

QUARTERLY BRIEF ON VIOLENCE AFFECTING CIVILIANS

CONTEXT

This brief presents an overview of trends in violence affecting civilians in the second quarter (Q2) of 2020, by assessing four major forms of individual harm experienced throughout the conflict (killing, injury, abduction and 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.

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 HRD field missions. All reported incidents, particularly those involving intercommunal violence, are deconflicted with incidents documented by the UNMISS Civil Affairs Division (CAD).

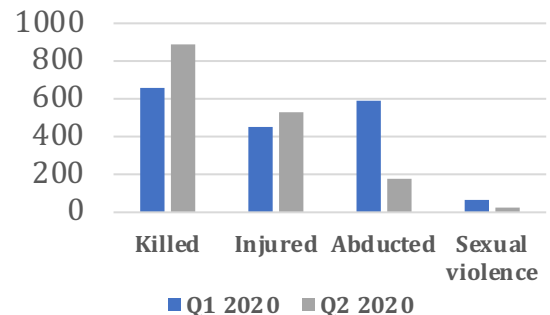
GENERAL TRENDS

Between April and June 2020, the overall number of civilians affected by violence decreased by 8 per cent, despite an increase by more than half (52 per cent) in the number of incidents, as compared with the first quarter (Q1) of the year. It is important to note, however, that COVID-19-related restrictions on movement negatively impacted HRD's capacity to thoroughly document all incidents, which may have led to the under-reporting in the number of victims this quarter.¹

During Q2, HRD documented more than 417 incidents, involving at least 1,620 civilians who were subjected to one of the four major forms of individual harm reported in South Sudan (887 killed, 531 injured, 176 abducted and 26 subjected to sexual violence). By comparison, between January and March 2020, 275 incidents were documented, involving at least 1,767 civilians (658 killed, 452 injured, 592 abducted and 65 subjected to sexual violence).

While the overall number of victims decreased between Q1 and Q2 of 2020, the proportion of those killed rose by slightly more than one third (35 per cent).

Number of victims, Q1 2020 / Q2 2020



By contrast, far fewer abductions were reported (a decrease of 70 per cent), due in part to a reduction in forced recruitment for military purposes after the formation of the unity Government in February 2020, as well as a decline in the number of abductions reported in the context of inter-communal violence.

The second quarter of 2020 was also far more violent than the corresponding period in 2019, when 138 incidents involving 441 civilian victims were recorded.

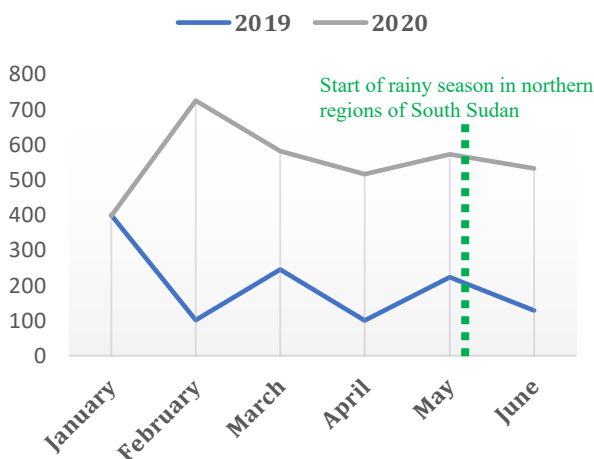
1. For instance, in June, HRD received reports of the alleged killing of approximately 100 individuals, reportedly comprised of fighters and civilians, in Tambura (Western Equatoria), as well as reports of fighting in Gumuruk and Manyabol (Jonglei). However, due to access and movement restrictions, HRD has not yet been able to corroborate the number of civilian casualties.

GENERAL TRENDS

As in Q1, violence involving community-based militias/civil defence groups (“intercommunal violence”) was the main form of violence documented by HRD, accounting for more than 86 per cent of all victims in Q2. HRD also noted that during the reporting period, clashes amongst different Dinka sections in Greater Bahr el Ghazal accounted for 34 per cent of the victims of intercommunal violence, while clashes opposing allied Dinka, Gawar and Lou Nuer sections against the Murle were responsible for 20 per cent of victims of this form of violence.

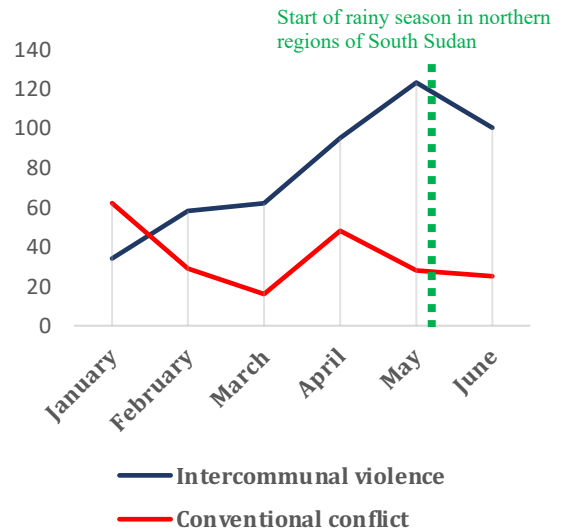
As a result of the pervasive involvement of heavily armed community-based militias/civil defence groups, supported in some circumstances by organized forces, intercommunal violence continued to have devastating consequences on local populations. A series of attacks carried out by Murle armed elements over a two-day period (between 16 and 17 May) in Uror county (Jonglei) alone accounted for the killing of 121 civilians, the injury of 24, and the abduction of at least 16. The number of fighters (at least 400) killed during these specific attacks further exemplified their intensity and the widespread use of lethal force.

**Number of victims,
January-June 2019 / 2020**



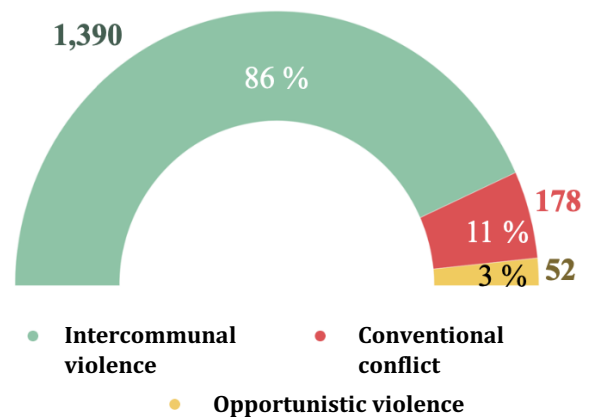
It is also important to note the minimal influence of the rainy season on the intensity of intercommunal violence, a striking illustration of the fact that this violence cannot be attributed to seasonal factors alone. Heavy rains arrived in the regions most affected by intercommunal violence between early and mid-May², corresponding with a slight decrease in the overall number of incidents. However, the number of civilian casualties did not drop significantly after this period.

**Number of incidents,
January-June 2020**



The web of actors (community-based militias /civil defence groups, conventional parties to the conflict, political and spiritual leaders, and other armed actors) (*see perpetrators*) fueling and benefitting from intercommunal violence continued to pose a threat to the peace process and a serious risk of further fragmentation of the conflict.

**Number of victims,
by category of violence**



Incidents of violence against civilians attributed to Government forces and organized armed groups remained relatively low nationwide, accounting for 11 per cent of all victims (down from 23 per cent during Q1), and the number of incidents (92) overall involving these perpetrators decreased slightly as compared with Q1, when 108 such incidents were reported. Despite the general respect of the ceasefire across the country, this form of violence arises in part from the persistent

2. Source: Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and World Food Programme (WFP): http://climis-southsudan.org/agromet/rainfall_data

tensions and splintering between and within some parties in certain areas. A case in point is the divergent dynamics between the situation in Yei (Central Equatoria) and Mundri (Western Equatoria), where members of the South Sudan People’s Defence Forces (SSPDF) and pro-Machar Sudan People’s Liberation Army in Opposition (SPLA-IO/RM) have joined forces to dislodge elements of the National Salvation Front (NAS). By contrast, in Maiwut (Upper Nile), armed elements of the Provisional Military and Political Council (PMPC) loyal to former SPLA-IO/RM commander James

Ochan and allied to the SSPDF, continued to confront SPLA-IO/RM.

The continuation of military operations involving conventional parties to the conflict from one quarter to the next is also indicative of the extent to which local conflict drivers and sub-national dynamics can prevail over national ones, or be influenced by the individual strategies of Juba-based political and military leaders.

GEOGRAPHIC TRENDS

As in Q1, more than half (59 per cent, or 961 individuals) of victims were documented in Jonglei, Lakes and Warrap, which were also the most affected by intercommunal violence. A closer examination reveals, however, that these states were unevenly impacted, and experienced varying degrees of violence at the county level. In particular, the counties of Uror in Jonglei (10 per cent), Tonj East and Tonj North in Warrap (14 per cent) and Rumbek East in Lakes (6 per cent) recorded the most victims. Uror county, especially the areas of Pieri and Walgak, suffered from heavy fighting between 16 and 17 May, while the other counties experienced chronic or sustained violence involving community-based militias/civil defence groups for the duration of the reporting period.

Conventional parties continued to harm civilians in the areas of Yei (Central Equatoria) and Mundri (Western Equatoria), along the border of the

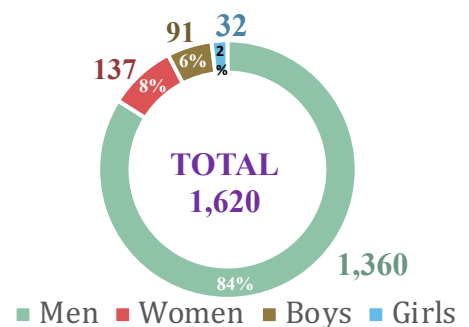
Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), during the reporting period. In Q2, this violence also expanded further into Maridi, Mvolo and Tambura (Western Equatoria). In addition, a major incident involving SSPDF personnel occurred in Aweil East (Northern Bahr el Ghazal). These six areas accounted for 64 per cent of the victims and 68 per cent of incidents attributed to conventional parties to the conflict. During Q1, civilians living in Yei and Mundri were already the most affected by military operations carried out by SSPDF and SPLA-IO/RM forces as well as asymmetric activities led by NAS. In Q2, violence between factions of the SPLA-IO/RM and Government forces and aligned militia groups led to an increase of civilian victims in the Tambura area, while military operations by Government and allied forces targeting NAS in Mundri resulted in a number of civilian victims as well.

VICTIMS

Men (and in particular, young men) continued to comprise the majority of civilian victims (84 per cent, or 1,360 individuals), followed by women (8 per cent, or 137 individuals) and children (8 per cent, or 123 individuals). In the specific context of South Sudan, however, women and children continue to be disproportionately affected by the indirect effects of conflict, particularly in terms of access to health care, education and income-generating activities in volatile areas.

According to HRD’s findings, most adult male civilians were either killed or injured (91 per cent), largely in the context of intercommunal violence, while the remainder were abducted for the purposes

Number of victims, by age and sex



of forced labour and/or military recruitment. In addition, violence nationwide claimed the lives of at least 628 male fighters or civilians who took an active part in hostilities³, particularly in the context of intercommunal violence.

3. Civilians who take a direct part in hostilities (other than a *levée en masse*) are unlawful combatants and lose their protection as civilians.

Women were primarily subjected to killing (41 per cent) and abduction (29 per cent), largely in the context of inter-communal violence. Sexual violence, including rape and sexual slavery, accounted for 12 per cent of adult female victims documented by HRD. The Yei area of Central Equatoria remained a major hotspot of conflict-related sexual violence (accounting for 38 per cent of victims), as did Unity state (where 24 per cent of victims were recorded). It

should be noted that abduction cases may have also involved some form of sexual violence.

Children were primarily abducted (55 per cent), overwhelmingly in the context of inter-communal violence, and killed (27 per cent) or injured (11 per cent). Nine girls (7 per cent) were confirmed to have been subjected to sexual violence, four of them in the context of inter-communal violence.

PERPETRATORS

Among the three main categories of alleged perpetrators involved in conflict-related violence, community-based militias/civil defence groups remained the primary actors causing harm to civilians, confirming that conventional parties to the conflict do not possess a monopoly on the use of violence in South Sudan.

Community-based militias/civil defence groups were responsible for 86 per cent of civilian victims during the reporting period, an increase as compared with Q1, when they were responsible for 75 per cent of victims. The organization and structure of these groups is complex and often remains opaque to outsiders. Nonetheless, as evidenced by the localized violence in Jonglei and Greater Pibor since January, attacks carried out by community-based militias/civil defence groups have revealed a certain degree of planning and coordination. In this specific context, spiritual leaders from the Lou Nuer and Murle communities reportedly gave their blessing for the armed mobilization and launch of these attacks, while some SPLA-IO/RM and SSPDF elements in their individual capacity and according to their community kinship either supported or took part in the fighting. Political and administrative leaders also appear to have been aware of the planning and execution of these attacks.

The attacks in Pieri and Walgak (Jonglei), carried out in May 2020 by Murle community-based militias/civil defence groups, allegedly supported by Murle SSPDF elements from the Greater Pibor Administrative Area (GPAA), demonstrated once again that impunity continues to fuel cycles of violence in South Sudan. According to HRD's findings, these attacks were largely driven by the desire to rescue Murle women and children abducted in the GPAA in February 2020 by Dinka, Gawar and Lou Nuer groups.

In late June, the Government established a high-level committee to address the security situation in Jonglei and the GPAA. Its terms of reference focused primarily on containing the deteriorating security situation and organizing peace conferences. As of the end of the reporting period, no meaningful action had been taken by law enforcement authorities to hold alleged perpetrators and instigators of these attacks to account.

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 11 per cent of victims documented during Q2 (as compared with 23 per cent in Q1), comprised primarily of killings and abductions. 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 and SPLA-IO/RM forces to dislodge NAS elements, as well as abuses committed against civilians by NAS elements, shaped the landscape of violence in Yei and Mundri.

On the other hand, in Western Equatoria, security forces allied with a newly defected SPLA-IO/RM local commander confronted certain SPLA-IO/RM elements, with a spillover effect on local communities, especially in the area of Tambura.

Unidentified but related armed elements also continued to account for a small proportion of victims, primarily in the form of opportunistic violence. Comparable to Q1, HRD found that these actors were responsible for 3 per cent of all victims documented.