

26 April 2012

Highlights:

- The African Union called on Sudan and South Sudan to return to peace negotiations, proposing a three-month deadline to reach an agreement before resorting to UN-backed binding arbitration.
- Humanitarian partners responded to help over 20,000 people affected by attacks in South Sudanese states bordering Sudan.
- South Sudan's embassy in Khartoum has so far issued about 3,000 emergency travel documents and received about 1,000 applications for nationality certificates and passports, as partners call for flights to resume for extremely vulnerable returnees.

I. Situation overview

South Sudan's relations with Sudan remained extremely tense despite a lull in border violence as international diplomacy continued in search of a peaceful solution. South Sudanese troops withdrew from Higlig, the oil-rich town adjoining the contested Abyei area, starting 20 April in compliance with UN wishes. However, fighting carried on in the border zone around Tishwin, and Sudanese aircraft dropped bombs in Unity State on 20-23 April. In Juba, the Minister of Information on 23 April called on the UN Security Council to punish the Government of Sudan for violating South Sudan's airspace and killing civilians. With the threat of all-out war still present, humanitarian agencies and NGOs stayed in crisis-response mode and kept preparing for potential large-scale impact on civilians.

The Peace and Security Council of the African Union (AU) on 24 April urged both sides to cease hostilities, including aerial bombardments, and withdraw all of their armed forces to their own, undisputed sides of the border. While welcoming South Sudan's pull-out from Higlig, the AU council condemned damage to oil installations, as well as "inflammatory statements" and "mutual demonization" by both sides. The AU urged the Governments of Sudan and South Sudan to resume negotiations within two weeks to resolve their basic disputes: on oil and associated payments; on the status of each country's nationals resident in the other country; on border demarcation; and on the final status of Abyei. If talks fail to produce an agreement in three months, the AU intends to seek a UN Security Council resolution for binding arbitration on these issues.

Humanitarian partners are concerned about dangers to South Sudan's economy as the pause in oil exports via Sudan – the only current pipeline route – stretches into a fourth month. The World Bank warned that the Government could run out of funds in 4-6 weeks. President Salva Kiir, on a state visit to China until 26 April, sought support and funding from Beijing to build an alternative East African pipeline.

South Sudan's army signed a handover agreement with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) on 25 April for the transfer of Sudanese prisoners of war back to Sudan. The army spokesperson, Colonel Philip Aguer, said South Sudan was releasing 14 prisoners of war through Egyptian mediation and called for intervention with Khartoum to similarly obtain the release of detained South Sudanese soldiers.

II. Humanitarian challenges: needs and response

Partners register and assist people newly displaced in border states

While Sudan and South Sudan have edged dangerously close to all-out war, humanitarian consequences have so far been seen mainly in border areas and Bentiu, the capital of Unity State. Partners estimate the total number of people displaced in recent incidents at 20,000 so far. Registration was planned for unverified displaced people in Bentiu.

Partners also began responding to assist newly displaced people in Northern Bahr el Ghazal State. The World Food Programme (WFP) was in discussions with the ICRC about how to overcome bad road and security considerations to deliver food in Jach, near the border with Sudan. Partners also worked together to distribute non-food items, including plastic sheets, jerry cans, mosquito nets, sleeping mats, kitchen sets, blankets and soap. Some 3,000 households have been registered in Jach as the new influx continues. In Gokmachar, an inter-agency assessment report on 26 April indicated the presence of 2,600 displaced people, with hundreds more

continuing to arrive. The response capacity already in place in Gokmachar was sufficient to cope with the increase, partners said.

Civilians, including children, hit by air attacks

Six wounded civilians arrived in Bentiu hospital following an air attack on 20 April in Lalob, three of whom later died. Six more wounded civilians were admitted on 21 April, as health partners replenished the hospital's medical supplies. Two people, including a child, were reportedly killed in bombings of Rubkona market and the Bentiu-Rubkona bridge area on 23 April. The bridge was left intact. UN staff and NGOs prepared to relocate from around Bentiu on short notice if necessary for security reasons. Air attacks also extended into Warrap State, with 3-4 bombs dropped on Ajak Kuac, Twic County, on 23 April.

The UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Radhika Coomaraswamy, called on the Sudan Armed Forces to immediately stop indiscriminate attacks. "Air raids in heavily populated areas killing and maiming children are grave breaches of international humanitarian law," she said.

Rising refugee arrivals mean increased needs in Unity State

Despite the unpredictable security situation in the northern part of Unity State, locations hosting refugees – Nyeel, Pariang and Yida – have not been affected directly. In Yida, the population is currently 24,400, with some 8,400 people reported to have arrived since detailed Level 2 registration was completed on 20 March. On average, 287 people have been reported to have arrived each day in April, compared to 83 daily new arrivals in February and March. A registration team from the UN refugee agency, UNHCR, is working to complete the registration of all new arrivals in Yida and issue them with ration and ID cards. Due to safety concerns, partners continue to advocate for the relocation of refugees from Yida to a site further away from the border.

Health partners report an increase of malnourished children among the new arrivals. In response, agencies and NGOs are working on improving the food provision to new arrivals. At the moment, new arrivals receive food twice a month, in addition to high energy biscuits provided upon arrival and a supplementary feeding programme for individuals in need. With the increase of new arrivals, health partners in Yida also report medical consultations with an estimated 200 refugees daily.

In Pariang, where there are currently 2,105 refugees, protection partners carried out individual interviews with separated boys. Among the concerns raised were lack of soap, travelling a long distance for the collection of firewood, and absence of recreational items. Partners are working to address these issues. Education activities were suspended temporarily in Pariang, as education partners relocated due to recent insecurity. Humanitarian agencies are seeking a solution so that education can resume immediately.

In Nyeel, with over 700 refugees now, more than 100 tents were destroyed due to heavy rain. All tents have been replaced. Meanwhile, refugees continue the construction of their own shelters in Nyeel.

Registration identifies vulnerable refugees in Upper Nile State

Water delivery at Doro has been increased to 12.9 litres per person per day. New drilling has begun in the northern section of the camp, and the construction of new latrines continues. Water supply continues to be at a critical level in Jammam, with a daily delivery rate of about 6.0 litres per person. Refugees, especially women and children, queue at water points throughout most of the day awaiting the arrival of water trucks.

Assessments have been conducted to explore the option of relocating refugees from Jammam to alternative sites. However, the ongoing registration could lead to a reduction in refugee population numbers, so that the Doro 2 site could absorb 15,000 people from Jammam. A rig has been diverted to Doro 2 to expedite drilling there of more boreholes. In the meantime, partners in Jammam are preparing a movement plan and will mobilize people.

Some 17,000 individuals are expected to be relocated from the original Jammam site to Jammam 2 because of the risk of flooding. The relocation has begun and partners are setting up family tents in Jammam 2. Partners are also working on providing transport for the most vulnerable. A rapid needs assessment identified about 2,500 vulnerable families in Jammam. Non-food items, such as plastic sheets, mats and blankets, were distributed in response to their needs.

Partners have completed the pitching of about 3,000 tents in the refugee communities in Doro. Child protection and psycho-social activities continue in both Doro and Jammam. Partners are working on setting up TB treatment facilities in Maban, which will reduce the need to refer patients to Malakal. Nine health promoters have conducted activities for more than 15,000 refugees in Doro.

Abyei area at risk amid rising tensions with Sudan

The situation in the contested Abyei area was calm but unpredictable. UN humanitarian and security officials recommended that the UN peacekeeping force, UNISFA, establish a presence in southern-controlled Agok town to deter aerial bombardments and reassure local civilians.

International partners met on 24 April to discuss their preparedness, including plans to bring more shelter and non-food items into the Abyei area before heavier rains make roads impassable. The supplies would cater for displaced people as well as returnees in Abyei and any other vulnerable population group.

Voluntary phase in Jonglei disarmament to end 30 April

The government-led civilian disarmament campaign in Jonglei State is scheduled to end on 30 April, after which people carrying weapons without authorization will be considered criminals and forcefully disarmed, the authorities have said. So far, disarmament has proceeded in 9 of the state's 11 counties, with over 10,000 guns collected since the 12 March start of the campaign, according to the UN peacekeeping mission for South Sudan, UNMISS. Disarmament had not yet started in Fangak and Canal counties because of the presence of rebel militia groups.

The number of weapons collected has still been relatively low, given the state's estimated population of 1.3 million. Humanitarian partners continue to be concerned about sporadic human rights violations during the disarmament.

III. Returns to South Sudan

Movement from Renk transit sites continues

The Relief and Rehabilitation Council moved 321 returnees by road within Upper Nile State from Renk to Malakal on 24-25 April. The returnees were awaiting onward transport to Bentiu, in Unity State, where movement has been disrupted by recent air attacks. In addition, some 270 returnees mostly bound for the Greater Bahr el Ghazal region left Renk on 22 April and were accommodated at the Malakal way station. IOM-supported barge movements also continued, with 1,700 returnees departing Renk on 23 April. Many returnees from each group had been caught in conflict in the Higlig area at the end of March. Only 361 returnees were registered to have arrived in final destinations during the week, bringing the total number of returnees to South Sudan since October 2010 to just over 375,000.

Returnee Overview by State*											
State:	Upper Nile	Unity	Warrap	Northern Bahr el Ghazal	Western Bahr el Ghazal	Lakes	Jonglei	Western Equatoria	Central Equatoria	Eastern Equatoria	Total
New Arrivals 18-24 Apr	158	0	27	6	113	0	57	0	0	0	361
Previous Total	60,580	88,016	33,902	71,716	24,507	17,474	21,231	2,297	43,174	11,761	374,658
Updated Total	60,738	88,016	33,929	71,722	24,620	17,474	21,288	2,297	43,174	11,761	375,019
Type of Returnee											
Government Assisted	25,398	32,462	17,244	24,470	10,388	15,703	16,090	1,575	27,063	9,940	180,333
Spontaneous	20,190	55,554	7,428	45,861	14,232	1,501	5,168	673	16,111	1,821	168,539
Unspecified	15,150	0	9,257	1,391	0	270	30	49	0	0	26,147

* Since 30 October 2010. Contains only verified IOM data unless otherwise noted. Figures are as of 24 April 2012.

Border tensions affect South Sudanese waiting to return

Air transport of vulnerable returnees from Sudan to South Sudan has been halted due to the escalating border conflict between the two countries and the suspension of flights between them. After the movement by air of 1,833 extremely vulnerable returnees on 44 flights to South Sudan in March, another 700 were meant to be flown south this month. However, new Sudanese civil aviation rules are preventing return movements, after the expiry of the 8 April deadline for South Sudanese to legalize their status in Sudan. The South Sudanese embassy in Khartoum has issued about 3,000 emergency travel documents and received about 1,000 applications for nationality certificates and passports so far. Humanitarian partners in Sudan are working to have exit requirements waived or adjusted in order to resume flights for vulnerable individuals.

Preparations for barge movements from Kosti, in Sudan, have also been curtailed until relations between the two countries improve, despite an agreement to resume movement at the end of March. Partners are also concerned that the recent altercations around Higlig are aggravating negative feelings towards South Sudanese in Sudan, with reports of harassment increasing.

Registration of South Sudanese by the Government of Sudan has begun, set to be completed on 9 May with the reported intention of preventing statelessness as well as minimizing undocumented employment. However, protection partners expressed concern about the type of detailed data being collected, including religion and tribe, and the reasons for collecting it.

IV. Humanitarian planning and coordination**Needs assessment organized promptly**

As civilians moved out of Bentiu to avoid the danger of air attacks, an inter-agency assessment team was mobilized rapidly to investigate reports of displaced people massing in Nhialdiu, about 40 kilometres to the south-west. The road was designated Category 4, permitting movement only in armoured de-mining vehicles. In a briefing from the local county commissioner on 20 April, the assessment team discovered that hundreds of people – mostly women and children – had arrived in the area, but had mostly dispersed to their villages of origin. Although the combined UN and NGO team found no humanitarian need to address in Nhialdiu, the assessment exemplified effective coordination, participants said.

Humanitarian funding website established:

As part of efforts to increase the transparency and accountability of pooled funds, a dedicated South Sudan Common Humanitarian Fund (CHF) website has been established. See: <http://www.unocha.org/south-sudan/financing/common-humanitarian-fund>

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