

UN report exposes human rights violations and abuses against civilians in and around Yei, South Sudan

GENEVA/JUBA (19 May 2017) - A United Nations report published today released the findings of an in-depth investigation into human rights violations and abuses committed in and around Yei town, Central Equatoria (150km southwest of the capital, Juba) between July 2016 and January 2017.

The report by the Human Rights Division of the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) and the UN Human Rights Office documents violations and abuses against civilians both sides of the conflict, based on ethnicity and/or their presumed support for other side. This includes 114 killings by pro-Government forces. The extent of the abuses by armed opposition groups remains unclear due to lack of access to areas where these groups are active. The report finds that these violations and abuses may amount to war crimes or crimes against humanity and that they warrant further investigation.

The report exposes cases of indiscriminate shelling of civilians; targeted killings; looting and burning of civilian property and cases of sexual violence perpetrated against women and girls, including those fleeing fighting.

Until recently, Yei was largely a peaceful town, with between 200,000 and 300,000 residents of many different ethnicities. In July 2016, violence erupted between Government and Opposition forces, which led to the departure of Opposition leader Riek Machar together with a small group of followers across the Equatorias, into the Democratic Republic of Congo. As Government forces pursued him, fighting simultaneously broke out along the route, particularly in Yei. This violence fuelled strong divisions along ethnic lines and resulted in targeted killings, arrests, rapes and mass civilian displacement of more than half of the population of the town.

Satellite imagery used to corroborate allegations shows that there was widespread burning of homes and businesses, resulting in the forcible displacement of tens of thousands of civilians. Even as people fled the violence, reports suggest that armed actors harassed, robbed and targeted them as they headed to Uganda to seek refuge.

The report documents “the profound human suffering caused by the ongoing conflict and the exploitation of local and ethnic divisions for political ends.”

“The conflict in Yei, in particular, highlights the startling level of impunity in South Sudan, which has fed successive cycles of violence across the country,” the report states.

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