

# **SOUTH SUDAN NGO FORUM**

## **Half yearly report covering January to June 2017**

### Disclaimer

This report has been produced by the South Sudan NGO Forum Secretariat. The purpose of this report is to provide a sense of the overall security situation for NGOs working in South Sudan, both at the national level and more locally across the country. It should therefore provide a basis for initial security and safety analysis when planning trips to the field to implement humanitarian activities. The content aims to provide an overview of the security situation in the six month period that could affect NGO operations in various parts of the country. Its intent, therefore, is to directly support NGOs in the delivery of humanitarian assistance to vulnerable South Sudanese people across the country.

The information contained in this report is gained from a variety of sources including international and national organisations, UNDSS, as well as from a range of open media sources. However, specific sources are not named in our reporting.

To the best of our ability, we have tried to produce a report that is objective. While every care has been taken to ensure the content is useful and accurate, not every incident has been confirmed due to the limitations of the resources available. The scope is also limited by sources of information available to us. Where the accuracy of primary information is in doubt we have tried to reflect this in the wording. The report does not provide a comprehensive list of all security incidents that have occurred in the country, rather it focuses on themes and trends.

This report is solely for informational purposes for NGO Forum members in order to aid their safety while delivering humanitarian assistance. It should not be circulated outside of those members or otherwise used for any other purpose.

### **Security environment for NGOs in South Sudan**

Security conditions for NGOs in South Sudan showed no signs of improvement between January and June 2017. The worst incident was the killing of six humanitarians and their driver on the Juba-Bor road in March – highlighting that road safety is one of the most significant security risks. Clashes between the SPLA and opposition groups, particularly in Upper Nile, Jonglei, Unity and Wau, caused several NGO relocations and hampered operations in those areas. Inter-communal issues, in Warrap, Lakes, Jonglei and Central Equatoria, have also created insecure environments for NGOs with increased activity by armed youth. Tensions have also arisen from NGO staffing patterns in some areas of the country. The Forum continued to receive reports of NGO compounds and staff being targeted by thieves from around the country.

There have been frequent reports of road incidents involving NGOs during the first half of this year, particularly in Central and Eastern Equatoria targeting movements to and from Uganda. While many of the incidents were criminal in nature with victims usually unharmed, including incidents believed to be perpetrated by officers of government security organs, the more violent incidents were likely

related to wider issues. The Forum received reports of 37 incidents<sup>1</sup> involving NGO vehicles and humanitarian contracted vehicles between January and June. This number does not include attacks on civilian or government vehicles, nor NGO staff travelling in non-NGO vehicles. It is reasonable to assume there were more incidents involving NGOs - just not reported to the forum. Central and Eastern Equatoria accounted for 20 reported incidents with the Juba-Nimule and Juba-Bor roads being the most dangerous. The aforementioned incident when NGO workers were killed was preceded by several fatal incidents against civilians in the same area of Mangalla, 75 kilometres north of Juba. Tensions between Bor Dinka, Murle and Mundari communities are likely to have played a role in some attacks along the Juba-Bor road but the number of fatal incidents appears to have declined in recent months. Likewise, some incidents along the Juba-Nimule road may have been a tactic to destabilise the government, rather than criminal motives. SPLA-IO forces claimed responsibility for the ambush around Moli on a government convoy in June which resulted in 15 civilians and soldiers dead. The other area where NGOs reported road incidents was around Rumbek, particularly following the May/June surge in inter-communal violence. Road blocks were reportedly set up by youth in a number of areas around Rumbek following the general environment of lawlessness following inter-communal clashes. In March, a health worker was killed in an attack on a convoy which included NGO staff in Yirol East County. The expectation is for roads to continue to be insecure as the capacity and effectiveness of government security organs remains limited, inter-communal violence and revenge cycles are unresolved and the economy shows no signs of improvement.

The safety of national NGO staff members is an ongoing issue. As the conflict continues and number of people receiving regular incomes around the country declines, NGO staff have been the target of robberies, threats and harassment. National staff have received threats in Unity, Jonglei and Upper Nile, typically from local youth who have perceptions of discrimination according to ethnicity in NGO recruitment. The indicators of such tensions remain the same with reports of public harassment, letters from self-appointed youth or community groups, rallies, statements by local authorities and social media chatter. National staff of humanitarian organisations are also having their residential homes robbed with increasingly regularity.

NGOs have not been directly targeted during armed conflicts but the spread of clashes between the SPLA and SPLA-IO and other armed groups remains a security issue for NGOs. Clashes along the West Bank in Upper Nile, northern corridor of Jonglei and in Unity led to several relocations. Local youth, emboldened by localised fighting and an environment of lawlessness particularly in Lakes, reportedly established checkpoints and ambushed several NGO vehicles during the unrest of May and June.

Compound intrusions and robberies continue to be reported around the country with most reports in the period coming from Juba and Rumbek. The worsening economic situation is widely believed to be driving many of these intrusions and the reported incidents indicate that thieves are not only targeting cash and valuables, but increasingly so food stuffs and non-food items. The NGO Forum received 34 reports of NGO office and residential compound intrusions nationwide but there is, however, a degree of under-reporting from Forum members.

## **Political situation**

The political situation in South Sudan between January and June 2017 continues to evolve. The government's National Dialogue was launched while IGAD acknowledged the lagging implementation of the ARCSS. President Salva Kiir relieved Paul Malong of his position as SPLA Chief of General Staff

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<sup>1</sup> This includes successful and attempted ambushes, robberies, or extortion.

while the influence of First Vice President Taban Deng Gai continues to grow with a number of political appointments under his faction of the SPLM-IO. The opposition movements are in the midst of realignments as the emergence of the National Salvation Front (NAS<sup>2</sup>) led by Thomas Cirillo Swaka, has offered an alternative focal point for opposition groups.

After several delays, the National Dialogue<sup>3</sup> was eventually launched in May. Initially announced in December as an initiative to bring peace and reconciliation, the Dialogue was delayed by financial constraints and miscommunications with some Steering Committee members. Questions linger about inclusivity as some oppositions and communities have reported being excluded from the Dialogue while the government insists the onus is on the groups to accept the process and join. The international community welcomed the Dialogue but insisted that it should not distract from implementing the ACRSS. The government's commitment to ACRSS has been questioned as progress falls behind and particularly after President Kiir did not attend the most recent IGAD summit of Heads of States and Government in Ethiopia in June. Barely a month after the Dialogue was launched, IGAD acknowledged that the ACRSS was in need of some additional support and announced the High-Level Revitalisation Forum (HLRF). While most of the international community continues to reiterate support for the ACRSS, there is growing disillusion among South Sudanese and some international partners with it but no alternatives are on the horizon.

President Kiir announced two unilateral ceasefires this year. In March at an IGAD leaders summit and again in May at the launch of the National Dialogue. The first announcement came after SPLA operations around Malakal and was initially welcomed. However, the SPLA continued its operations and effectively took control of the West Bank. The second unilateral ceasefire then preceded a push further into Maiwut County. In both cases, some observers expected the SPLA to pause operations with the onset of the rainy season affecting the logistics of heavy weaponry. This was not the case. The government's attention to the Upper Nile was foreshadowed by President Kiir's declaration of four additional states in January. The new states, bring the number from 28 to 32, redrew large parts of the Upper Nile and only one other state was affected (Western Equatoria). Given the spread of resources dedicated to the Upper Nile operations, and likelihood of continued skirmishes with opposition soldiers, the government may attempt to consolidate control of Upper Nile before pushing into other contested areas.

A number of senior political positions have been replaced in the first six months of the year. President Kiir appointed Taban faction-SPLM-IO officials to the portfolios of Deputy Defence and Veterans Affairs, Labour, Public Service, Human Resources Development and Agriculture and Food Security. A number of state and county level positions have also been appointed to officials under the Taban SPLM-IO banner, particularly in Unity. On 9 May, a Presidential Decree announced that Paul Malong would be replaced by James Ajongo Mawut as the SPLA Chief of General Staff. Malong is reported to have represented a more hard-line approach within the government and the US had reportedly unsuccessfully pushed for him, and others, to be subject to UN sanctions.<sup>4</sup> Despite some misunderstandings in the days following the announcement, Malong remains in Juba.

Meanwhile the opposition movement is becoming an increasingly congested space as groups jostle to attract anti-government supporters. Riek Machar remains in South Africa and seems unlikely to leave soon, which raises questions about his ability to participate in any facilitated negotiations. January saw infighting among the Shilluk with Lam Akol's military wing of the National Democratic Front resoundingly defeated by Johnson Olony's soldiers. Akol however remains an active political

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<sup>2</sup> The acronym NAS is used as it sounds closer to the local pronunciation of an Arabic word for people.

<sup>3</sup> The Government of Sudan had a similar initiative previously  
<http://hewarwatani.gov.sd/eng/index.php/about-the-dialogue.html>

<sup>4</sup> Reuters, 18 November 2016, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-southsudan-security-un-idUSKBN13D238>

voice. Thomas Cirillo Swaka's defection from his position as SPLA Deputy Chief of Staff for Logistics and formation of the NAS has become an alternative rallying point from Machar for the opposition movement. Cirillo fashioned a military wing with a mix of known military commanders, many who defected from the Machar led umbrella, but the strength of NAS's military wing remains unknown. While there has been some coordination between the opposition groups, including several joint statements, the precise nature of the dynamics among the opposition groups leaders remains unknown – and hampered by the fact they are spread across several different countries. Parts of the politically influential SPLM-Former Detainees have however responded positively to the initiatives led by President Museveni of Uganda to resurrect the Arusha Agreement on SPLM reunification.

As the political landscape continued to evolve, conditions for South Sudanese is reportedly becoming more difficult. Outbreaks of cholera were reported around the country, particularly among IDP populations, but did not become a national epidemic. Famine was officially declared in South Sudan (in parts of Unity and Jonglei) in February, the first official declaration anywhere in the world since 2011. While the famine was officially lifted in June, largely due to the humanitarian response, by then an additional 500,000 joined the "at risk" classification. The economy struggles as several issues collide; fuel shortages, non-payment of civil servant wages, difficulties importing goods, increasingly absent government services, the delayed wet season and drought conditions, exodus of business owners, low oil prices and reduced oil production, road insecurity, low foreign capital reserves, more restricted borrowing options for the government and the prolonged conflict have all contributed to challenging economic conditions. This is spreading to affect many civilians who are far from areas of active conflict which has in turn been attributed to the reason for what is anecdotally reported as an increase in criminal activity in Juba and across South Sudan. Ongoing hardships for people far from the conflict will only serve to foster discontent.

### **Greater Upper Nile (Upper Nile, Jonglei & Unity)**

SPLA operations in Upper Nile significantly affected NGOs operating along the West Bank of Upper Nile and into northern Jonglei. The clashes in Upper Nile lasted from January until May with the SPLA managing to push most of the opposition forces under Olony across the border into Sudan. A large IDP population congregated at Aburoc, which received an urgent humanitarian response and by the end of June, most of the IDP population had moved back to their homes, less volatile areas in Upper Nile or onwards to Sudan. The SPLA pushed through to Longochuk in eastern Upper Nile but by the end of June did not push through to Maiwut and Pagak. On the West Bank and in Maiwut County, there was no significant number of opposition casualties as the bulk of forces withdrew from SPLA advances. Towns under SPLA control have experienced a number of seemingly coordinated skirmishes along the West Bank. It is yet to be seen if opposition soldiers pushed out of areas in Maiwut will regroup in a similar fashion or move to consolidate with other SPLA-IO in Jonglei. In Jonglei, the SPLA held its positions in Waat and Ayod but did not launch any further major operations in the area, but neither did opposition forces in the area launch any major attacks. Tensions between the Bor Dinka and Murle have dragged out following several significant cattle raiding incidents. A delegation led by First Vice President Taban Deng brokered a cessation of hostilities but as of the end of June, armed youth from both communities remain restrained but the parts of the cessation agreement remain not implemented. A number of concerning incidents against humanitarian actors occurred in Unity with reports of forced recruitment, threats, harassment and violence. The growth of the Taban faction of the SPLM/A-IO continues to affect the dynamics of the state but Unity remains an area most dependent on humanitarian assistance.

### **Equatorias**

The Equatorias continues to be destabilised by on the ongoing contest between SPLA and SPLA-IO soldiers in the region. SPLA soldiers continue to maintain control over major population centres while the SPLA-IO maintains a presence in the bush areas often in close proximity to towns. While the SPLA-IO has maintained a strategy of harassment rather than all out offensives, some parts of the Equatorias have experienced strong handed interventions by government security. In January, there were SPLA operations in Rimanze (Western Equatoria), targeting opposition elements which reportedly also drew in a number of civilians. Likewise, after a clash with SPLA-IO, SPLA soldiers reportedly attacked the village of Pajok (also known as Parajok) in Eastern Equatoria. This reportedly resulted in multiple civilian casualties and a significant displacement to Uganda. Humanitarian access to large parts of the Equatorias has been hampered by local authorities from both government and opposition. Road safety however has become such an issue that many civilians travel by road less and less. Pro-government irregular militia were believed to be behind some of more violent road ambushes (and attacks on civilians) but they have reportedly returned to their areas of origin. Government security forces have been providing escorts for some road convoys but that in itself creates a target for some armed groups in the area.

## **Bahr El Ghazals**

In the Bahr El Ghazals, Wau and Raja remain the major fault line between government and opposition soldiers. The SPLA and opposition soldiers clashed in April to the south of Wau following a number of inter-communal and cattle-related incidents in Jur River County. 15 civilians were reportedly killed in Wau town following the clashes. Most of the areas to the south of Raja and Wau continue to remain under opposition control. Stability in Northern Bahr El Ghazal was affected by political movements in Juba but overall remains largely calm apart from the occasional issues with migratory cattle herders moving from Abyei. Lakes and Warrap experienced a volatile couple months from April to June. The end of the dry season usually sees an increase in last minute cattle raiding before rain affects to ability to move stolen cattle. This year's wet season was reportedly delayed slightly and incidents of cattle raiding were reportedly motivated by increasing economic difficulties.