

QUARTERLY BRIEF ON VIOLENCE AFFECTING CIVILIANS

HIGHLIGHTS

- In Q3, there were 62% fewer incidents and a 25% decrease in civilians affected by violence as compared to Q2.
- 1,223 civilians were individually affected by violence (500 killed, 299 injured, 375 abducted and 49 subjected to sexual violence).
- Sub-national violence involving civil defence groups accounted for 74% of victims.
- The majority of victims were documented in Jonglei and the Greater Pibor Administrative Area (44%); Central Equatoria, particularly the Yei area (12%); Warrap (12%); Unity (11%); and Lakes (6%).

CONTEXT

This brief presents an overview of trends in violence affecting civilians in the third quarter (Q3) of 2020, by assessing four major forms of individual harm (killing, injury, abduction, and sexual violence). While the impact of violence extends beyond these forms of harm, they have been the most common incidents documented throughout the conflict in South Sudan.

Sources of information include victim and eyewitness accounts, as well as reports from secondary sources identified during field missions by the UNMISS Human Rights Division (HRD). All reported incidents, particularly those involving sub-national violence, are deconflicted with incidents documented by the UNMISS Civil Affairs Division (CAD).

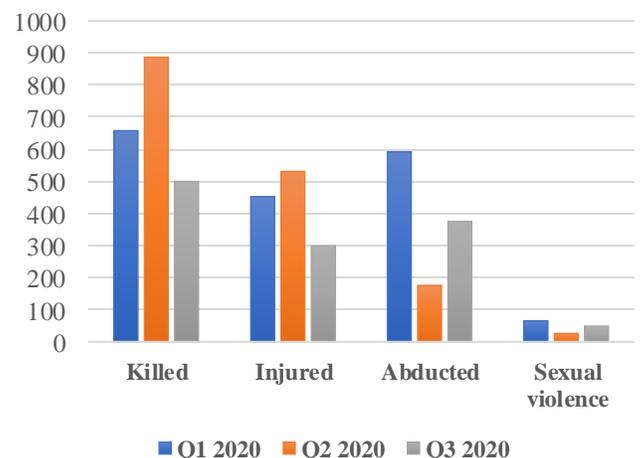
GENERAL TRENDS

Between July and September 2020, HRD documented 62 per cent fewer incidents and a 25 per cent decrease in the number of civilians affected by violence as compared to the previous quarter (Q2). However, it is important to note that the number of victims may have been under-reported, due to the negative impact of COVID-19 movement restrictions and heavy flooding, particularly in Jonglei and the Greater Pibor Administrative Area (GPAA), on HRD's ability to conduct field missions.

During Q3, HRD documented more than 260 incidents involving at least 1,223 civilians subjected to one of the four major forms of individual harm (500 killed, 299 injured, 375 abducted and 49 subjected to sexual violence). By comparison, in Q2, 417 incidents were documented, involving at least 1,620 civilians (887 killed, 531 injured, 176 abducted and 26 subjected to sexual violence).

As illustrated in the following table, the number of civilians killed declined by 44 per cent (from 887 to 500), largely due to fewer incidents and casualties resulting from sub-national violence in Lakes and Warrap states. However, there was a 113 per cent increase in civilians abducted (from 176 to 375) and an 88 per cent increase in those subjected to conflict-related sexual violence (from 26 to 49 victims).

*Number of victims,
January - September 2020*



Despite the overall downward trend in the number of victims recorded, the first part of Q3 in 2020 was more violent than the same period in 2019. However, as indicated in the graph below, violence declined significantly towards the end of the quarter, due to heavy flooding along the White Nile, which

affected an estimated 800,000 civilians and displaced at least 368,000.¹

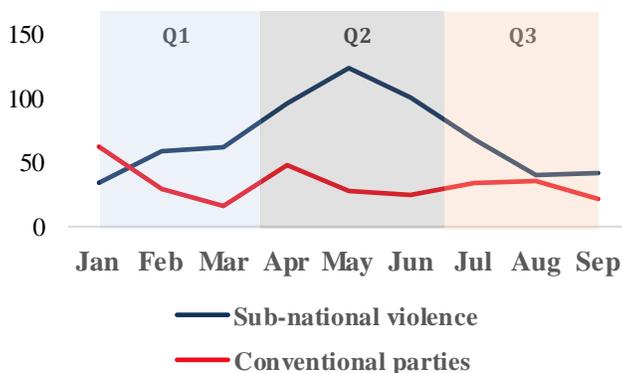
Number of victims, January - September 2019/2020



Incidents involving civil defence groups² continue to be the main form of violence documented, accounting for nearly 74 per cent of victims in Q3. During this period, 45 per cent of victims were affected by clashes in Jonglei between Lou/Gawar Nuer and Dinka Bor groups on the one hand and Murle on the other. Many women were also subjected to sexual violence during this conflict.

The extensive involvement of heavily armed civil defence groups in sub-national violence continues to have severe consequences for local populations. This localized violence is being fueled by external political actors as well as individuals from the national security apparatus, contributing to what are now complex and intractable conflicts. Despite making several visits to the area, a high-level committee established by the President in June to address the security situation and root causes of the violence in Jonglei and the GPAA has not had a tangible impact on tensions.

Number of incidents, January - September 2020

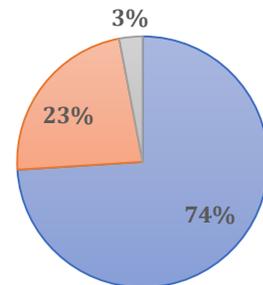


By contrast, heavy rains and major flooding appear to have been an important factor in the decrease in violence. In this context, accountability for serious human rights abuses committed by civil defence groups and their sponsors has remained elusive.

Incidents of violence against civilians attributed to Government forces and organized armed groups³ remained lower than those involving civil defence groups. Despite the general respect of the ceasefire across the country, conventional parties still accounted for 23 per cent of victims (282) in Q3, as compared to 11 per cent (178) in Q2.

This political violence was provoked by particular tensions around Yei (Central Equatoria) as well as Mairi and Mundri (Western Equatoria) between the South Sudan People’s Defense Forces (SSPDF) and pro-Machar Sudan People’s Liberation Army in Opposition (SPLA-IO/RM) on the one hand and the National Salvation Front (NAS) on the other.

Victims by category of violence



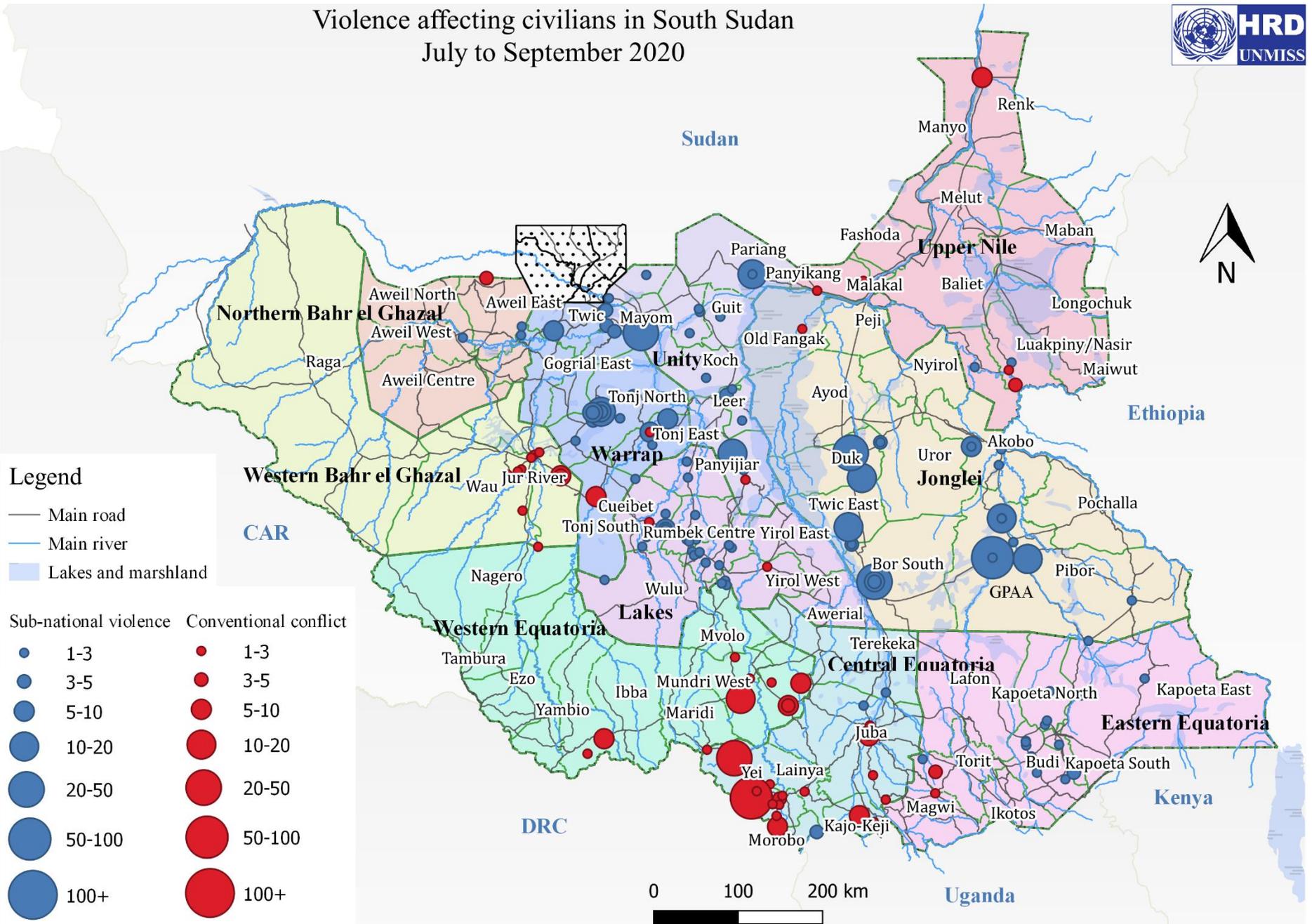
■ Sub-national violence ■ Conventional parties ■ Opportunistic violence

In Q3, HRD documented a surge in abductions by NAS in Greater Yei, primarily the forced recruitment of male civilians. In Greater Bahr el Ghazal, heightened tensions between SPLA-IO/RM elements in Greater Wau (Western Bahr el Ghazal) and SSPDF disarmament forces deployed around Tonj (Warrap) led to several incidents of abduction involving both civilians and combatants. Following the intervention of the Joint Defence Board, all civilian abductees were released. Disarmament forces were also involved in major clashes with armed youths in Romic (Warrap) in mid-August, which claimed the lives of at least 109 soldiers and armed youths.

¹ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), “South Sudan: Flooding Snapshot”, 5 October 2020, available at: https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/south_sudan_flooding_snapshot_3.pdf

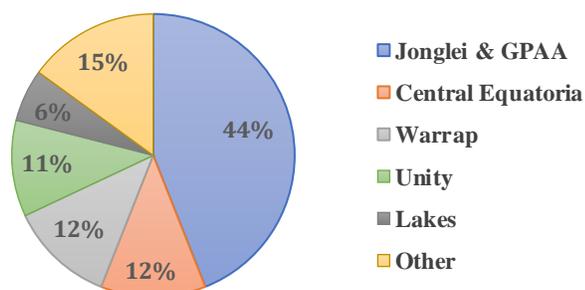
² The term “civil defence groups”, as used in this report, refers to civilians who are both armed and organized but who are not professional fighters.
³ The term “organized armed groups”, as used in this report, refers to the armed or military wing of a non-state party to a non-international armed conflict, such as SPLA-IO/RM or NAS in the context of South Sudan.

Violence affecting civilians in South Sudan July to September 2020



GEOGRAPHIC TRENDS

Location of victims



In Q3, Jonglei and the GPAA remained the most violent area in the country, accounting for almost half of the victims recorded throughout South Sudan. However, it is

important to note that the number of incidents and associated violence dropped by 67 per cent in Warrap and Lakes as compared to Q2, due partly to the rainy season and subsequent movement of cattle to more secure grazing lands. Another factor was the presence of SSPDF disarmament forces, which have been a deterrent in some counties in Lakes, although very few weapons had been collected as of September. The appointment of governors in these states may have also played a positive role in mitigating tensions between rival communities.

The areas of Yei (Central Equatoria) as well as Maridi and Mundri (Western Equatoria) continued to be affected by armed violence involving conventional parties to the conflict. These areas accounted for 71 per cent of victims and 42 per cent of incidents attributed to these parties. Other areas where civilians were impacted by this violence included Greater Wau and Greater Tonj.

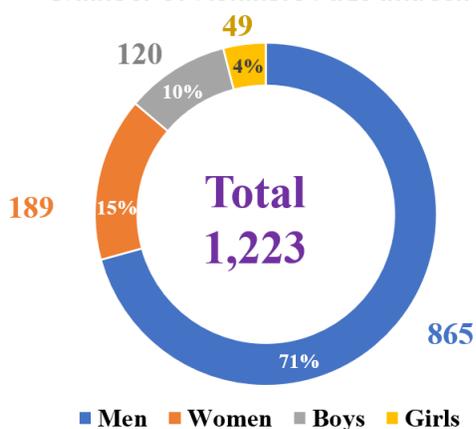
VICTIMS

In Q3, HRD's capacity to comprehensively document the number of victims affected by armed violence was seriously impacted by COVID-19 travel restrictions and heavy flooding across several states. In the GPAA, for instance, as of 30 September, there was a gap of about five per cent between the number of victims provided by Murle administrative officials and those established by HRD investigations, which were still underway at the end of the reporting period. While noting this caveat, the number of civilians affected by violence decreased by 25 per cent compared to Q2, although it remained comparable to trends documented during the same period in 2019.

followed by women (15 per cent or 189 individuals) and children (14 per cent or 169 individuals).

According to HRD's findings, 77 per cent of adult male civilians were killed or injured during sub-national violence, while the remainder were abducted for the purposes of military recruitment and/or forced labour. In Q3, at least 181 male civilians were abducted, mostly around Yei and Mundri.

Number of victims, by age and sex



Men, particularly young men, continued to comprise the majority of civilian victims (71 per cent or 865 individuals),

Women were primarily subjected to abduction (40 per cent) and killings (24 per cent), largely during sub-national violence. Sexual violence, including rape and sexual slavery, accounted for 20 per cent of adult female victims. Nearly half (45 per cent) of these cases were recorded in the GPAA during attacks by Nuer and Dinka civil defense groups against the Murle. The Yei area also remained a major hotspot for CRSV (16 per cent of victims) as did Unity, where 15 per cent of victims were recorded. UNMISS has reason to be concerned that women and girls were subjected to sexual violence in cases of abduction as well.

Children were primarily abducted (59 per cent) during sub-national violence and killed (25 per cent) or injured (10 per cent). HRD confirmed that 10 girls were subjected to sexual violence, six of them during sub-national violence.

Despite the overall decrease of civilians subjected to armed violence in Q3, the high number of fighters killed during clashes continued to exemplify the widespread use of lethal force, with at least 250 killed and 370 injured this quarter.

PERPETRATORS

Among the three main categories of alleged perpetrators involved in conflict-related violence, civil defence groups continued to bear the primary responsibility for harming civilians, demonstrating that conventional parties to the conflict do not have a monopoly on the use of violence in South Sudan.

Sub-national violence involving civil defence groups reduced slightly in Q3, accounting for 74 per cent of civilian victims, as compared to 86 per cent in the previous quarter. Although their organization and structure remains complex and rooted in the social fabric, HRD investigations have found that some of these groups are collective entities with a degree of organization, and are capable of carrying out sustained and concerted attacks using military-style tactics.

These groups are often bolstered by the support of national and local actors driven by political or economic interests and/or according to their community kinship. For instance, based on available information, HRD considers that at least 50 of these actors, including spiritual leaders, local and national politicians, and SSPDF and SPLA-IO/RM commanders in their individual capacity,

may have directly or indirectly supported Nuer, Dinka and Murle civil defence groups involved in armed violence in Jonglei and the GPAA in recent months.

The second category of perpetrators causing the most harm to civilians remains the conventional parties to the conflict. Government forces and organized armed groups were responsible for 23 per cent of victims documented in Q3, as compared to 11 per cent in the previous quarter, primarily killings and abductions.

However, as illustrated in the geographic trends section of this report, there were only a limited number of areas marred by violence involving these actors, with most civilian victims attributed to NAS elements conducting forced recruitment operations in Central and Western Equatoria.

Unidentified but related armed elements also continued to account for a small proportion of victims, primarily through opportunistic violence. Comparable to Q2, HRD found that these actors were responsible for three per cent of all victims documented.