



UNMISS

HUMAN RIGHTS DIVISION

Update on the 75th Commemoration of International Human Rights Day in South Sudan



On International Human Rights Day, 10 December 2023, UNMISS celebrated the 75th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), under the Human Rights 75 (HR75) initiative launched by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). UNMISS Human Rights Division (HRD) held a series of activities in all 10 States of South Sudan under the theme “Freedom, Equality, and Justice for All.” The activities provided a platform to educate the general population and raise awareness about human rights concerns, principles, and standards. The topics of discussion included the current state of human rights in South Sudan, strategies to address and documented instances of human rights violations, and enhance cooperation and coordination among stakeholders and partners in the field of human rights

The activities organized by the HRD, were part of the HR75 year-long campaign which culminated in a high-level event organized by the OHCHR on 11 and 12 December 2023 in Geneva, that announced global pledges and ideas for a vision for the future of human rights.

UPDATE ON THE 75TH COMMEMORATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS DAY IN SOUTH SUDAN

On 17 May 2023, UNMISS hosted the 12th National Human Rights Forum in collaboration with the South Sudan Human Rights Commission (SSHRC), under the theme “Right to Freedom of Expression and Assembly.” The Forum fostered a productive dialogue with various stakeholders to address challenges associated with the exercise of the Right to Freedom of Expression and Peaceful Assembly in South Sudan. It advocated for accountability for human rights violations and abuses perpetrated against journalists and individuals exercising their right to free expression and peaceful assembly in the context of upcoming elections in South Sudan.



Ms. Irena Angelova, UNMISS Human Rights Division (HRD) Coordinator during the 2023 Human Rights 75 Commemoration held at Nyakuron Cultural Centre in Juba



From 7 to 9 September, a three-day workshop focused on International Human Rights Instruments and Mechanisms for sixty (60) members of parliament from the 11 specialized committees of the Reconstituted Transitional National Legislative Assembly (RTNLA). This follows the signing of bills of accession for international human rights treaties by President Salva Kiir Mayardit on 24 February 2023, namely the International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and its Optional Protocol; the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR); and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESR); as well as the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol). The workshop highlighted the important role played by parliament in promoting and protecting human rights through translating international human rights treaty obligations into concrete domestic actions and collaborating with the United Nations and regional treaty bodies to ensure compliance with treaty obligations.



Mr. Musa Gassama, Director of UNMISS Human Rights Division delivered the opening remarks during the RTNLA workshop from 7-9 September 2023 at Dembesh Hotel in Juba

On 22 June 2023, a roundtable discussion was held for women and youth groups on inclusive and effective participation in transitional justice and democratic processes. Also, on 28 September, a Youth Forum on civic engagement was held to provide a platform for various stakeholders to engage in meaningful discussions on opportunities and challenges associated with advancing youth political participation and civic engagement in South Sudan. The Forum called for the involvement and representation of South Sudan youth at the national and state level to facilitate the active participation of young people in decision-making processes and provide them with a platform to influence and determine societal transformations.

HUMAN RIGHTS 75 ACTIVITIES AS PART OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS DAY CELEBRATIONS ACROSS SOUTH SUDAN

CENTRAL EQUATORIA

On 8 December, UNMISS, in partnership with the SSHRC and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), celebrated the 75th anniversary of Human Rights Day at the Nyakuron Cultural Centre in Juba. The event convened over 400 participants, including 200 females, consisting of officials from the diplomatic community, organized forces, the SSHRC, UNMISS components, UN Agencies, funds and programmes, senior government officials, and CSOs, including persons with disabilities, women, youth, and members of the academia. Messages emphasizing the significance of collaborative endeavors to guarantee the protection of human rights were disseminated on behalf of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, the diplomatic community, the Ministry of Justice and Constitutional Affairs, SSHRC, CSOs, and persons with disabilities. Similarly, public awareness activities were held on UNMISS Radio Miraya Talk Show's "Know Your Rights" program.



On 12 December, in Yei, a radio talk show on Spirit FM was conducted in collaboration with the Mission to Alleviate Suffering in South Sudan (MASS), Community Empowerment Progress Organization (CEPO), and Disable Action Group (DAG) on the principles enshrined in the UDHR. Similarly, a human rights dialogue to raise awareness and strengthen the capacity of local leaders, youth, women, military, and police on human rights in Mugwo Payam, Yei River County, with the participation of UNMISS police and military components, was also held. During the weekly market day, UNMISS and implementing partner MASS mounted a public road campaign to commemorate Human Rights 75 at the Mugwo Payam trading centre.



EASTERN EQUATORIA

On 6 December, UNMISS conducted a one-day human rights sensitization workshop, entitled "Harmful Traditional Practices and the Role of Community Leaders in Promoting and Protecting Human Rights" in Chukudum Town, Budi County for participants drawn from county officials, police, local chiefs, and women and youth groups.

LAKES

On 7 December 2023, in Rumbek town. UNMISS in collaboration with the Lake State Human Rights Commission, conducted a two-day workshop on the human rights situation in Lakes State for participants drawn from the state executive bodies, members of the state parliament, security forces, and civil society members in commemoration of the day.



JONGLEI

UNMISS commemorated Human Rights Day on 7 December 2023 at the Government Secretariat, Bor town, under the state-level theme "Dignity, Freedom and Justice for all", focusing on enhancing civic space and promoting and protecting human rights. High-level delegates from the state authorities including the Acting Governor of Jonglei State and State ministers, school children, civil society members, community members, and UNMISS civil and military components attended the event. It featured speeches by the Gender-Based Violence (GBV) cluster lead, the women's association, the Director General of the Ministry of Gender, Child, and Social Welfare, and the Minister of Education. In addition, a radio talk show was organized via the Jonglei FM – Voice of Reconciliation featuring guests from the Union of Journalists in Jonglei State speaking about the role of civil society and the responsibilities of the State in promoting and protecting human rights.

NORTHERN BAHR EL GHAZAL

On 11 December 2023, UNMISS, in collaboration with the Ministry of Gender, Child, and Social Welfare celebrated Human Rights Day in Gok Machar, Aweil North County (approx. 120 km from UNMISS Aweil Field Office). The ceremony also marked the conclusion of the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence. It was attended by over 3,500 individuals, including youth, women, persons with disabilities, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), members of the South Sudan People's Defense Forces (SSPDF) and South Sudan National Police Service (SSNPS), and government officials. At the occasion, speakers expressed concern over the distressing prevalence of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) instances. Young people performed poetry emphasizing the significance of women's and girls' rights. They urged the government and community members to actively support collaborative initiatives and act against detrimental traditional customs, such as child, early and forced marriage. Women organizations advocated for a violence-free environment in Northern Bahr el Ghazal State.



UNITY

Human Rights Day celebration in Bentiu was held on 11 December 2023 at the Dr John Garang Playground in Bentiu town, HQ of Unity State. The event was attended by government dignitaries, UN Agencies, CSOs, and community leaders and groups, including women and youth groups, faith leaders, and traditional leaders. The event started with an all-female junior volleyball match and was followed by messages of peace from UNMISS, UNCHR, and the Unity State Acting Governor.



UPPER NILE

The annual celebration of Human Rights Day in Malakal took place on 11 December at both the Protection of Civilians (PoC) site and Malakal town. The event marked the end of a series of activities and initiatives conducted in Upper Nile State during the year, which included the commemoration of 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence. The key concepts of human rights were communicated through plays, music, poetry, speeches and dance. Women and girls obtained skills in martial arts through self-defense training to protect themselves against GBV.



WARRAP

In Lietnhom, Gogrial East County, UNMISS commemorated the day in collaboration with the State human rights advisor, chairperson of the State Human Rights Commission, Gogrial East County authorities, women and youth groups, religious and traditional leaders, civil society, community organizations, and UNMISS components.



WESTERN BAHR EL GHAZAL

UNMISS organized an interactive event on 13 December 2023 at the University of Bahr el Ghazal in Wau town to commemorate Human Rights Day. A total of 150 individuals, consisting of 104 males and 46 females, participated in the event from the government, the State Human Rights Commission, and students and professors from the university. The State Minister of Education presided over the ceremony, which underscored the need to uphold human rights and emphasized the importance of upholding and advancing the rights of women, persons with disabilities, and other marginalized groups. As part of the festivities, four teams composed of individuals from different departments participated in a quiz competition designed to assess their understanding of the importance of human rights in their daily lives. Subsequently, an award ceremony was held to award the top three groups with sports products and promotional materials on human rights.

WESTERN EQUATORIA

UNMISS held a public event in Ibba County to celebrate Human Rights Day with speeches, dramas, and dances containing human rights messages for members of the public, the county commissioner, the SSNPS commander, the paramount chief of the county, the women's chairperson, and local youth.



Participants of the Human Rights Day/HR75 events engaged in dynamic discussions on many human rights issues, including widening the civic space and the right to participate in elections. Key themes were disseminated through various artistic mediums such as play, poetry, music, dance, sports events, and speeches. The participants included government officials, organized forces, traditional leaders, religious leaders, CSOs/NGOs, community associations, women groups, youth groups, unions of persons with disabilities, and the general public. The observance of Human Rights Day/HR75 was conducted with extensive collaboration with various UNMISS components, government actors, civil society collaborators, and community constituents. The momentum generated by these initiatives contributed to building a strong human rights architecture in South Sudan

UNMISS is actively supporting and urging the government to create a conducive environment for human rights, specifically focusing on the challenges faced in the upcoming elections. The efforts include advocating for the expansion of civic and democratic space, which is essential for fostering the involvement of civil society, media, grassroots organizations, victims, survivors, and witnesses. This initiative aims to ensure a transparent and fair electoral process that upholds respect for the protection of civic and political rights, and the principles of openness and equality.

UNMISS HRD's commitment to South Sudan includes ongoing monitoring of the human rights situation and proactive engagement in activities to raise awareness about human rights as well as advocating for accountability in cases of human rights violations and abuses, emphasizing the importance of holding responsible parties accountable for their actions.

OBSERVATIONS



ABOUT THE UNMISS HUMAN RIGHTS DIVISION

UNMISS Human Rights Division represent the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in South Sudan to promote and protect human rights.

Our core activities include:

- Monitoring, investigating, verifying, and reporting on human rights violations and abuses, as well as violations of international humanitarian law, including conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV); and
- Contribute to enhancing the capacity of national stakeholders to create a conducive environment for enhanced protection of civilians and transparent, inclusive, and genuine consultation in relation to transitional justice, constitutional-making, and electoral processes.



A representative from Union of Person with Disabilities addressing an opening remark during the Human Rights Day in Juba, December 2023



Dinka women from Gok Machar performing a cultural dance during the conduct of the events marking the celebrations of the IHRD and 75 years of the UDHR in Gok Machar on 11 December 2023



Photographs of Executive Director Mugwo, Payam address participants during the focus group discussion to celebrate IHRD

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