



PRESS RELEASE

Community-based militias responsible for 78% of victims of violence in South Sudan

31 March 2021: Community-based militias were responsible for 78 percent of killings and injuries caused to civilians as well as abductions and conflict-related sexual violence during attacks in pockets of South Sudan, according to a new human rights report.

The Annual Brief on Violence Affecting Civilians, released by the Human Rights Division of the United Nations Mission in South Sudan, documented the killing of 2,421 civilians in 2020, more than double the previous year. Just over 1,500 people were injured, up from 866.

While the figures represent a significant increase in violence compared to 2019, the clashes were concentrated in just 13 percent of the country's 540 payams (administrative areas) and largely involved community-based militias rather than conventional parties to the conflict. The level of violence also remains significantly lower than the period prior to the signing of the 2018 peace deal.

The report raises particular concern about a sharp spike in abductions by more than 300 percent. Many of the victims were children stolen from their families during militia-led raids. Men were also abducted by conventional parties for forced military recruitment and labour. The report notes a 21 percent reduction in cases of conflict-related sexual violence documented in 2020.

Many of the victims of violence were killed or injured during a wave of attacks by armed community-based militias across Jonglei and the Greater Pibor Administrative Area, as well as in Warrap and Lakes. In some cases, these groups were supported by local and national elites driven by political and economic interests.

"The surge in subnational violence is deeply concerning and has had a devastating impact on the lives of communities already suffering huge economic deprivation due to flooding in areas like Jonglei," said the Head of UNMISS, David Shearer.

Late last year, UNMISS deployed peacekeepers to the affected areas so they were in place ahead of the dry season when conflict traditionally erupts due to tensions between communities over scarce resources. The peacekeeping mission currently has numerous temporary bases in particular conflict hotspots and is conducting regular patrols to help deter further attacks.

"We are also working closely with political and traditional leaders at the national and local level to promote reconciliation and facilitate peace talks as well as negotiating the release of abducted women and children," said David Shearer. "A peacebuilding trust fund is also being used to improve basic services to reduce the risk of fighting flaring up over access to resources."

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