



# United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS)

Media & Spokesperson Unit  
Communications & Public Information Office

## MEDIA MONITORING REPORT

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- Riek Machar's End-Game - What Is It? (*Sudan Tribune*)

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## South Sudan to release all but three political detainees (*Sudan Tribune*)

South Sudan announced on Saturday that it will release all but three of the nine remaining political detainees accused of conspiring to oust President Salva Kiir on 15 December.

Eleven senior officials from South Sudan's ruling Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) were arrested shortly after infighting within the army (SPLA) triggered a nationwide crisis almost two weeks ago. The announcement followed the release of two other detainees on Friday.

All the accused deny attempting to overthrow Kiir's government, although former vice-president Riek Machar is now leading a rebellions against the government in Unity, Upper Nile and Jonglei states. The release of detainees has been one of the conditions Machar has said must be met before he will engage in talks to end the conflict, which has led to over 1,000 deaths and the displacement of over 120,000 people, according to the UN.

"The government had agreed in principle to immediate cessation of hostilities, so that access to humanitarian assistance and operations are not hindered", minister of cabinet affairs Martin Elia Lomuro told journalists on Saturday.

"The government is also committed to peaceful dialogue and to release all political detainees consistent to our laws and the constitution, except individuals who have criminal cses to answer", Lomuro said.

Media reports suggest that Machar has appointed Pagan Amum, the former SPLM secretary- general, to be part of his negotiating team in the Ethiopian capital, Addis Ababa.

Amum, is one of the three SPLM members that remain in detention, according to presidential spokesperson Ateny Wek Ateny.

He said Amum, along with former finance minister Kosti Manibe and former cabinet affairs minister Deng Alor will not be released as they still have criminal cases to answer.

"Apart from these officials, the rest of the political detainees will be released. Two of the eight have already been released. They are now free since yesterday. The rest will also follow", Ateny said.

The decision to release the political detainees and to declare a cessation of hostilities came after extensive consultations with the leaders of Ethiopia and Kenya during a visit to Juba on Thursday, where an agreement on unconditional dialogue was also reached, Lomuro said.

Lomuro said the government hopes that a political solution can be found to stop the young nation slipping into a full-blown conflict.

The decision to release more of the detainees "was arrived at after holding extensive consultative discussions at [the] high level of leadership. At the ministerial level meetings, there were queries which sought clarifications on the status and nature of the group the government would now enter into dialogue [with]. [If] it is [a] rebel movement then a name of this rebellion must be known", he said.

The minister said Machar had complicated the negotiations by demanding that some of the political detainees in Juba be released so that they could participate in talks as members of his group.

"Imagine people have been arrested in connection with the alleged coup and instead of allowing them to clear themselves before the court of law he is making conditions and even appointing some of them in detention as members of the delegations to participate in the dialogue", Lomuro said.

"He is confirming that they participated in this failed coup. I don't know why he thinks like that. Some people are educated, but they have problem with reasoning", he added.

### **'White Army' militia to join fight (Independent.ie)**

Twenty-five thousand young men who make up a tribal militia known as the "White Army" are marching towards a contested state capital in South Sudan, an official has said, reducing hopes for a ceasefire. Seeking an end to the two-week crisis in which an estimated 1,000 people have been killed, leaders from across East Africa announced on Friday that South Sudan had agreed to a "cessation of hostilities" against forces loyal to former vice president Riek Machar.

The government accuses Mr Machar of leading a coup attempt on December 15 that erupted into growing violence.

But Mr Machar rejected that, saying in an interview with the BBC that any ceasefire had to be negotiated by delegations from both sides. The government in the capital, Juba, seized on that statement to further condemn Mr Machar.

"Dr Riek Machar has put obstacles to this genuine call by issuing pre-conditions that a ceasefire cannot be reached unless a negotiation is conducted," said vice president James Wani Igga. "This is complete intransigence and obstinacy because the main issue now is to stop violence."

In addition to those killed, tens of thousands are seeking shelters at UN camps. More fighting is expected. There is a looming battle for Bor, the provincial capital of Jonglei state that briefly fell to rebels before government forces took it back this week, said military spokesman Col Philip Aguer.

Pro-Machar forces are believed to be preparing a fresh offensive to retake Bor, he said. Bor is the town where three United States military aircraft were hit by gunfire while trying to evacuate American citizens on December 21, wounding four US service members.

An estimated 25,000 youths from the Lou Nuer sub-clan - the same tribe Mr Machar is from - are marching on Bor, said information minister Michael Makuei Lueth.

The "White Army" gets its name in part from the white ash fighters put on their skin as a form of protection from insects.

"He has decided to mobilise the youth in the name of his tribe," Mr Lueth said.

The White Army has threatened the central government in the recent past. In 2011 the army said that the Nuer youths would fight until all the Murle - another tribe - had been killed. The statement warned the national military to stay out of the way.

Another statement warned that the White Army would "wipe out" the army, according to the Enough Project, a US-based advocacy group that works on issues in central Africa.

Elsewhere, in oil-rich Unity state government troops were being forced to repel attacks by forces loyal to Mr Machar, said Col Aguer. The military "is fighting back, but it is the other side that is attacking us", he said.

IGAD, the regional bloc of East African nations, demanded on Friday that negotiations begin before the end of the year between South Sudan's government and Mr Machar, but there was no sign that is likely.

"We are ready to meet even before that. It is now up to Machar to accept the ceasefire," said vice president Igga.

The government blames Mr Machar for plotting a coup attempt on December 15.

Mr Machar denies that charge and his backers insist violence began when presidential guards from President Salva Kiir's majority Dinka tribe tried to disarm guards from Mr Machar's Nuer ethnic group.

The United Nations, South Sudan's government and other analysts say the dispute is political at its heart, but has since taken on ethnic overtones. The fighting has displaced more than 120,000 people.

### **'White Army' march dims ceasefire hopes in South Sudan (AP)**

Twenty-five thousand young men who make up a tribal militia known as the "White Army" are marching toward a contested state capital in South Sudan, an official said Saturday, dimming hopes for a cease-fire. Seeking an end to the nearly two-week crisis in which an estimated 1,000 people have been killed, leaders from across East Africa announced on Friday that South Sudan had agreed to a "cessation of hostilities" against forces loyal to former Vice-President Riek Machar, accused by the government of leading a coup attempt on Dec. 15 that erupted into spiraling violence.

But Machar rejected that, saying in an interview with the BBC that any cease-fire had to be negotiated by delegations from both sides. The government in the capital, Juba, seized on that statement to further condemn Machar.

"Dr. Riek Machar has put obstacles to this genuine call by issuing pre-conditions that a cease-fire cannot be reached unless a negotiation is conducted," said Vice-President James Wani Igga. "This is complete intransigence and obstinacy because the main issue now is to stop violence."

In addition to those killed, tens of thousands are seeking shelters at United Nations camps.

More fighting is expected. Most serious is the looming battle for Bor, the provincial capital of Jonglei state that briefly fell to rebels before government forces took it back this week, said military spokesman Col. Philip Aguer. Pro-Machar forces are believed to be preparing a fresh offensive to retake Bor, the Jonglei state town where three United States military aircraft were hit by gunfire while trying to evacuate American citizens on Dec. 21, wounding four U.S. service members.

The estimated 25,000 youths from the Lou Nuer sub-clan — the same tribe Machar is from — are marching on Bor, said Information Minister Michael Makuei Lueth. The "White Army" gets its name from the white ash fighters put on their skin as protection from insects.

"He has decided to mobilize the youth in the name of his tribe," Lueth said.

The estimate of 25,000 came from intelligence inside the group itself, Lueth said. Asked if the government was monitoring the group from the air, he said only: "Well, ultimately we are monitoring."

As of Saturday evening, the youths, who are armed with light weapons and heavy machine-guns, were about 30 miles outside Bor, he said, meaning they could reach the state capital imminently.

Earlier in the crisis some 2,000 Lou Nuer armed fighters attacked a U.N. base in Akobo, also in Jonglei state, killing three U.N. troops and a reported two dozen or so ethnic Dinka inside the base.

Akshaya Kumar, a South Sudan analyst for the U.S.-based Enough Project, said it was important to remember that civilian lives hang in the balance in Bor.

"Bor has already been the site of two violent clashes in less than two weeks. Its people, many of whom are sheltering in the U.N. compound, cannot withstand another battle," she said. "The recent Lou Nuer storming of the U.N. base in Akobo set a dangerous precedent. We worry that the Bor peacekeeping force may not be able to withstand a similar onslaught."

South Sudan military forces are in Bor and will protect the civilian population against attacks, Lueth said. Most of the residents of Bor are Dinka.

"It's hard to predict what will happen," Lueth said. "This is war."

The White Army has threatened the central government in recent past. In 2011 the army said that the Nuer youths would fight until all the Murle — another tribe — had been killed. The statement warned the national military to stay out of the way. Another statement warned that the White Army would "wipe out" the army, according to the Enough Project, a U.S.-based advocacy group that works on issues in central Africa.

Elsewhere, in oil-rich Unity state government troops were being forced to repel attacks by forces loyal to Machar, said Aguer. The military "is fighting back, but it is the other side that is attacking us," he said. IGAD, the regional bloc of East African nations, demanded on Friday that negotiations begin before the end of the year between South Sudan's government and Machar, but there was no sign on Saturday that is likely.

"We are ready to meet even before that. It is now up to Machar to accept the ceasefire," said Vice-President Igga.

The government blames Machar for plotting a coup attempt on Dec. 15. Machar denies that charge and his backers insist violence began when presidential guards from President Salva Kiir's majority Dinka tribe tried to disarm guards from Machar's Nuer ethnic group. From Juba the military clashes then spiraled across the country.

The United Nations, South Sudan's government and other analysts say the dispute is political at its heart, but has since taken on ethnic overtones. The fighting has displaced more than 120,000 people.

### **South Sudan accuses rebels of mobilizing 'White Army' (Reuters/All Africa)**

(Reuters) - South Sudan accused rebels on Sunday of mobilizing a feared ethnic militia for new attacks despite a government offer of a truce to end two weeks of conflict in the young state.

A 25,000-strong force of the "White Army" - made up largely of ethnic Nuer youths who dust their bodies with ash - was marching on the town of Bor, recaptured by loyalist forces last Tuesday, an army spokesman said.

"We are prepared to engage them," Sudan People's Liberation Army spokesman Philip Aguer said by phone from South Sudan's capital, Juba, 190 km (120 miles) south of Bor by road.

Fighting has left at least 1,000 dead and split the east African country barely two years after it won independence from Sudan. It has also raised fears of an all-out civil war between the main Dinka and Nuer ethnic groups which could destabilize the fragile region.

The White Army rebels, loyal to former Vice President Riek Machar, were likely to clash with President Salva Kiir's troops near Bor within the next day, the army spokesman said.

Machar made no immediate comment on the rebel force or on the government's offer of a ceasefire on Friday.

Witnesses spoke of panicked civilians fleeing Bor to escape another round of bloodletting.

The scene of a massacre of Kiir's Dinka ethnic group in 1991 by Nuer fighters loyal to Machar, Bor was retaken by government troops after several days of heavy fighting.

The White Army are recognized by the ash, prepared from burnt cow dung, with which they cover themselves to ward off insects. They are armed with machetes and sticks as well as guns.

"They are a wildcard whose intervention in the theatre of conflict outside Bor could ratchet up the conflict even further and also put at even greater risk the lives of innocent civilians," Joe Contreras, a spokesman for the U.N. mission in Sudan, told the BBC.

The army said rebels were also mobilizing youths and armed civilians for another attack on Malakal, the capital of the oil-producing Upper Nile state. Rebels were pushed out of the town on Friday.

Among the civilians trying to escape Bor, capital of Jonglei State, was Juuk Mading.

"We are very scared," Mading, a father of four, said from a crowded river jetty as he waited in the fierce heat for a boat to cross the White Nile river to a neighboring state.

A Reuters cameraman who visited Bor on December 25, a day after the rebels were pushed out, said burnt corpses lay in the streets. Traumatized civilians spoke of mass killings by marauding youths.

As well as offering a truce, President Kiir's government said it would release eight of 11 senior politicians, widely seen to be Machar allies, arrested over an alleged coup plot against Kiir.

Defense Minister Kuol Manyang Juuk told Reuters politicians in Juba were speaking to the White Army members to tell them that this is not an ethnic-based conflict and to convince them to abandon their march on Bor.

### **No Proper Negotiations, No Ceasefire, Says South Sudan Rebel Leader (This Day)**

The South Sudan rebel leader, Riek Machar, has said there must be proper negotiations before the rebels can cease fire.

Machar, who spoke to BBC World Service by satellite phone from the bush after the government said it had agreed to an immediate end to fighting in Nairobi, said he had a negotiating team ready but any ceasefire had to be serious, credible and properly monitored.

"Many here are too frightened to venture out of the UN camp. So until mechanisms for monitoring are established, when one says there is a unilateral ceasefire, there is no way that the other person would be confident that this is a commitment," he said.

He also called for the release of all 11 detainees; a key rebel condition for any negotiations, according to him, the rebels controlled the whole of Unity State, three-quarters of Upper Nile State and all of Jonglei State except the state capital Bor.

He said he had spoken to the two detainees freed in Juba, whom he named as his executive director, Deng Deng Akon, and former Higher Education Minister Peter Adwok.

Presidential spokesman Ateny Wek said:"It is not a unilateral offer, but it is a conditional offer to be accepted by the other party."

Also, the Information Minister of the country, Michael Makuei Lueth, said the government had agreed to suspend a planned offensive to recapture Bentiu, the capital of Unity State. "We are not moving on Bentiu as long as the rebel forces abide by the ceasefire," he added.

### **South Sudan's Rebels Say Committed to Dialogue, Warn 'March to Juba' If Salva Kiir Curtails Peace (South Sudan News Agency)**

Bor — The defected SPLA forces loyal to former South Sudanese Vice president Dr. Riek Machar say they are committed to peaceful solution to the current political crisis in the country.

In a 'press statement' seen by the South Sudan News Agency, the rebel forces said they are in control of Greater Upper Nile states, namely Unity, Jonglei, and Upper Nile. However, they admitted that some areas are still controlled by Kiir's forces.

"Dr. Machar is committed to dialogue as he has already nominated his negotiation team with the precondition of releasing all the detainees first", the statement reads in part.

"In the event Salva continues to be obstinate curtailing efforts for dialogue as is the case, then our only option will be to march to Juba", warns the statement.

The statement comes just one day after leaders of Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) met in Kenya capital, Nairobi, to try to find a peaceful solution to the ongoing political crisis.

"As of today Saturday, December 28th, 2013, the SPLM/A forces under the leadership of Dr. Riek Machar Teny are in control of the Greater Upper Nile States of Unity, Upper Nile and Jonglei. There are still some pockets of counter attacks in Northern Upper Nile Counties, but all the oil fields in both Unity and Upper Nile states are under our control", said the statement.

The rebel forces also said that Juba has been bombing their positions in Upper Nile, Jonglei, and Unity.

"Salva forces continue use aircraft to bomb areas of Jonglei yesterday afternoon. He also continues attacks on Malakal town and border areas of Bentiu with Warrap as corroborated by Salva Army Spokesman yesterday", adds the statement.

In the press release, the defected forces denied that they were defeated by the government forces; instead they said that they withdrew from Jonglei State capital, Bor, on December 24, due to strategic reasons.

"Our forces briefly withdrew from Bor Town, the Jonglei State Capital on December 24, 2013 for tactical reasons, and it is true that there is presence of Salva Kiir forces in the town center", asserted the statement.

The United Nations (UN) estimated that 1000 people have died in the conflict and the number could be higher.

Fighting erupted in Juba on December 15 after deep political differences between senior members of the ruling Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) party.

### **Why Riek Machar is wary of truce offer in troubled South Sudan (Standard Digital, Kenya)**

Juba, South Sudan: South Sudan rebel leader Riek Machar has said there must be proper negotiations before the rebels can agree to a truce with the government. He was speaking after the government said it had agreed to an immediate end to fighting, in a declaration welcomed by East African leaders in Nairobi. Fighting continued on Friday in the oil town of Malakal, Upper Nile State. The first UN reinforcements have arrived to help control civilians seeking shelter at UN compounds. About 63,000 people have turned to the UN for help, among more than 121,600 who have fled their homes in the world's newest state. 'No way' At least 1,000 people have died in the fighting. President Salva Kiir is engaged in a deadly power struggle with Mr Machar, his former vice-president, since accusing him of a coup attempt. Members of Mr Kiir's Dinka ethnic group and Machar's Nuer community have both been targeted. The government has freed two of Machar's allies from detention, partially meeting a rebel demand for the release of 11 coup plotters. US envoy Donald Booth said in Juba he hoped the freed detainees would "participate in a constructive manner in the efforts to bring about peace... and resolve the political issues that sparked this conflict". Machar spoke to the BBC World Service by satellite phone "from the bush", as he put it. He said he had a negotiating team ready but any ceasefire had to be serious, credible and properly monitored. "So until mechanisms for monitoring are established, when one says there is a unilateral ceasefire, there is no way that the other person would be confident that this is a commitment," he said. He called for the release of all 11 detainees, a key rebel condition for any negotiations. Machar said the rebels controlled the whole of Unity State, three-quarters of Upper Nile State and all of Jonglei State except the state capital Bor. He said he had spoken to the two detainees freed in Juba, whom he named as his executive director, Deng Deng Akon, and former Higher Education Minister Peter Adwok. ([Read more](#))

### **Juba Accuses Former Vice-President of Rejecting Ceasefire (Sudan Tribune)**

Juba — South Sudan's vice-president, James Wani Igga, has accused his predecessor, Riek Machar, of rejecting opportunities to end hostilities and putting obstacles in the way of peaceful dialogue to resolve the ongoing conflict, which has lasted almost two weeks.

Machar has "put conditions that a ceasefire cannot be reached unless a negotiation is conducted. This is complete intransigence and obstinacy because the main issue now is to stop [the] violence", Wani told reporters after chairing a crisis management committee.

### **NO TO POWER-SHARING DEAL**

The spokesperson of South Sudan's president Salva Kiir Mayardit said on Saturday that the government will not accept any proposal seeking the commitment of the government to enter into negotiations aimed at reaching a power-sharing agreement with Machar.

"It will not make sense that the same person who was dismissed as part of the general change which western governments have all these times been advising, because of corruption, return to the same government in which he was dismissed after killing innocent people. This is unacceptable and it will never happen", presidential spokesperson, Ateny Wek Ateny, said.

Reports from the talks, which are being mediated by regional leaders, have indicated a strong desire among East African countries to end the violence by bringing all the aggrieved parties on board.

"There is no meeting the president has ever held with foreign dignitaries, representatives and envoys without my presence. In these meetings and interactions, I have never heard anybody who has met the president talk about [a] power-sharing proposal", Ateny said.

"What had always been discussed is the need to cease hostilities and to accept dialogue, which the president had already accepted without conditions", the spokesperson told Sudan Tribune.

### **PUSH FOR DIALOGUE**

The official said the main objective of the dialogue is to contain the conflict from escalating into major unrest and to prepare a conducive political ground for the 2015 general elections.

The talks are being chaired by the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD), whose member countries currently include Djibouti, Ethiopia, Somalia, Sudan, Kenya and Uganda. South Sudan became a member in 2011 after it seceded from Sudan as part of a 2005 peace deal that was also mediated by IGAD. "Actually this initiative came from IGAD member countries and the western envoys. The objective was to focus on how to handle political differences from shifting to tribal conflict", Ateny said.

Since the fighting began in Juba on 15 December, the United Nations says that over 1,000 people are believed to have been killed. President Kiir's government has accused Machar and his supporters of attempting to stage a coup. This has been strongly denied, with other accounts suggesting that fighting within the presidential guard broke out due to a dispute between soldiers from the Dinka and Nuer tribes. Violence has since spread to other parts of South Sudan, displacing thousands of civilians. While the army has retaken Jonglei state capital Bor from mutineers, Unity state and much of Upper Nile remain in control of forces loyal to officers who switched allegiance.

Upper Nile and Unity are home to the country's key oil fields, raising concerns that the unrest could cut off the economic lifeblood of the young nation, which derives nearly its entire government budget from oil revenues.

Ateny said that South Sudan's "government agreed to the dialogue so that conducive ground is created for Riek Machar and his group to come back as normal citizens so that they can participate in the next elections. If they win elections, they will certainly take the office through [a] peaceful transfer of power", he said. ([Read More](#))

### **South Sudan's Rebels Say Committed to Dialogue, Warn 'March to Juba' if Salva Kiir Curtails Peace (South Sudan News Agency)**

The defected SPLA forces loyal to former South Sudanese Vice president Dr. Riek Machar say they are committed to peaceful solution to the current political crisis in the country.

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The statement comes just one day after leaders of Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) met in Kenya capital, Nairobi, to try to find a peaceful solution to the ongoing political crisis.

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In the press release, the defected forces denied that they were defeated by the government forces; instead they said that they withdrew from Jonglei State capital, Bor, on December 24, due to strategic reasons.

“Our forces briefly withdrew from Bor Town, the Jonglei State Capital on December 24, 2013 for tactical reasons, and it is true that there is presence of Salva Kiir forces in the town center”, asserted the statement.

The United Nations (UN) estimated that 1000 people have died in the conflict and the number could be higher.

Fighting erupted in Juba on December 15 after deep political differences between senior members of the ruling Sudan People’s Liberation Movement (SPLM) party.

### **South Sudan: Machar's Forces Planning Attack On Bor, Says SPLA (Sudan Tribune)**

Juba — South Sudan's army (SPLA) spokesperson, Philip Aguer, said on Saturday that rebel forces loyal to former vice-president Riek Machar are planning an attack on Jonglei state capital Bor.

Mutineers from the army took control of Bor a few days after conflict broke out between members of the presidential guard on 15 December in the capital, Juba, with the army later retaking control of Bor on 24 December.

The United Nations says that 120,000 people have been displaced and over 1,000 people killed since the fighting spread from Juba to Jonglei, as well as the oil-producing states of Unity and Upper Nile.

"We have information that forces loyal to Riek Machar are believed to be preparing a fresh offensive on Bor. We don't know the number, but it is estimated 25,000 youths from the Lou Nuer [tribe] have been mobilised to participate in the attack", Aguer told reporters.

South Sudan's information minister, Michael Makuei Lueth, accused Machar of mobilising young men from his Nuer tribe to rise up against the government.

"Riek Machar has decided to mobilise the youth in the name of his tribe. This is unacceptable. He is putting in danger the lives of these innocent youth", Lueth said in an interview on government-owned broadcasters on Saturday.

### **FIGHTING IN UNITY STATE**

Aguer said government troops had clashed and repelled attacks by forces loyal to Machar in Unity state, where the SPLA's state division commander defected a week ago.

The "SPLA is fighting back", Aguer said, adding "it is the other side that is attacking us".

East African body, the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) has said that negotiations will begin before the end of the year, but there were no signs that a ceasefire agreement was being observed on Saturday.

It is feared that the situation is likely to continue unabated unless regional leaders expedite the process of negotiations.

Earlier, South Sudanese vice-president James Wani said his government was ready to begin negotiations earlier than the initial period put forward by regional leaders in a bid to end the violence.

"We are ready to meet even before that. It is now up to Machar to accept the ceasefire", said Igga.

### **Defected commander in Unity state confirms presence of Sudanese rebels (Sudan Tribune)**

Defected fourth division commander in Unity state Maj. Gen. James Koang Chuol has warned Sudanese rebels against becoming involved in South Sudanese affairs.

In an interview with Sudan Tribune on Saturday, Koang confirmed presence of Sudanese rebels from the Justices and Equality Movement (JEM) in Parieng county.

He says he received reports from his troops on the ground that JEM fighters had come down from Nuba Mountains and are currently occupying Parieng after Juba blocked their supply route from Unity state. “Yes, we received report that they [JEM] want to interfere. This evening we received a report from Parieng because it is not under our control. We learned that they came out from Nuba Mountain and and attacked”, said Koang.

The defected general has ordered the Sudanese rebels to leave the area within two days otherwise his troops will launch military action, saying the current conflict on South Sudan does not concern them. “These are the Southerners fighting themselves no need for involvement for other people”, Koang emphasised.

An aid agency worker in Yida refugee camp who spoke on condition of anonymity, told Sudan Tribune that he had seen JEM rebels with heavy armoured vehicles and ammunitions passing through the refugee camp on their way to Parieng on Friday.

Koang announced on Saturday evening that his forces had repulsed an attack from government troops and militia loyal to Maj.Gen. Pul Jang. He said over 26 armoured vehicles, as well as heavy weaponry was captured from troops belonging to the former rebel group South Sudan Liberation Army (SSLA), while two tanks were also captured from government forces.

He confirmed over 50 soldiers from both government and SSLA troops had been killed, while many others had also surrendered.

Unity is the second state to fall to anti-government forces, with Jonglei state capital Bor also falling under rebel control after conflict erupted in the country earlier this month.

Forces led by Koang, who have aligned themselves with former vice-president Riek Machar, seized Unity capital Bentiu and other parts of the northern region on 21 December, with oil production shut down last week as the security situation deteriorated.

Fighting broke out in the South Sudan capital, Juba, on 15 December following a dispute between members of the Nuer and Dinka tribes in the presidential guard.

President Salva Kiir has accused Machar and his supporters of orchestrating an alleged coup attempt to overthrow his government.

The UN says at least 1,000 people have died in the ensuing violence, which has led to increased ethnic tensions across the country.

## **27 UN police in Juba on peacekeeping mission (Gurtong)**

December 28 (JUBA) – At least 27 United Nations Police from its peacekeeping mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) arrived in South Sudan on Saturday, as part of the 5,500 additional troops approved after recent outbreak of violence in the country.

The UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon had on 23 December 2013 asked for more peacekeepers to be deployed in the new nation, which was unanimously approved by its Security Council, a day later.

The world body, in a statement, said the contingent of Bangladesh police officers who are trained in crowd management and security will be deployed immediately to help with the growing numbers of internally displaced persons in various parts of war-torn South Sudan.

An estimated 63,000 civilians are currently seeking refuge in UN compounds throughout South Sudan, after the violence which killed nearly 1,000 people.

The UN reiterated calls for a peaceful end to South Sudan’s ongoing conflict, days after Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) regional leaders visited the capital, Juba for talks.

“The mission fully supports these intense and ongoing efforts of South Sudan’s neighbours to seek a peaceful resolution to the current crisis”, Hilde Johnson, head of its South Sudan mission said Thursday.

## **WELCOMES DEPLOYMENT**

Johnson also welcomed the Security Council resolution increasing the numbers of UN peacekeepers and police by 5,500, saying it would enhance the mission’s capability to protect civilians.

“The scale of the crisis has challenged an already overstretched mission,” she said, stressing that UN personnel must not only protect civilians within their premises, but those generally under threat. South Sudan has, in the last two weeks, been tense after what government said was a botched coup attempt allegedly planned by its former vice-president Riek Machar.

### **Thousands of South Sudanese seeking refuge on U.N. base remain too afraid to return home (The Washington Post)**

MALAKAL, South Sudan — The corpses of soldiers, dressed in camouflage fatigues, lay in the streets and ditches. Shop after shop had been plundered, leaving the poor and hungry to scavenge through the remains. Houses burned to the ground still smoldered, the scars of the four days of chaos that tore through this town.

Not even the U.N. peacekeepers’ base was entirely safe. A bullet passed through the stomach of Nyauny Otham, who had sought refuge there with her family and thousands of other terrified civilians. On Saturday, the 6-year-old rested in a hospital bed, a white sheet covering her tiny body.

Fighting among rival soldiers in South Sudan’s army engulfed Malakal on Christmas Eve, uprooting thousands of civilians and trapping scores of foreigners, including Americans. A visit on Saturday, a day after government forces drove out the renegade troops, opened a window into how swiftly the world’s newest nation disintegrated into anarchy and its immense humanitarian and political challenges. The city was mostly calm, but residents remained fearful.

“The fighting can start anytime,” said William Deng, 21, who fled to the U.N. base with only the clothes on his back. “The tensions are still high between the rebels and the government.”

Violent clashes have spread across this oil-producing country and key U.S. ally in the Horn of Africa since Dec. 16, when President Salva Kiir accused his former deputy, Riek Machar, of trying to stage a coup. That set off simmering tensions in the ruling party and the army, as troops loyal to Kiir and those allied to Machar battled each other in half of the nation’s 10 states. Hundreds, if not several thousand, have died, and more than 100,000 have fled their homes. The violence has often unfolded along ethnic fault lines, pitting Kiir’s tribal group, the Dinka, against Machar’s, the Nuer.

The struggle for Malakal, a sprawling town of thatched huts and dusty red earth, was particularly significant because of its proximity to some of South Sudan’s most lucrative oil fields and food-rich regions. It also has the best airport after the capital, Juba, and is nestled on a major road to Sudan, from which this country won independence in 2011. Analysts have expressed concern that the Khartoum government could seize advantage of the instability here and interfere.

“It’s a key town,” Toby Lanzer, the deputy special representative to the U.N. mission in South Sudan, said of Malakal. “For all the right reasons this is a very important place to hold onto or to take control of if you are engaged in these hostilities.”

Machar’s loyalists stormed Malakal on Christmas Eve, triggering fierce street battles and pillaging. Civilians trapped by hails of bullets huddled in their homes, waiting for an opportunity to flee.

“We were so scared,” said Otham Bol, Nyauny’s father.

During a respite in the fighting, he and his wife ran with their three children to the U.N. base. But the bullets followed them inside. On Christmas, Nyauny was shot, apparently by a bullet fired in a fight outside the base. Another bullet hit her father’s thumb.

Aid workers said many of the rebels appeared to be drunken youths dressed in military uniforms and looting shops. And after the initial surprise assault, government forces brought in heavy weapons to attack the rebels.

“The bodies we saw were of kids with beers and biscuits,” said Caroline Opok, a U.N. employee in Malakal. “And the government was fighting them with tanks.”

### **Stranded amid the violence**

Unlike the violence in South Sudan's capital, or in Jonglei state, the fighting did not appear to be ethnically based in Malakal, with its diverse mix of tribal groups, including Dinkas, Nuer and Shilluk. On the U.N. base Saturday, members of all three groups were living side by side .

"I am a Nuer, they are Dinkas, and he is a Shilluk," said Zakaria Youal, 26, pointing at his friends. "We were all targeted by the soldiers in the same way."

One group of South Sudanese was returning home to the western region of Bahr al Ghazal after spending years working in Sudan. But as they arrived in Malakal, the fighting erupted, and they were forced to seek refuge in a government compound. On Saturday, they were still there because the security guard had locked the gates and left with the key.

"We are here in the middle, in between the militaries from both sides," lamented Juma Lamiri, one of the members of the group, as Lanzer assured him that they would soon be continuing their journey home. Scores of Kenyans, Somalis and other Africans from the region who had come to trade and work in Malakal were among the displaced. Many were waiting for their governments to evacuate them. On Sunday, the U.S. Embassy is expected to send a plane to evacuate 60 Americans, Canadians, Australians and New Zealanders, U.N. officials said.

"We came to South Sudan to look for a better future," Nancy Wairimu, 24, a Kenyan trader who imports clothes, said as she sat on a tarpaulin donated by an aid agency. "Now, we are looking for help to get back to Kenya. We can never come back here."

### **'Delicate' situation at base**

For the vast majority, who has little chance of being evacuated, conditions on the base are growing increasingly dire. (Read More)

### **Civilians in South Sudan fleeing to UN bases now 63,000 (The Nation)**

United Nations - Some 63,000 civilians have now sought refuge in United Nations bases in South Sudan as the UN peacekeeping mission there moves to reinforce its strength with troops and helicopters in the face of a conflict that has killed thousands and driven at least 122,000 others from their homes in the past 12 days.

"Priorities for the response to the displaced are food, healthcare, shelter, water, sanitation and hygiene services, protection and camp management," the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) reported Saturday, noting that aid agencies will need \$166 million to respond to immediate needs until March. "Additional air assets and transport support are needed to enable the response."

UNMISS said heavy fighting raged between Government and rebel forces in Jonglei and Upper Nile states over the past three days. On Tuesday the Government said it had regained control of Bor, in Jonglei state. "Since then, there has reportedly been no fighting in the town itself, though clashes continue in the surrounding areas," UNMISS reported. Heavy fighting was also reported yesterday in Malakal in Upper Nile state while Juba, the national capital, remained calm but tense. Tensions within South Sudan, the world's youngest country which only gained independence in 2011 after seceding from Sudan, burst out into open conflict on 15 December when President Salva Kiir's Government said soldiers loyal to former deputy president Riek Machar, dismissed in July, launched an attempted coup. Kiir belongs to the Dinka ethnic group and Machar to the Lou Nuer. The conflict has been increasingly marked by reports of ethnically targeted violence.

The UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) is working with other peacekeeping missions in the region, as well as troop and police contributing countries, to quickly move troops and equipment, especially helicopters, into South Sudan to strengthen the protection of civilians. On Friday, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's Special Representative in South Sudan, Hilde Johnson, said she hoped to have the first reinforcements on the ground within 48 hours.

On Tuesday the Security Council authorized almost doubling UNMISS peacekeepers to nearly 14,000

personnel through the transfer of units if necessary from UN forces in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Darfur, Abyei, Ivory Coast and Liberia, and 72 police from the peacekeeping force in DRC (MONUSCO) arrived in Juba today.

The officers, from Bangladesh, are trained in crowd management and security and will be deployed immediately to help with the growing numbers of displaced in the UN Compounds. Though the number of people killed in the clashes is unknown, thousands are likely to have lost their lives since the crisis started, UNMISS said.

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reported that that at least 121,600 people have been displaced and humanitarian organizations say the figure is expected to be higher. “A top priority for humanitarian agencies is to re-enter areas currently inaccessible due to insecurity, and gather more information about needs of people displaced outside main population centres,” UNMISS said. Ocha said aid agencies have delivered food to thousands of people in Juba, Bentiu, Malakal and Awerial, but have not been able to access the relief warehouse in Bor due to insecurity, and reports indicate that it may have been looted.

Mobile clinics operating in UN facilities in Juba, where 25,000 civilians have sought refuge, are carrying out 350 consultations per day, and measles and polio vaccination campaigns are scheduled to begin before the New Year. Aid organisations have distributed mosquito nets, mattresses, tents and soap to displaced families and have set up 160 latrines at displacement sites in Juba. The main concern remains sanitation as well as hygiene and the risk of disease outbreaks, such as cholera. “All actors are fully focused on minimizing this risk, by improving the public health situation,” UNMISS said.

In Bor, where 15,000 civilians have sought shelter, conditions are “very challenging, especially in terms of health and water and sanitation,” it added. “There are few latrines within the site, and limited access to clean water. There are also urgent needs for food and shelter supplies.” In Bentiu in Unity state, some 8,000 people are sheltering inside the UN base. “Public health is the main concern, with three cases of measles reported, and top priorities for response are health supplies and blankets to protect people from the cold during night,” the mission reported.

In Upper Nile state, 12,000 people are sheltering in the UN peacekeeping base, and several civilians inside the base were injured by stray bullets during clashes. Meanwhile, Ban continues to contact leaders around the world to discuss the crisis. Yesterday President Uhuru Kenyatta of Kenya and Ethiopian Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn visited Juba in a bid to broker a peace. UNMISS is investigating numerous reports of massacres, extra-judicial killings, arbitrary detentions, mistreatment, abuses and mass rapes, and Ms. Johnson has stressed that it is essential that all perpetrators be held accountable.

## **Civilians Trying to Flee South Sudan Violence Are Caught Between Two Sides (The New York Times)**

MALAKAL, South Sudan — When the shooting started last week, Othom Bol quickly fled with his wife and their three young children to what he thought would be the safety of the United Nations peacekeeping base on the outskirts of town.

Instead, as the pitched gun battle between troops loyal to the government of South Sudan and rebels seeking to overthrow it thundered outside on Wednesday, bullets came whistling into the makeshift camp for the internally displaced at the base, striking civilians, including Mr. Bol’s daughter Nyauny, 6. The bullet hit her in the stomach, passing through her torso and exiting her back.

The girl lay in a hospital bed on the base here Saturday, metal sutures from an operation to stop the internal bleeding studding her abdomen and an intravenous tube protruding from the gauze wrapping her left hand. The base hospital, overstretched, is out of injectable antibiotics and analgesics, a doctor said. “We’re just civilians and we really don’t know who started this,” said Mr. Bol, 27, a slender man visibly exhausted by his daughter’s ordeal, keeping vigil by her bedside each night in a gray plastic chair. He had

not even noticed that he had been shot in the thumb until after he brought his daughter to the hospital. "We are victims."

On Saturday, a day after the South Sudanese military drove the rebels out of Malakal, the scene of some of the fiercest fighting in recent days, burned-out huts smoldered. The battle for South Sudan has raged since Dec. 15, a day before President Salva Kiir accused his former vice president, Riek Machar, of plotting a coup. Mr. Machar denies the accusation but has in turn demanded Mr. Kiir's resignation.

In the mostly empty town, six men with kerchiefs covering their noses and mouths hefted the body of a soldier in a blanket, carrying it a few paces before setting it down again, turning their faces away. Other bodies lay in ditches at the looted market, by the university, and in one case in the middle of a main road, under the beating hot sun. He was still wearing his camouflage uniform, his feet stripped bare.

"It's politics between two people making thousands of people die," said Simon Monyluk, 21, who lost his father to the prolonged civil war that resulted in the creation of South Sudan, only to see violence flare up again two years after its hard-won independence from Sudan.

Despite efforts by regional leaders to broker a peace deal, there are reports that a column of ethnic Nuer fighters backing Mr. Machar is marching toward Bor, the capital of restive Jonglei State. Although the South Sudan government has said it would be willing to release eight of the 11 senior politicians detained two weeks ago on allegations of plotting a coup, it refused on Saturday to release all of them as a condition for a truce with rebel forces.

"It is not accepted," Michael Makuei Lueth, South Sudan's information minister, said in a phone interview. "That is a condition, and we said we will enter negotiations with no preconditions."

This city is a prize seen as worth fighting over, the capital of Upper Nile, the state with the most oil in South Sudan. It sits on an important road into Sudan and near the city of Renk, which has major food stores. Malakal also has one of the country's best airports.

While diplomats from across East Africa and around the world scramble for a political settlement between the two sides, tens of thousands of South Sudanese have fled to United Nations facilities like the one near Malakal. Their numbers have overwhelmed peacekeepers and humanitarian aid workers at a time when many of them had already left this landlocked African country for their winter vacations.

Mr. Monyluk was at the camp trying to care for his five brothers, the youngest just 12. "A lot of children, they are suffering, taking dirty water," he said. "Kids are sick."

The most conservative estimate of the number of people sheltered at the base is 10,000 to 12,000, though officials admit that they have nothing like the infrastructure needed to accommodate so many. Toby Lanzer, the United Nations' humanitarian coordinator for South Sudan, said the real figure might be as high as 22,000.

"This is a mini city inside a U.N. base in a very hot climate," said Mr. Lanzer, describing the situation in Malakal as "a lot worse than I was expecting" when he arrived for a visit on Saturday. (Read More)

### **Stay, protect and deliver (Relief Web)**

Heavy fighting broke on 15 December in South Sudan's capital Juba and quickly spread to four other states, forcing over 120,000 people to flee their homes. Some 63,000 people have sought refuge at the UN peacekeeping bases around the country. Despite the access challenges caused by insecurity, aid organizations are reaching people with life-saving aid, including food, water and sanitation.

"This is a massive set-back for the people of South Sudan," said the UN's Humanitarian Coordinator Toby Lanzer. "We are looking at a major increase in need, coming on top of what was already one of the world's largest aid operations." The fighting came just weeks after aid organizations launched an appeal for \$1.1 billion to meet people's basic needs in 2014.

### **Protection as a top concern**

In all areas affected by violence, protection of civilians remains a top concern for aid organizations. In Juba, a protection team visited several of the neighbourhoods where fighting took place, and found most homes deserted and looted.

“Across the country, civilians are bearing the brunt of this unrest, and we are hearing harrowing stories of killings and abuses,” added Vincent Lelei, head of the OCHA office in South Sudan.

“Even in Juba, where there has been no major fighting since 17 December, many of the people displaced remain too afraid to return to their homes. Making sure that people are safe is paramount, and we urge all parties to the violence to keep civilians out of the fighting and ensure that they can access assistance freely.”

Today, aid organizations are implementing programmes and services to help protect displaced people, especially women and children, in camps. They have been monitoring the camps in Juba and helping people who have suffered from violence and trauma to receive medical and psychosocial support.

### **Seeking a safe place**

Sitting under a temporary shelter made of pieces of tarpaulin and a few poles, John cradles his four-day-old baby. Sunday, named after the day he was born, came into the world on 15 December. The next morning, amid gunfire in their neighbourhood, the family decided to flee to one of the two UN peacekeeping bases in the capital, Juba. A total of 25,000 people have sought refuge at the bases. Now John lives with his wife, three children and four other relatives in the makeshift site which has sprung up on the base, hosting some 11,000 displaced people seeking protection from the violence. They feel safe, he says, but the living conditions are challenging.

“The children are healthy for now, but the water and sanitation situation is bad. We also need better shelters.”

### **Humanitarian response underway**

Aid agencies have scaled up the response to displaced families in the bases in Juba. Emergency medical clinics are up and running, latrines are being dug, and NGOs and UN agencies are working around the clock to make sure the people are getting the assistance that they need.

Humanitarian organizations are trying to get more access to people affected by the crisis in other parts of the country. In Jonglei State’s capital Bor, where fighting raged for several days last week, the humanitarian situation is dire. An estimated 15,000 civilians at the UN base there urgently need more access to food, healthcare, clean water and proper sanitation.

“Our main concern at this stage is the spread of disease,” continued Mr. Lelei. “We are doing everything we can to get people clean water and proper sanitation which is key to keeping them healthy. But time is really of the essence.”

Aid agencies have appealed for US\$166 million immediately to meet the most urgent needs of people struck by the current crisis ([LINK to press release](#)). The money will go towards emergency healthcare, food, water, sanitation, and shelter for displaced communities, and will cover the staff and aid supplies needed to manage camps and transport relief supplies.

“Our commitment is clear,” says Humanitarian Coordinator Toby Lanzer. “We are here to stay, protect and deliver. I hope that donors will also show their solidarity by contributing generously to our work, so we can achieve those goals together.”

### **Q&A: Civilians under fire in South Sudan with Head of OCHA (Aljazeera)**

It has been more than a week since fighting began in the world's youngest country.

Hundreds of people have been killed and at least 100,000 others are displaced while a power struggle between President Salva Kir and former Vice President Riak Machar stirred concerns about a full out ethnic war between the Nuer and Dinka groups.

Even though South Sudan's capital, Juba, remains relatively peaceful, fighting continues in other parts of the country, including in Jonglei, an oil-rich area close to the Ethiopian border. Some estimates have put the number of deaths at over 1,000.

The African Union has described the ongoing violence as having "the potential to undermine the viability of the new nation" and has demanded dialogue between the two opposing parties.

While the UN looks to forge a peace deal, tens of thousands of civilians continue to live in danger as tensions escalate. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon stated that the UN aims to increase the number of peacekeepers to protect civilians caught in the crosshairs.

Al Jazeera talks to Vincent Lelei, the Head of Office for the UN's Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), South Sudan about the country's humanitarian crisis.

**Al Jazeera: The UN Security Council has expressed concern over the humanitarian crisis unfolding in the South Sudan. How serious is the situation at this point?**

**Lelei:** The situation in South Sudan is deeply concerning. There are multiple crises in a number of key states resulting in significant humanitarian consequences and concerns regarding the protection of civilians.

While the scale of humanitarian consequences in large parts of the country cannot yet be ascertained due to a lack of access, humanitarians in Juba and elsewhere such as Bor and Bentiu in the Jonglei and Unity states paint a troubling picture - a situation of desperation where civilians, including women and children are targeted, displaced and injured.

For example, significant numbers of people, mainly women and children are leaving Juba to unknown destinations, though we're monitoring the situation closely.

The number of people seeking refuge in UN peacekeeping (UNMISS) bases, or moved to other places of relative safety continues to grow. To date, an estimated 81,000 people have been displaced, including some 46,000 sheltering in UN bases. We are also worried about those whose whereabouts are not known. These people are in urgent need of emergency food, shelter, water and sanitation including medical care. However, this number is considered to be an under-estimate as thousands are thought to have moved into the bush or villages. Limited access for humanitarians due to insecurity both within the towns affected by fighting as well as outside the towns has affected the level of humanitarian assistance provided so far as well as ascertaining reliable information on to the scale of the crisis.

**Al Jazeera: Are civilians being targeted purposefully or just caught in the middle of fighting at this point?**

**Lelei:** The people of South Sudan have been united for many decades in their fight for independence. That commitment was based on a desire for peace and development that is shared by all parts of South Sudanese society. Humanitarians must urge the political leaders to work towards bringing peace to the world's newest nation. We are deeply concerned about the situation of all civilians affected by armed violence in Juba and elsewhere in the country regardless of whom they are and where they are from. In light of the continued and increasing reports of serious human rights violations, it is vital that all reported cases are documented and investigated in due course. There is a need to hold perpetrators of human rights violations accountable. All parties to the conflict must respect their obligations under national and international law and ensure that civilians are spared from the consequences of fighting and that civilians are allowed to freely seek safety and assistance.

**Al Jazeera: We know of the attack at the Akobo UN base - there are two other bases in the country looking after a number of civilians as well. How vulnerable are the civilians outside the UN bases?**

**Lelei:** Conditions for displaced people in Juba and elsewhere in the country are of great concern to us. This is why UNMISS has opened the gates to its bases in Juba and elsewhere for some 46,000 people to seek protection and access life-saving assistance. It is likely that this number will increase dramatically if the violence is not stopped. The UN and its partners are doing everything they can to reach out to those who are not in its bases and ensure that their lives are safe and that they receive assistance. We have also reached out to the government and political leaders in South Sudan urging them to ensure the protection of civilians according to international law. As soon as the security situation improves, humanitarians will



scale up the response to ensure that all communities affected are assisted, based on the need and principles of impartiality and neutrality.

### **Mobile Scratch Cards Shortage Hits Eastern Equatoria, Communication Stalled (Gurtong)**

The move comes after violence erupted in Juba a fortnight ago and later spread to Jonglei, Unity and Upper Nile states respectively.

Officials in Eastern Equatoria state have noted that the recent strife forced parts of the country to face shortages of scratch cards of various companies including Zain, MTN, Vivacell and Gemtel due to the hindrances of supplies caused by the violence in the country.

The whole week went without sales of scratch cards which noticeably began to run out and respective prices being sharply increased despite Eastern Equatoria state having remained calm.

The state residents have expressed disappointments as they ask the government to improve the security situation and normalize supplies from Juba to states.

### **Fresh cattle raid attacks hit Lakes state (Sudan Tribune)**

Authorities in South Sudan's Lakes state said that inter-clan clashes spurred by cattle raiding and counter revenge attacks have once again flared.

An officer from Lakes state's criminal investigation department (CID), who spoke on condition of anonymity, said that revenge attacks had occurred on Saturday in which a person identified as Maliet Majok Cenmuoth was killed by an unknown assailant in the Anyinyong area, located in the northern part of Rumbek Central county.

The officer said the incident was believed to be a revenge attack, with members of the Nyang clan suspected to have carried out the killing.

Cenmuoth hailed from the Joth clan, with its members involved in recent clashes with the Nyang section following the death of a 17-year-old student in November, who was killed by unknown gunmen, reportedly from the Joth section.

The CID noted that Cenmuoth was ambushed while coming out of Akot cattle camp near Langcok military barracks in a Nyang area.

In a separate incident, a group of suspected pastoralists from Cueibet county entered Lila cattle camp in neighbouring Rumbek Central county in an attempt to steal cows.

Cueibet county commissioner Isaac Mayom Malek confirmed the incident, but there remains conflicting reports on the number of people killed during the ensuing gunfire exchange between the suspected cattle raiders and cattle owners at the Lila camp.

"Yes, I am aware of that incident, but there is no proper detail of people killed. Some days ago, I got information that there were criminal people who always raid cattle moving toward that cattle camp called Lila and I inform my counterpart of Rumbek Central county", Malek said.

Police in Rumbek Central county confirmed that one person had been killed and two people suffered gunshot wounds in the attack.

However, police who were on ground at the time in Lila said they saw about eight dead bodies in the area following the withdrawal of the suspected cattle raiders.

An eyewitness said that Thien Madit from the Ajaak section was killed, with two people admitted to Rumbek state hospital with gunshot wounds. He said all cattle had since been recovered.

Investigations into the matter are ongoing, with police yet to capture any suspects in the Lila attack.

### **South Sudan rights abusers must be brought to justice: Ban (The Daily Star/AFP)**

JUBA: UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon has reiterated a call for perpetrators of violence in South Sudan to be brought to justice.

"All violence, attacks and human rights abuses must end immediately," Ban's spokesman said in a statement late Saturday.

"The secretary general reminds those responsible that they will be held accountable. He calls on the government and all concerned to ensure the rights and security of civilians are protected," said the statement, issued in New York.

The government on Saturday meanwhile accused sacked former vice president and rebel leader Riek Machar of recruiting up to 25,000 young men of the Nuer tribe in eastern Jonglei state.

But rebel spokesman Moses Ruai Lat denied the allegation, telling AFP that Machar was "not mobilising his tribe", South Sudan's second biggest ethnic group.

Those young people were regular soldiers turning their back on the government and had not been drafted by Machar, he said.

The conflict, fuelled by an old rivalry between President Salva Kiir and Machar, has fanned ethnic differences between Kiir's Dinka group and the Nuer.

The accusations came as East African and Horn of Africa peace brokers set a Tuesday deadline for Kiir and Machar to start face-to-face talks and stop two weeks of fighting that is thought to have left thousands dead in the world's youngest country, which won independence from Sudan in 2011.

The regional grouping the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development is spearheading efforts to end the fierce battles for control over several strategic oil-producing areas notably in the north of South Sudan. The United Nations, Washington and Beijing are also pressing for talks.

A spokesman for IGAD said President Kiir had on Friday expressed willingness for an "immediate" ceasefire though Machar would not immediately commit to a truce.

The rebel leader said he first wanted a mechanism to monitor any ceasefire as well as the release of all his political allies arrested when trouble first broke out.

Reports of massacres, rapes and murders have emerged in recent days. The United Nations -- whose hard-pressed peacekeepers are to be doubled to more than 12,000 -- said one mass grave had been discovered and large numbers of uncollected bodies were seen outside at least one UN base.

The fighting erupted December 15 after Kiir accused his former vice president of trying to mount a coup. Machar has denied the allegation and retorted that Kiir was trying to eliminate his rivals.

Rebels quickly took control of a few key regional cities including Bentiu, in the northern oil-producing state of Unity, as well as Bor which was recaptured by the army on Tuesday.

The death toll nationwide is said to be several thousand. The United Nations has said more than 120,000 residents have been displaced since the conflict started.

## REGIONAL

### **Ugandans fear retaliatory rebel attacks after its troops enter Juba (The East African)**

Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni's decision to send troops into South Sudan could put thousands of his citizens trapped in the country at risk.

According to a security official working in South Sudan, while sending in troops could help sustain the regime and gain President Museveni gratitude from President Salva Kiir, Ugandans currently trapped in Bor and other places could be targeted as enemy foreigners.

On December 20, an unspecified number of Ugandan soldiers from the elite Special Forces were deployed to South Sudan to secure the capital Juba, support efforts to evacuate Ugandans and other foreign nationals as well as contribute to returning normalcy to the two-year-old nation.

READ: Uganda now steps in, sends troops to South Sudan

But they had been in the country for only a few hours when they were accused of siding with Kiir against Dr Riek Machar, his former deputy and long running political rival — a charge the Ugandan government denied. Kampala insisted any form of involvement beyond humanitarian activities would have to be sanctioned by the UN.

The town of Bor, which lies north of the capital Juba in Jonglei State, has been the scene of fierce fighting since the conflict broke out. It has changed hands between forces loyal to the conflict's key protagonists. Ugandans trapped there are estimated to be in the thousands. Officials from Uganda's Ministry of Foreign Affairs concede the situation is too fragile as to enable any evacuation. The *Daily Monitor* reported on Christmas day that at least 20 Ugandans were feared to have died there already.

"The fighting is intense here and the rebel forces, who were formerly targeting and killing only Dinkas, are targeting people from other countries, claiming their governments, including Uganda are offering support to President Kiir," the paper was told by Alex Byamukama, a Uganda group leader in Bor.

"Before they would ask us if we were Kenyans or Ugandans and leave us alone, but now they have turned on us [Ugandans] as well," the paper quoted Hebert Nnyanja, one of an estimated 2,000 Ugandans stranded at the UN compound, as saying.

The political disagreement between Kiir and Dr Machar that, according to multiple reports and analyses, has been brewing over several years now, came to a head on December 15, when the former accused the latter of orchestrating a coup against him — a charge he has repeatedly denied.

The military clashes that followed have claimed thousands of lives and displaced up to 92,500 people, according to the UN's Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

Museveni's, and Uganda's, interest in the unity and stability of South Sudan is due to its role as a buffer zone against Khartoum, which has for a long time maintained unfriendly relations with Kampala, according to Norbert Mao, the former chair of Gulu district, who has been involved in numerous engagements involving the two countries.

Although relations between the two countries appeared to thaw on the back of their mutual opposition to the International Criminal Court, which reissued arrest warrants against Sudan's President Omar al-Bashir in 2010, strong suspicions linger.

"President Museveni is close to Salva Kiir. That is well known. So he cannot claim to be neutral in a conflict where his friend is involved. The only way to defuse any perception of partiality is to reach out to Riek Machar and make it clear he comes in the interest of Ugandans and stability," Mao told *The EastAfrican*. Mao, who currently leads the Democratic Party, says failure to assert impartiality carries the risk of endangering not only Ugandans currently in South Sudan but the region's stability. (Read More)

### **Peace efforts flounder in S.Sudan (New Vision, Uganda)**

JUBA - International efforts to bring peace to strife-torn South Sudan appeared at an impasse Sunday as the government accused former vice president Riek Machar of recruiting tens of thousands of fighters.

As the fighting which is believed to have killed thousands moves towards a third week, Juba claimed that Machar, the de facto leader of rebels fighting the government, has recruited up to 25,000 young men from his Nuer tribe in the eastern state of Jonglei who it says are "ready to attack any time".

According to Jonglei's acting governor Ogato Chan, the Nuer fighters were around 110 kilometres (70 miles) from the state capital of Bor, which he said was calm, for the moment at least.

"The information is that they want to come and attack Bor but I am sure they will not attempt to do it because the SPLA (Sudanese army) forces will repel them back," Chan said. "Now the army are taking position."

Rebel spokesman Moses Ruai Lat said Machar was "not mobilising his tribe", the second biggest ethnic group in South Sudan, describing the men instead as regular soldiers who had rejected the government and were not specifically drafted by Machar.

The accusations have cast a shadow over peace talks spearheaded by regional leaders to end the bloody violence which the international community fears could slide into civil war.

Regional leaders at the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) have set Tuesday as a deadline for face-to-face talks between President Salva Kiir and his former deputy to end the fierce battles for control over several strategic oil-producing areas notably in the north of South Sudan.

While the government has said it was willing to observe a ceasefire, Machar has made demands including the release of his arrested political allies before committing to a truce.

120,000 displaced

South Sudanese government spokesman Michael Makuei told AFP Sunday: "I really doubt if we, the South Sudanese government, will be in a position to sit with Riek Machar... He has not even respected the call by IGAD and the African Union to agree to the cessation of hostilities."

Fuelled by an old rivalry between the two, the conflict has fanned ethnic differences between Kiir's Dinka group and Machar's Nuer clan in the country, which won independence from Sudan in 2011.

Fighting broke out on December 15 after Kiir accused Machar of mounting a coup, which his rival has denied. Rebels swiftly took over several key regional cities including Bentiu, in the northern oil-producing state of Unity, and Bor, which has since been recaptured by the army.

South Sudan's army said calm had returned to a number of flashpoint areas in Unity state and the northeastern Upper Nile state, where troops pushed back rebel attacks.

In recent days, grim reports of massacres, rapes and killings nationwide have emerged, with the United Nations reporting the discovery of a mass grave.

Washington, which championed South Sudan's drive for independence, as well as the United Nations and Beijing have all pressed for dialogue, with UN chief Ban Ki-moon reiterating Saturday a warning that all perpetrators would be brought to justice.

"All violence, attacks and human rights abuses must end immediately," Ban's spokesman said in a statement issued in New York.

"The secretary general reminds those responsible that they will be held accountable. He calls on the government and all concerned to ensure the rights and security of civilians are protected."

More than 120,000 people are estimated to have been displaced by the clashes, according to the United Nations, which is to double its peacekeeping force to more than 12,000 to contain the carnage.

The UN refugee agency UNHCR is also investigating reports that hundreds of South Sudanese have fled to neighbouring Sudan.

South Sudan, the world's youngest nation, became independent after a civil war that killed more than two million people between 1983 and 2005.

### **Sudan calls on US to remove its name from terror list (Sudan Tribune)**

The Sudanese government has renewed its call for the US administration to take serious steps to normalise bilateral ties, urging it to remove Sudan's name from the list of states sponsoring terrorism. Sudan was placed on the US terrorism list in 1993 over allegations it was harbouring Islamist militants working against regional and international targets. Despite close cooperation on counter-terrorism issues

over the past decade which Washington repeatedly acknowledged, Khartoum has remained on the blacklist.

The east African country has also been subject to comprehensive economic sanctions since 1997 over terrorism charges and human right abuses. Further sanctions, particularly on weapons, have been imposed since the 2003 outbreak of violence in the western Darfur region.

Sudan's official news agency (SUNA) quoted a government official on Saturday as saying that removing Sudan's name from the list of states sponsoring terrorism is the first step towards improving ties between the two countries.

The Sudanese official was responding to statements attributed to the US Chargé d'affaires in Khartoum, Joseph D. Stafford, in which he said that Washington seeks to improve ties with Khartoum.

He pointed to Sudan's continuous cooperation with the US in counter-terrorism issues since the year 2000, stressing Khartoum's rejection to the US claims that it sponsors terrorism.

The same source added that successive US administrations consistently praised Sudan's efforts in counter-terrorism issues, wondering why its name was not removed from the list of states sponsoring terrorism if that was the case.

"The US administration should answer the question why Sudan's name is still on the list of states sponsoring terrorism?" he said.

He further pointed to the testimony of the US former envoy to Sudan, Scott Gration, before the congress in 2009 in which he said that Sudan's name was not removed from the list for political reasons.

The government source also pointed that the US administration should have the political will to acknowledge Sudan's cooperation in counter-terrorism issues by removing its name from the list.

"This move would open the door wide for all efforts intending to improve relations with the US", he added. Earlier this month the Sudanese government ruled out receiving the US special envoy Donald Booth again without first setting a clear agenda for his visit.

Booth arrived in Khartoum and met with the head of the parliamentary subcommittee on foreign affairs, security, and defence, Mohamed Al-Hassan Al-Amin and according to state media discussed political and economic issues.

There were no indications that other meetings occurred with other Sudanese officials.

The head of the Americas Bureau at the Sudanese foreign ministry Mohamed Abdullah Al-Tom stressed in press statements that from now on there is no room for the traditional visits and meetings with officials to talk about the issues that were pre-agreed.

"What is required now from Washington is to address the concerns of the government to reach at a relationship based on interests", Al-Tom said.

Last month, the Sudanese foreign minister Ali Karti offered rare praise of the US disclosing that it had played a significant role in the UN Human Rights Council's (UNHRC) recent resolution which kept Sudan under agenda item 10 of technical assistance for another year, despite attempts by some parties to move Sudan back to agenda item 4 of monitoring.

"If the US hasn't cooperated rigorously and clearly with Sudan, we wouldn't have been able to move from item 4 to item 10", Karti said.

### **KPA creates special space to hold cargo destined for South Sudan (The East Africa)**

The Kenya Ports Authority has reserved part of the Mombasa port for cargo destined for South Sudan as it monitors the ongoing unrest in Juba, acting KPA managing director Twalib Khamis, who is also the general manager operations, has told *The EastAfrican*.

There is a slow uplift of the country's cargo by importers and it has gradually piled over the more than 10 days of the crisis. South Sudan is the second biggest user of the port after Uganda.

Container Freight Stations Association of Kenya chief executive officer Daniel Nzeki said the port and Container Freight Station management have been monitoring cargo volumes since the conflict began with the aim of managing it.

“Before any congestion arises and adversely affects the speed of clearance for all cargo within the port, we are looking for alternatives to deal with South Sudan-bound cargo,” he said.

According to Mr Nzeki, no additional cost should be passed to importers as this is Kenya Ports Authority’s “nominated cargo” where the authority tariff absorbs any such transfer charges.

“Other charges such as shore handling, wharfage and storage apply,” he said.

Awale Transporters Ltd deputy managing director Abdi Awale was concerned over 19 trucks stranded in the Upper Nile, where they had transported humanitarian cargo to the United Nations camp.

“In the process, we lost one of our workers, who was shot dead in a crossfire,” he said, adding that the fate of 62 employees and 29 trucks was unclear, but the company had requested the South Sudanese government to offer security of its crew and property.

The company has been operating a yard in South Sudan since 2008 because it transports humanitarian cargo for UN. To cushion some of the individual businesspeople there, the transporter will offer storage space for 500 containers in its Mombasa yard.

“We are ready to supplement the storage space if the KPA or CFS yards are overwhelmed and the crisis persists,” he said. He added that they would only charge loading, offloading and transport charges to South Sudan.

### **Costly conflict**

Another transporter facing a cargo crisis, Weston Logistics Ltd, has been advised not to clear and transport two South Sudan-bound containers because of the prevailing circumstances.

“South Sudan containers are not moving and this is going to be costly for us,” managing director Salim Nassib Mbarak said, adding they do not know what to do if the cargo continues to attract storage and demurrage charges.

The crisis, according to two truck drivers’ association, has left more than 200 drivers stranded at the Nimule border post with their cargo.

Kenya Long Distance Truck Drivers Association secretary-general Nicholas Mbugua and Transport and Allied Workers Union secretary John Muite called on the government to assist the drivers in volatile South Sudan. ([Read More](#))

## **INTERNATIONAL**

### **South Sudan: UN concerned by 'wildcard' White Army (BBC)**

The UN has expressed concerns about thousands of South Sudanese youths - loyal to rebel leader Riek Machar - marching on the strategic town of Bor.

Armed with machetes and sticks, the "wildcard" group does not have military training, a UN spokesman told the BBC. The UN is organising surveillance flights to ascertain the group's size, added the spokesman, Joe Contreras.

At least 1,000 people have died in this month's fighting. More than 121,600 are believed to have fled their homes. Tens of thousands of civilians have sought refuge in UN camps and reinforcements have been arriving to give them extra protection.

The government has offered a ceasefire, but the army says its forces are still battling over oilfields in the north. What began as a power struggle between Mr Machar and President Salva Kiir has taken on overtones of a tribal conflict. The Dinka, to which Mr Kiir belongs, are pitted against the Nuer, from which Mr Machar hails.

### **'Ratchet up the conflict'**

The White Army is a name that inspires fear in South Sudan.

This loose grouping of armed youth from the Nuer ethnic group was at least partly responsible for the 1991 Bor massacre, in which at least 2,000 people were killed. Then, the White Army fought alongside Riek Machar, who had split away from the main southern Sudanese rebel group fighting Khartoum.

In 2011 and 2012 a new incarnation of the White Army went on the rampage, killing hundreds of civilians from the Murle ethnic group. At the time, Mr Machar was vice president - and although he travelled to meet them, he was unable to stop their advance.

Now the South Sudanese government says thousands of White Army members are marching on Bor - under Mr Machar's command. This is an explosive claim - particularly as Mr Machar is under international pressure to stop fighting and begin negotiations by the end of the year.

Government troops are currently in control of Bor, the capital of Jonglei state they had taken from the rebels. The group reportedly marching on the town are part of an ethnic Nuer militia known as the White Army because of the white ash they put on their skin to protect them from insects.

South Sudanese government spokesmen have been quoted as saying it numbers as many as 25,000 armed men and answers to the former vice-president, but these details have not been confirmed.

The White Army seems sympathetic to Mr Machar, but does not appear to be acting on his direct orders, said Joe Contreras, a spokesman for the UN Mission in South Sudan, who described the group as "a volatile and unpredictable ingredient" to the unrest in South Sudan. "They do not have a military background or the discipline that you would associate with military who have been fighting under the banner of the former vice-president since this crisis began," he told the BBC's World Service.

"They are a wildcard whose intervention in the theatre of conflict outside Bor could ratchet up the conflict even further and also put at even greater risk the lives of innocent civilians." Mr Machar was deputy president until Mr Kiir sacked him in July.

Earlier this month fighting broke out between rival army factions after Mr Kiir accused Mr Machar of trying to unseat him in a coup.

Mr Machar said on Friday his forces were in control of the whole of the states of Jonglei and Unity, apart from Bor. He said he had a negotiating team ready but any ceasefire had to be credible, properly monitored and preceded by the release of 11 detainees accused of being co-conspirators in the coup plan. Mr Kiir has refused to accept any preconditions for a ceasefire.

### **Pressure mounts for South Sudan ceasefire (Aljazeera)**

International pressure is bearing down on the two sides in South Sudan's bloody conflict to launch peace talks, in an effort to keep the young nation from sliding into civil war.

The push comes as 25,000 young men comprising a tribal armed group known as the White Army were reportedly marching on Saturday towards a contested state capital, dimming hopes for a ceasefire.

Peace brokers from East Africa and the Horn of Africa have set a December 31 deadline for President Salva Kiir and de facto rebel leader Riek Machar, the country's former vice-president, to begin face-to-face talks.

"We, government, are ready to meet even before that," South Sudan's vice-president, James Wani Igga, told reporters. "It's now up to Machar to accept the ceasefire."

Meanwhile, the estimated 25,000 youths from the Lou Nuer sub-clan - the same tribe Machar is from - were marching on Bor, armed with light weapons and heavy machine guns, Information Minister Michael Makuei Lueth said.

The White Army gets its name from the white ash fighters put on their skin as protection from insects.

"[Machar] has decided to mobilise the youth in the name of his tribe," Lueth said, noting the estimate of 25,000 came from intelligence inside the group itself. "We are monitoring."

A spokesman for the rebels, however, denied Machar was mobilising his tribe, saying the young people were regular soldiers turning their back on the government.

'This is war'

Seeking an end to the nearly two-week crisis in which an estimated 1,000 people have been killed, leaders from across East Africa announced on Friday that South Sudan had agreed to a "cessation of hostilities"

against forces loyal to Machar, who stands accused by the government of leading a coup attempt on December 15.

But Machar, who denies the coup allegations, told the BBC that any ceasefire must be negotiated by delegations from both sides, prompting condemnation from the government.

"Dr Riek Machar has put obstacles to this genuine call by issuing pre-conditions that a ceasefire cannot be reached unless a negotiation is conducted," Igga said. "This is complete intransigence and obstinacy because the main issue now is to stop violence."

In addition to those killed, tens of thousands of people have sought shelter at United Nations camps. Pro-Machar forces were believed to be preparing a fresh offensive to retake Bor, the Jonglei state town where three US military aircraft were hit by gunfire while trying to evacuate American citizens a week ago. South Sudan military forces were in Bor and would protect the civilian population against attacks, Lueth said.

"It's hard to predict what will happen," he acknowledged. "This is war."

## **How Hollywood cloaked South Sudan in celebrity and fell for the 'big lie (The Guardian)**

When violence erupted two weeks ago in the world's youngest country, one of the first voices to speak out, before the US president or the head of the United Nations, was that of the Hollywood actor George Clooney. There was nothing particularly objectionable about his counsel, which in any case was more likely authored by the American activist John Prendergast, with whom he shared a byline. It spoke of the need for a robust UN response and, even as tens of thousands of civilians fled ethnically motivated death squads, of the "opportunities" present in South Sudan.

This is a country, not yet two and a half years old, whose birth has been soaked in celebrity like no other. As well as Clooney, Matt Dillon and Don Cheadle have been occasional visitors who have tried to use their star power to place the international public firmly in the corner of this plucky upstart nation.

Unsurprisingly, the actors were highly effective at communicating a narrative about the new country that borrowed from a simple script. The south had fought a bloody two-decade battle for its independence against an Islamic and chauvinist north led by an indicted war criminal. The cost of that war, regularly touted as two million lives, meant that the south would need huge development support to lift it from the impoverished floor of every quality of life index published.

The great threat in this narrative was the vile regime in Khartoum, the capital of rump Sudan, which would seek to undermine its southern breakaway, or march back to war to reclaim some of its lost oilfields. It was a seductive story that could be well told by handsome movie stars against the lavish backdrop supplied by South Sudan's superheated swamps and deserts and often beautiful people. But the narrative – part truth, part wilful misunderstanding – was deeply flawed. This would have mattered less if it had only informed public opinion, but instead it found its way into the building of a state.

Sudan, the former British colony that became Africa's largest state, has been in a condition of slow-burning internal conflict almost since independence in the 1950s. The second instalment of civil war was ended by the comprehensive peace agreement signed in 2005. The deal provided for a cooling-off period of six years before a loosely geographically defined south would be given the chance to vote on secession from the north.

The war had been brought to life in the US by broadcast evangelicals such as Billy Graham, who cast it as a heroic battle by Christian and African underdogs against a more powerful Muslim and Arab foe. The fact that religious and geographical lines were never remotely this clear and clean-cut was routinely ignored. The Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), under the leadership of the charismatic John Garang, was not fighting for an independent south but a democratic "new Sudan". Its forces were drawn from areas far beyond what are now the borders of South Sudan. And its battles were, for the most part, not against the national army, the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) but against rival militia groups, often drawn from the same great southern tribes, such as the Dinka and Nuer, that the SPLA leadership came from.



Much of the fighting and dying took place in the south, often with funding and encouragement from the north. This meant that a new country would have to be built in what had been the main theatre of the war, with a nation drawn from opposing sides in much of that conflict. No serious effort was made by any side in the post-2005 cooling-off period to reconcile the north and south. The US, Europe, the UN and the south's near-neighbours, Ethiopia, Uganda and Kenya, all pushed for the country to be broken up. This effort was formalised in a referendum in 2011. (Read More)

## **UN welcomes regional efforts to resolve S. Sudan conflict (Xinhua)**

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon on Saturday welcomed the work of East African countries in peacefully resolving the ongoing conflict in South Sudan, offering his "full support" to the regional efforts.

"The secretary-general welcomes the outcome of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) Summit held on 27 December, appointing a mediation team to work with the government of South Sudan and opposition in reaching a cease fire, the release of the detainees and building toward a process of peaceful dialogue," said a statement issued here by Ban's spokesperson.

In the statement, Ban pledged that the United Nations stands with the people of South Sudan and will continue to do everything within its means to protect civilians at risk and provide necessary humanitarian assistance.

"All violence, attacks and human rights abuses must end immediately," he stressed, adding that those responsible will be held accountable.

The UN chief also called on the government and all concerned in South Sudan to ensure the rights and security of civilians are protected.

According to reports, at the IGAD summit held on Friday in the Kenyan capital of Nairobi, the East African bloc issued a communique in which it condemned the violent escalation of conflict in South Sudan, the world's youngest country which only gained independence in 2011 after seceding from Sudan.

The conflict began on Dec. 15 when President Salva Kiir's government said soldiers loyal to former deputy president Riek Machar, dismissed in July, launched an attempted coup.

According to the UN, the fighting has led to well over a thousand deaths and the displacement of at least 122,000 people, some 63,000 of whom have taken refuge in UN bases in the country.

## **China calls for calm in South Sudan (GOSS ONLINE/Aljazeera)**

**JUBA, 29 December 2013** - China has called for calm in South Sudan, urging both factions to start ceasefire talks as soon as possible, to avert the current situation from deteriorating any further in country, the Foreign Ministry has said.

China's Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying said on Friday that the deteriorating situation in the country was cause for concern. East African leaders have also urged the two factions in South Sudan to end the violence.

"We are negotiating with both sides in the conflict in various ways. China's special representative on African Affairs, Zhong Jianhua, talked with South Sudanese Foreign Minister Barnaba Marial Benjamin on the phone, calling for calm and restraint from both sides to start ceasefire talks as soon as possible.

"China has maintained close communication and coordination with the Intergovernmental Authority on Development, the African Union as well as African countries in an effort to allow the international community to play a positive role in relieving the tensions in South Sudan," Hua said.

The Red Cross Society of China has offered emergency humanitarian aid to the people of South Sudan, said Hua, adding that China will continue to provide assistance for South Sudan. Zhong Jianhua reaffirmed China's hope the conflict will be solved peacefully.

"The Chinese government has made it clear that it firmly opposes the use of military force to resolve conflict, especially when it causes heavy casualties ... we also believe that with the joint efforts of African countries, the relevant parties will solve the issue by rational and peaceful means," said Zhong.

## OPINION/ANALYSIS

### Riek Machar's End-Game - What Is It? (Sudan Tribune)

BY ERIC REEVES

Riek Machar, former Vice-President of South Sudan and current leader of rebel forces in the country, knows as well as anyone that every day that passes without a halt to the fighting--every hour--makes more likely the explosive spread of violence that has already taken on a clear ethnic character.

Riek knows as well that as long as this violence continues it will be impossible for most humanitarian organizations to operate outside Juba, putting many hundreds of thousands of civilians at risk--most without any political identity, but inevitably an ethnic identity. The number of those displaced was put at 121,000 several days ago by the UN, but it was only a mechanical estimate.

Toby Lanzer, head of humanitarian operations in South Sudan, declared on December 22 that, "As we go to bed tonight, there are hundreds of thousands of South Sudanese who've fled into the bush or back to their villages to get out of harm's way" (BBC, December 22, 2013).

There is dismayingly little reporting presence in most of South Sudan, especially in Jonglei, Unity State, and Upper Nile--those areas that have seen the most fighting and in which the forces of Riek Machar are strongest.

Bor (Jonglei) and Malakal (Upper Nile) have been recaptured by the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA, the army of South Sudan); however, these major towns may yet be the sites of more fighting. Indeed, Associated Press reports today (Nairobi, December 28, 2013) that 25,000 (Lou) Nuer youth are within 30 miles of Bor and that fighting could resume at any time (this figure is likely an overstatement, but perhaps not by much). This would put a tremendous number of civilians at acute risk. Of this Lou Nuer "White Army" Associated Press also reports:

The White Army has threatened the central government in recent past. In 2011 the army said that the Nuer youths would fight until all the Murle--another tribe [in Jonglei]--had been killed.

An unconfirmed report from the ground has the forces of Peter Gadet, who defected to Riek, even closer--at only a few kilometers north of Bor, possibly awaiting the arrival of the "White Army." Gadet has a well-deserved reputation as a fearsome and brutal warrior.

Two of the states involved in recent fighting--Unity and Upper Nile--are the primary oil producing regions of South Sudan. Machar's allies control Bentiu, capital of Unity State, and defecting SPLA division commander General James Koang Chuol has declared that the oil fields of Unity have been completely shut down. It is quite unclear whether the shutdown occurred with anything approaching the necessary technical care for such an operation; and given the wholesale exodus of Chinese, Malaysian, and Indian oil workers--including those with technical expertise--it is certain that in the relatively near term, in the absence of maintenance, major damage will be done to the oil infrastructure; moreover, re-starting the flow of oil may be an extended operation. This denies revenues to both Khartoum as well as Juba, given the transit fee arrangements and the significant amount of oil that lies in reserves north of the current North/South border. Oil from the reserves of both South Sudan and Sudan in the Unity/South Kordofan areas use the same pipeline and infrastructure, and are equally affected by any threat to professional maintenance of this system. Riek is also well aware of this.

So why has Riek refused to respond to offers from the Government of South Sudan (GOSS)? These include talks "without preconditions" (December 19), the announced release of most of the detainees Riek has demanded be freed (December 27), and the offer of an "immediate ceasefire" (in a Twitter feed of December 27, the GOSS declared: "We have agreed in principle to a ceasefire to begin immediately, but our forces are prepared to defend themselves if attacked." Riek's response? In an interview on December

27, speaking to the BBC by satellite phone, he said "any cease-fire had to be negotiated by delegations from both sides and must be 'credible,' must 'include a way to monitor compliance,' and 'must have [established] mechanisms for monitoring.'" But all this will take a good deal of time at a critical moment; and if these requirements are true for a full and final cease-fire agreement, it is not true for an immediate military stand-down. The government in Juba has declared that it will hold off on its offensive designed to re-take Bentiu: this halting, easily monitored, will provide a clear measure of whether the GOSS and the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) are acting in good faith, provided that Riek responds in kind. Instead, there are reliable reports of a resumed assault by Riek's forces on Bor, and my contact in Malakal indicates the SPLA there expects renewed attack.

We could have in effect something very much like the "Agreement on the Cessation of Offensive Hostilities" declared by Khartoum and the SPLA in October 2002--the event that marked the rapid de-escalation of fighting in the civil war, then in its twentieth year. To be sure, fighting continued (as I witnessed myself in January 2003), but the de-escalation continued, leading to a more formalized cease-fire in February 2003. It was this that enabled progress in negotiating the Comprehensive Peace Agreement.

[ Troublingly, it must be said, comments by Juba's military spokesman, Philip Aguer, are indicative of either a lack of communication or confusion on the part of Juba. Associated Press reports Aguer as saying that, "'We have not seen any sign of a cease-fire. There is no cease-fire agreed by the two sides,' an indication the planned assault on Bentiu could still take place" (Nairobi, December 27, 2013). This ambiguity or contradiction or lack of internal communication should be addressed immediately. ]

Machar also declared to the BBC on December 27 that conditions for a truce were not yet in place. But if not now, when? Fighting, violence, and ethnic animosities increase every day, every hour: how can these facts, these "conditions," not dictate that whatever form of truce or cease-fire is possible be declared now? (Read More)