

**To Permanent Representatives of
Members of the UN Human Rights Council**

Geneva, May 6, 2014

Re: Special Session of the Human Rights Council on the deteriorating human rights situation in South Sudan

Excellency,

The undersigned South Sudanese, African and international non-governmental organizations are writing to appeal to your Government to urgently support the convening of a Special Session of the Human Rights Council (HRC) on the deteriorating human rights situation in South Sudan.

In light of the upsurge of violence that has left thousands of civilians dead, the Human Rights Council must use its mandate to “address situations of violations of human rights, including gross and systematic violations, and make recommendations thereon” to respond to the situation. The UN High Commissioner for the Human Rights, Navi Pillay, at the end of her recently concluded mission to the country, stated that South Sudan is on the verge of catastrophe.¹ The dire and deteriorating situation in South Sudan cannot remain unaddressed and deserves the Council’s immediate attention.

A special session will enable the Council to receive without delay a briefing on the findings of the UN High Commissioner on Human Rights and the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, Adama Dieng, and to decide on the most appropriate response to prevent further violations and abuses, in line with the Council’s mandate. It will allow the Council to be briefed on the gravity of the ongoing crisis, to address the urgent needs for protection of civilians, and to enhance the engagement of the Human Rights Council on the situation in the country.

Serious human rights violations during current conflict

Since the outbreak of conflict on 15 December 2013, South Sudan has faced a dramatic rise in the level of violence and human rights violations and abuses. Soldiers from both parties to the conflict have committed serious violations of international humanitarian law that constitute war crimes, including widespread targeting and killing of civilians, often because of their ethnicity, and massive pillage and destruction of civilian property, according to non-governmental organizations which have documented the situation.

Fighting in the capital Juba on 15 December 2013, which first erupted among soldiers in the Presidential Guard, was immediately followed by acts of killing, torture and unlawful arrests targeted at individuals of the Nuer ethnicity. The hostilities rapidly developed into a full-blown armed conflict, spreading to the town of Bor, where ethnic Dinka were targeted and killed by opposition forces, and to the towns of Bentiu and Malakal where forces from both sides carried out massive destruction of civilian property and unlawful killings. Large swathes of Jonglei, Unity and Upper Nile states have been directly affected by fighting that has been accompanied by large scale looting and destruction of civilian property including of dozens of humanitarian and medical facilities.

The United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) human rights investigators reported that hundreds of civilians were killed on the basis of their ethnicity or nationality when the SPLA in Opposition forces captured

¹<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/Media.aspx>

Bentiu town on 15 and 16 April 2014. Hundreds more were wounded and thousands displaced following the violence. Scores were killed or injured when an armed mob, some in security uniforms and others in civilian clothes, attacked the UNMISS base in Bor on 17 April. These are only the latest in a series of ethnically targeted attacks.

There is evidence of the use of cluster bombs during the current conflict. Credible allegations have been made that both sides have used child soldiers. Targeted killings of civilians, looting, and destruction of civilian property by both government and opposition armed forces in locations across the country have contributed to the displacement of over 950,000 persons within South Sudan, with a further 290,000 people having fled to nearby countries, according to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

We welcome the adoption by the Human Rights Council during its 25th session of a Presidential Statement on South Sudan. However, the Council can and must do more to prevent further serious human rights violations, war crimes and crimes against humanity in the country and to ensure that there is no impunity for the crimes already committed.

In the past, the South Sudanese government has acknowledged concerns over the human rights situation in the country and asked for support in addressing challenges. As highlighted by the recent visit of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Special Advisor on the Prevention of Genocide in South Sudan, the current crisis makes an urgent intervention all the more necessary. **We therefore urge your Government to support the convening without delay of a Special Session of the Human Rights Council.**

We thank you for your attention,

- African Centre for Democracy and Human Rights Studies (ACDHRS)
- Amnesty International
- Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA)
- Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies
- Child Soldiers International
- Citizens for Peace and Justice (CPJ)
- CIVICUS - World Alliance for Citizen Participation
- Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative
- Community Empowerment for Progress Organization (CEPO)
- Conectas Direitos Humanos
- Darfur Relief and Documentation Centre (DRDC)
- East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project
- Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR)
- Greater Upper Nile, Bahr El Gazahal & Equatoria Youth Association (GUBEYA)
- Human Rights Watch
- International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)
- International Service for Human Rights
- Kenya Human Rights Commission
- Rencontre Africaine pour la Défense des Droits de l'Homme
- South Sudan Law Society (SSLS)