

**AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL  
PRESS RELEASE**

AI Index: PRE 01/671/2013  
20 December 2013

## **South Sudan leaders must prevent 'disturbing' spread of violence**

Warring factions in South Sudan must immediately rein in their troops to prevent further attacks on civilians, Amnesty International said amid violence that has erupted across the country.

There is mounting evidence that troops and armed civilians from South Sudan's two largest communities, the Dinka and Nuer, are carrying out targeted killings of civilians based on their ethnic background.

Three United Nations peacekeepers were also reportedly killed on Thursday when armed Nuer youths in Akobo, Jonglei state, forced their way into a peacekeeping base sheltering Dinka civilians.

"Attacks on civilians seeking shelter from fighting is a shocking development in this increasingly vicious conflict," said Netsanet Belay, Africa Director at Amnesty International.

"The fact that these attacks were carried out by armed youths is a disturbing sign that this conflict is moving beyond fighting between soldiers and into widespread inter-communal violence."

Fighting originated in the capital Juba on Sunday but has since spread to other parts of the country including Jonglei, South Sudan's largest state.

Jonglei state capital Bor was seized from government control on Wednesday evening by Nuer defectors from the army led by General Peter Gatdet Yak, who said he had fled the army due to attacks by Dinka soldiers on Nuer civilians in Juba.

There have also been reports of attacks by Nuer soldiers on Dinka civilians in Bor, from where thousands of civilians have fled.

Around 14,000 civilians have sought shelter in the UN compound on the outskirts of the city, while others fled into nearby forests. Meanwhile United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs evacuated 70 humanitarian personnel from Bor to Juba yesterday, with further evacuations scheduled for today.

In Juba 20,000 civilians, including many women and children, have fled their homes to seek refuge in two UN bases.

Local hospitals say that over 500 people have died in the violence, including a high number of civilians killed by rifle fire, in many cases at close range.

There have also been deaths from wounds consistent with artillery weapons.

Local witnesses in Juba told Amnesty International that soldiers had fired indiscriminately at civilians, while tanks had destroyed homes in built-up civilian areas.

"It is clear from the number of casualties reported in South Sudan that all parties must do more to protect civilians," said Netsanet Belay. "Using artillery in densely populated civilian areas is unacceptable and would violate international humanitarian law."

Sources told Amnesty International that hospitals and the mortuary in Juba are currently full.

A doctor from the military hospital told local station Radio Tamazuj that bodies of soldiers and civilians were removed from the hospital in trucks and taken to an unknown location when family members did not show up to identify the deceased.

"The humanitarian situation is a cause for grave concern, and it will only worsen if the violence continues. South Sudan is already straining to cope with the large numbers of injured and displaced people," said Netsanet Belay.

The government has tried to play down claims that the conflict is being driven by fighting between communities.

However, local sources say that soldiers from the national army are defecting along tribal lines.

Amnesty International has received worrying reports of individual soldiers targeting civilians based on their ethnicity, allegedly killing some in their homes.

The organization has received numerous reports of soldiers killing Nuer at checkpoints after identifying them by their distinctive facial markings or their identification cards.

Juba's largest hospital has received at least two cases of civilians from the Nuer community being shot dead after being tied up.

"The fighting between factions of the military is increasingly driven by inter-communal violence, with civilians dragged into the conflict," said Netsanet Belay.

"Leaders on all sides must instruct their forces not to attack civilians, regardless of what community they belong to, and to adhere strictly to their obligations under international humanitarian law. They should also condemn violence carried out by armed civilians and work to diffuse tensions between communities. There must be an immediate halt to acts of violence or language that could further inflame violence between communities."

## **Background**

The origins of the fighting, which began with different units of the Presidential Guard trading fire in Juba on 15 December, remain unclear.

The South Sudan government claims that the violence was sparked by an attempted coup by soldiers loyal to former Vice President Riek Machar, who was dismissed in July 2013 when President Kiir dissolved his entire cabinet.

On 17 December, the Government of South Sudan's official website announced the arrest of 10 former senior officials. It accused them of being behind a foiled coup attempt and announced the government's intentions to arrest five others including Riek Machar.

Machar denies that an attempted coup sparked the conflict, but has since called on the army to remove President Kiir from power. He has accused President Kiir of "inciting tribal and ethnic violence".

President Kiir comes from South Sudan's dominant Dinka community, while former Vice President Machar is from the Nuer community.

Clashes between communities long pre-date South Sudan's independence in July 2011, having caused the displacement of thousands of people and hundreds of civilian casualties.