NAS elements and resulted in seven casualties (one killing and six injured) and abductions of 36 civilians (including eight women and nine children). Notably, some of these abductions were perpetrated by the NAS splinter group led by General John Kenyi Luburon, the former executive and operation officer of NAS’ Commander in Chief.

Similarly, the SSPDF’s counter-insurgency operations against the NAS rebel group continue to undermine the human rights and protection of civilians, including the targeting of civilians based on allegations of collaborating with NAS.

As in the past, NAS incursions expanded to other areas of Western Equatoria State. On 12 June 2023, NAS elements reportedly shot and injured a male civilian and stormed and looted one of the health facilities in Mundri East County.

Generally, the number of civilian casualties from violence involving parties to the conflict decreased by 77 per cent (from 348 to 79 civilians harmed) compared to the same period in 2022, which saw significant civilian casualties from the violence in Southern Unity between conventional parties. In comparison to the first quarter of 2023, civilian casualties increased by 58 per cent (from 50 to 79). These groups were responsible for nine per cent of the overall civilians harmed that were documented during the period, involving at least 79 victims (10 killed, 14 injured, 36 abducted and 19 subjected to CRSV).

✓ *Unidentified and other opportunistic armed elements*

Relatively, HRD also documented incidents of violence by armed elements, which do not fall specifically within one of the two categories described above, but which bear a link to the conflict or violence affecting civilians based on the modus operandi of the suspected perpetrators, location, and other factors. For instance, in Upper Nile State, the influx of South Sudanese returnees and refugees fleeing from the conflict in Sudan intensified the protection concerns and humanitarian needs in the area. On 15 May, a major incident was documented at the Upper Nile University transit camp where one person was killed and 29 individuals were injured resulting from the communal fighting between the Dinka and Nuer returnees from Northern Bahr el Ghazal and Unity States, following an altercation at water point between two girls that led into the tension between individuals from the two communities, that exacerbated the insecurity and instability among the returnees and the host community.

Separately, incidents of road ambushes by unidentified armed elements increased in the Northern area of Unity State and in the Ruweng Administrative Area. HRD documented two killings and one injury in relation to these incidents.

Further, HRD documented incidents of violence attributed to other armed actors from some neighboring countries, notably a cross-border incursion in Owiny-kibul, Magwi County of Eastern Equatoria State by foreign armed elements. Additionally, multiple sources reported that in June, foreign armed elements shot and killed a 15-year-old boy in Kauto Payam, Kapoeta East County, during a cross-border cattle raid. The assailants were able to flee with 32 heads of cattle.

✓ *Sexual and gender-based violence*

During the second quarter of 2023, HRD documented at least 20 rape or gang rape incidents in six states, which affected 23 victims (five women and 18 girls). In comparison to the first quarter of 2023, this represents a five per cent increase in SGBV incidents. These 20 incidents (23 victims) were in addition to 22 CRSV incidents (29 victims, including 13 minors), in which cases of sexual violence were linked to the ongoing armed conflict. The CRSV and SGBV incidents together directly affected 52 victims.

Most of the incidents happened within the community, however, the majority of the alleged perpetrators were not known to the victims. This demonstrates that victims and potential victims require more protection in community settings, where they remain vulnerable due to the lower status of women and girls in South Sudanese society exacerbated by harmful traditional practices.

Consistent with previous observations, HRD considers that cases and incidents of SGBV are underreported due to various factors, including stigma, trauma, and fear of retaliation, that prevent victims and families from reporting. The dearth of formal justice structures across most of South Sudan impedes survivors' access to justice. Consequently, many families are compelled to instead resort to adjudication by traditional leaders. Furthermore, intersectional vulnerabilities faced by the victims often result in families preferring the immediate economic benefits from compensation ordered through customary courts and the perceived reduced stigma by addressing sexual violence through marriage between the perpetrator and victim rather than filing criminal charges for the prosecution of offenders.

GEOGRAPHICAL TRENDS

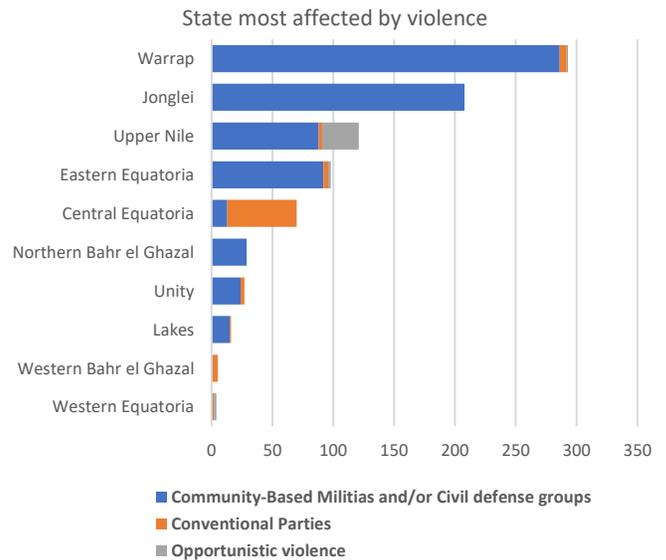
Despite the signing of a cessation of hostilities agreement in April 2022 between the Dinka Ngok and Dinka Twic Mayardit to promote peaceful co-existence and the Communiqué on Peace signed in October 2022, as well as the Inter-Communal Peace Conference on cessation of

hostilities held in April 2023 between the Dinka Ngok and Dinka Twic Mayardit in Wau, tensions and incidents of attacks and counterattacks between Dinka sub-sections in Warrap and Abyei continue to persist. In fact, the majority of the victims during the reporting period were

documented in Warrap, being the most affected region by chronic violence and accounted for 34 per cent of the civilian victims recorded throughout South Sudan, followed by Jonglei, Upper Nile, Eastern Equatoria and Central Equatoria states. With the exception of Central Equatoria state, most of these states were generally impacted by violence involving community-based militias and/or civil-defense groups, which altogether accounted for approximately 83 per cent of the victims recorded.

Incidents of violence against civilians attributed to Government forces and other organized armed groups remained relatively low nationwide since the last spike in violence involving conventional parties in the last quarter of 2022 in the Greater Upper Nile region, accounting for nine per cent of all victims and the overall number of incidents (38) involving these perpetrators increased as compared with the previous quarter (from 24 to 38). Despite the general respect of the ceasefire across the country, this form of violence arises in part from the persistent tensions and splintering between and within some parties in certain areas – more particularly, is the divergent dynamics between the situation in Morobo, Yei

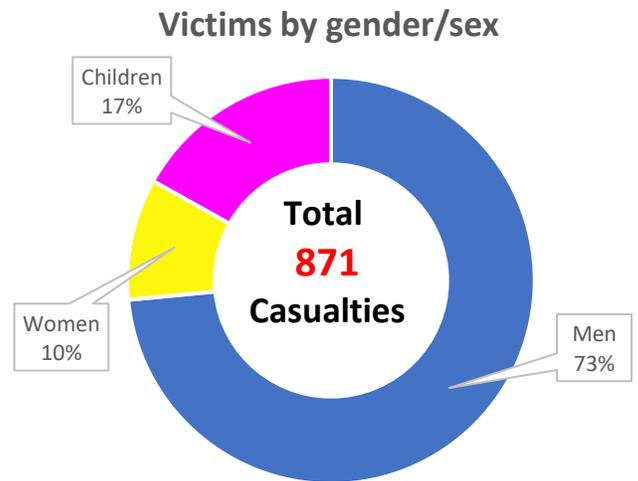
and Mundri counties of Central and Western Equatoria states where incidents of violence primarily involved NAS elements and Government forces, predominantly the SSPDF.



VICTIMS

HRD’s findings indicate that men, particularly young men, comprise the majority of victims (73 per cent, or 640 individuals). Children are the second-largest group of victims, at 17 per cent (147 individuals), while women account for the remaining 10 per cent (84 individuals). However, in the specific context of South Sudan, women and children continue to be disproportionately affected by the effects of conflict, particularly in terms of access to health care, education, and income generating activities in volatile areas.

HRD found most adult male victims (75 per cent) were either killed or injured, largely in the context of intercommunal violence, while the remainder were abducted for the purposes of forced labor and/or forced conscription. Women victims were primarily killed (31 per cent), injured (21 per cent), abducted (32 per cent) and subjected to CRSV (15 per cent). Most of the cases of CRSV, including rape and gang rape, occurred in seven States (Central Equatoria, Eastern Equatoria, Jonglei, Lakes, Unity, Upper Nile and Western Bahr El Ghazal States). Out of 147 children, 118 were primarily abducted (80 per cent), injured (four per cent), killed (seven per cent), and subjected to CRSV (nine per cent). As compared to the previous quarter, there is a 33 per cent increase (from 479 to 640) in male victims, 58 per cent



decrease (from 198 to 84) in women victims, and 40 per cent decrease in children affected (from 243 to 147). In comparison, to the same reporting period in 2022 (April to June), there is a six per cent increase (from 602 to 640) in male victims, 50 per cent decrease (from 168 to 84) in women victims, and three per cent decrease in children affected (from 152 to 147).

PERPETRATORS

HRD has identified three major categories of alleged perpetrators involved in conflict-related violence affecting civilians: i) community-based militias and/or civil defense groups; ii) conventional parties to the conflict; and iii) opportunistic, unidentified, and foreign armed elements. Among these three main categories, community-based militias and/or civil defense groups remained the primary actors causing harm to civilians, confirming that community-based militias are currently responsible for most of the violent incidents recorded.

In the second quarter of 2023, HRD attributed responsibility for 87 per cent of victims to community-based militias and/or civil defense groups. These groups are a longstanding feature of pastoralist communities across South Sudan. Traditionally, their main objective was to protect herds of cattle from external attacks. However, as a consequence of years of armed conflict and the resultant illicit proliferation of small arms amongst local communities, members of these community-based militias and/or civil-defense groups have been co-opted, armed, and used as proxy armed elements by all parties to the conflict and by local actors, which has contributed to the progressive militarization of intercommunal violence. The organization and structure of these groups is complex and often remains opaque to outsiders. Nonetheless, as evidenced by the localized violence in Jonglei State and Greater Pibor Administrative Area since December 2022, attacks carried out by community-based militias and/or civil defense groups revealed a certain degree of planning and coordination. HRD found that these groups were armed with assault rifles such as AK-47, PKM and light machine guns. Some these elements were reportedly equipped with rocket-propelled grenades and other types of military equipment like Thurayas and Ultra High Frequency radios.

The second category of perpetrators causing the most harm to civilians remained the conventional parties to the conflict. Government forces and organized armed groups were responsible for nine per cent of victims documented during the reporting quarter (as compared with five per cent in the previous quarter), comprised primarily of abductions, followed by CRSV. However, as illustrated in the section on geographic trends, a limited number of areas of the country were marred by violence involving these actors. Thus, military operations carried out by Government forces to dislodge NAS elements, as well as abuses committed against civilians by NAS elements,

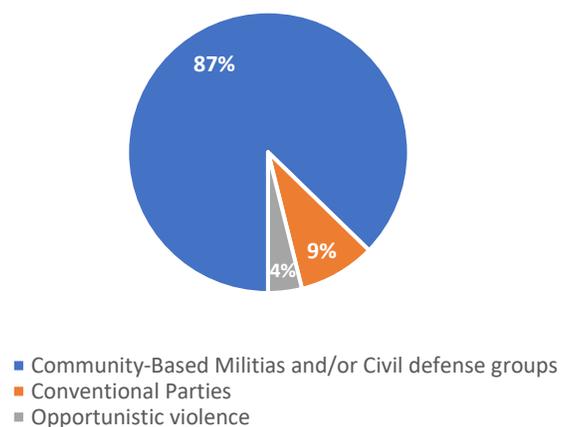
shaped the landscape of violence in Yei and Morobo Counties in Central Equatoria State.

Amongst government forces, acts of violence impacting civilians were mainly attributed to the SSPDF, the National Security Service, the South Sudan National Police Service, and the National Prison Service of South Sudan.

The distinction between government forces and organized armed groups should not obscure the extreme fluidity between and within these entities, whose loyalties may shift according to the formation of alliances of convenience, defections, and buy-offs.

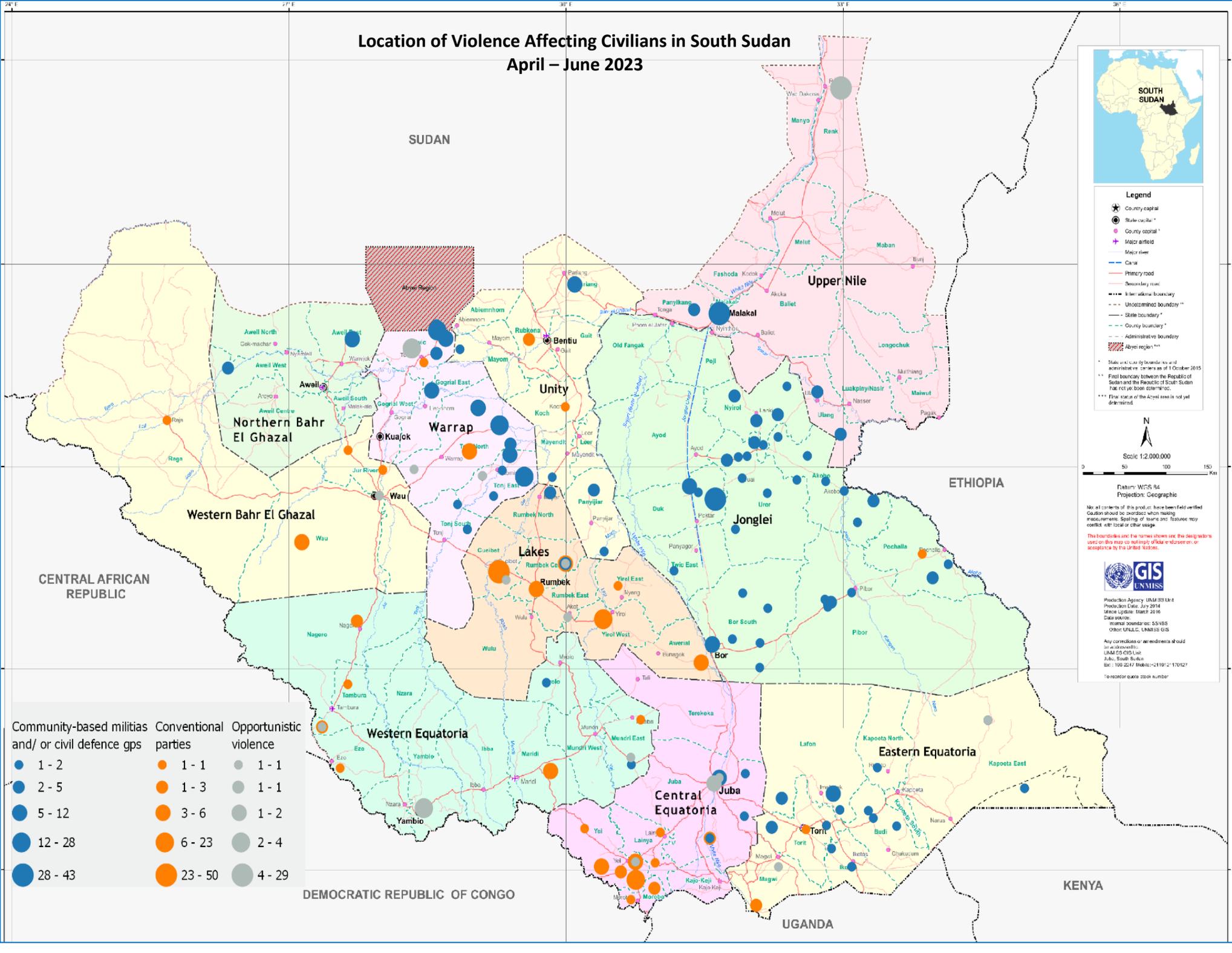
The unidentified armed elements comprised the third category of perpetrators and continued to account for a small proportion of victims, primarily in a form of opportunistic violence. HRD found that this type of actors accounted for four per cent of the civilians harmed during the reporting period. Often, they have a historical affiliation with community-based militias and/or civil-defense groups, have progressively acquired autonomy from their sponsors and now carry out acts of violence against civilians from their own or rival communities, without any clear strategic or military objectives. Foreign armed elements, also accounted for a few casualties.

Civilian casualties by type of perpetrators



Location of Violence Affecting Civilians in South Sudan

April – June 2023



Legend

- Country capital
- State capital *
- County capital †
- ✦ Major airfield
- Major river
- Canal
- Primary road
- Secondary road
- International boundary
- Unconfirmed boundary **
- State boundary †
- County boundary †
- Administrative boundary
- ▨ Abyei region ***

* State or county boundary to and administered as of 1 October 2015
 ** Final boundary between the Republic of Sudan and the Republic of South Sudan has not yet been determined.
 *** Final status of the Abyei area is not yet determined.

N

Scale 1:2,000,000

0 50 100 150 Km

Datum: WGS 84
 Projection: Geographic

No all contents of this product have been field-verified. Caution should be exercised when making measurements. Spelling of towns and features may conflict with local or other usage.

This product and the names shown are the designers' best effort to ensure accuracy of data and are not a guarantee of accuracy or acceptance by the United Nations.

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Community-based militias and/ or civil defence gps	Conventional parties	Opportunistic violence
● 1 - 2	● 1 - 1	● 1 - 1
● 2 - 5	● 1 - 3	● 1 - 1
● 5 - 12	● 3 - 6	● 1 - 2
● 12 - 28	● 6 - 23	● 2 - 4
● 28 - 43	● 23 - 50	● 4 - 29

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

UGANDA

KENYA