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South Sudan: UN Human Rights Council must continue scrutiny of deteriorating human rights situation in South Sudan

The human rights situation in South Sudan remains dire. As of November, around 6 million people were acutely food insecure,¹ including an estimated 28,000 people who experienced catastrophic hunger. 70% of children,² most of them girls, were out of school. The Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan (CHRSS) found that systemic corruption and diversion of state revenues has resulted in the severe underfunding of essential services,³ including health and education. The South Sudanese government must start providing services to, and protecting, its people.

Instead of protecting, authorities continue to use authoritarian practices to oppress or stifle dissent and political opposition, including arbitrary detentions. Critics are harassed, intimidated, threatened, and arbitrarily detained and, in some cases, forcibly disappeared.⁴ For instance, in November, media reported that the National Security Service (NSS) arrested and detained for four days, a comedian after she referred to President Kiir as a “big thief wearing a hat” during a live broadcast on TikTok.⁵

South Sudan’s non-international armed conflict, which erupted in December 2013, continues. It escalated in intensity early 2025 with the CHRSS saying that armed clashes were occurring on a scale not seen since 2017.⁶ A security organization recorded an unprecedented 149 airstrikes

¹ OCHA, South Sudan: Humanitarian Snapshot (November 2025), <https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/south-sudan/south-sudan-humanitarian-snapshot-november-2025>

² UNICEF, South Sudan: Education, <https://www.unicef.org/southsudan/what-we-do/education>

³ Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan (CHRSS), Plundering a Nation: how rampant corruption unleashed a human rights crisis in South Sudan, 16 September 2025, A/HRC/60/CRP.5, <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/hrcouncil/cohrsouthsudan/a-hrc-60-crp-5.pdf>

⁴ “Entrenched repression: systematic curtailment of the democratic and civic space in South Sudan,” UN Doc. A/HRC/54/CRP.6, 5 October 2023, available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/hrc/co-h-south-sudan/index>, in particular paras. 62-177; South Sudan Human Rights Defenders Network (SSHRDN), “This Town will be too small for you: Repression of Civic Space in South Sudan”, September 2025, (on file with SSHRDN).

⁵ Radio Tamazuj, “Comedian arrested over TikTok jibe at President Kiir”, 11 November 2025,

<https://www.radiotamazuj.org/en/news/article/comedian-arrested-over-tiktok-jibe-at-president-kiir>; Radio Tamazuj, “Comedian Amath Jok freed but banned from social media”, 15 November 2025, <https://www.radiotamazuj.org/en/news/article/comedian-amath-jok-freed-but-banned-from-social-media>; Radio Tamazuj, “Comedian Amath Jok rearrested alongside singer and TikToker”, 17 November 2025, <https://www.radiotamazuj.org/en/news/article/comedian-amath-jok-rearrested-alongside-singer-and-tiktoker>

⁶ CHRSS, “South Sudan: UN Commission urges AU and UN Security Council to act decisively as crisis deepens, demanding urgent action and renewed commitment to peace, accountability and a credible transition”, 13 October 2025, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/10/south-sudan-un-commission-urges-au-and-un-security-council-act-decisively>

across South Sudan between 1 February 2025 and 31 January 2026. Whilst airstrikes were conducted in all states except Northern Bahr el Ghazal, the majority took place in Greater Upper Nile. To the best of Amnesty International's knowledge, the opposition forces do not have air power.⁷ The use of aerial bombardments at this scale and for this duration marks a significant change on the government's side in the conduct of hostilities.

Some of these airstrikes have harmed civilians and civilian infrastructure. For instance, on 4 May 2025, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) reported that two helicopter gunships bombed their pharmacy in Old Fangak in Jonglei State the day before and fired at the town, killing seven and injuring 20 others.⁸ On 7 May 2025, media cite eyewitnesses alleging that South Sudan Peoples Defence Forces (SSPDF) helicopter gunships killed six civilians in Mayom County, Unity State.⁹ On 3 December 2025, MSF's medical facility in Pieri town was hit by an airstrike.¹⁰ In the night of 3 to 4 February 2026, an airstrike conducted by government forces hit an MSF hospital in Lankien, Jonglei State, injuring one staff member and destroying the hospital's main warehouse and critical medical supplies.¹¹ A deliberate attack targeting a hospital performing its humanitarian function would violate international humanitarian law and constitute a war crime.

In late January 2026, the SSPDF commenced a military operation against opposition forces in Jonglei State named "Operation Enduring Peace" to reclaim areas captured by opposition forces in the preceding weeks.¹² Days before Operation Enduring Peace was launched, Johnson Olony, commander of the predominantly Shilluk militia, once again fighting on the government's side, was filmed in Poktap, Duk county's administrative headquarters in Jonglei, telling his troops to "spare [no] elderly person, or a chicken, or even a house... so that they don't disturb us every year."¹³ Olony's remarks caused alarm and drew criticism from international actors including the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) and the CHRSS.¹⁴ The government distanced itself from these remarks,¹⁵ yet media report that, on 21 February, fighters allied to government forces, killed more than a dozen people, including children, after binding their hands behind their backs.¹⁶ On 4 March, media reported that the army confirmed these killings by government soldiers which cost the lives of 16 civilians, including eight children and five women.¹⁷ The clashes have displaced around 263,000 people.¹⁸ Media report that "homes have been

⁷ See also, MSF, "South Sudan: Government forces bombarded MSF hospital in Lankien, Jonglei State", 4 February 2026, <https://www.msf-me.org/media-centre/news-and-stories/south-sudan-government-forces-bombarded-msf-hospital-lankien-jonglei>

⁸ MSF, "South Sudan: MSF strongly condemns the deliberate bombing of our hospital in Old Fangak, Jonglei State", 4 May 2025, <https://www.msf.org/msf-condemns-bombing-our-hospital-south-sudan>

⁹ Radio Tamazuj, "Civilian casualties as army bombs Mayom – eyewitnesses", 7 May 2025, <https://www.radiotamazuj.org/en/news/article/civilian-casualties-as-army-bombs-mayom-eyewitnesses>

¹⁰ MSF, "MSF Healthcare Facility Hit during an Airstrike in South Sudan", 5 December 2025, <https://msf.or.ke/news-and-resources/news/msf-healthcare-facility-hit-during-airstrike-south-sudan>

¹¹ MSF, "South Sudan: Government forces bombarded MSF hospital in Lankien, Jonglei State", 4 February 2026, <https://www.msf-me.org/media-centre/news-and-stories/south-sudan-government-forces-bombarded-msf-hospital-lankien-jonglei>

¹² Aljazeera, "South Sudan launches offensive against opposition forces: What to know", 28 January 2026, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2026/1/28/south-sudan-launches-offensive-against-opposition-forces-what-to-know>

¹³ Sudans Post, "Olony orders troops to 'spare no lives' in Jonglei offensive", 24 January 2025, <https://www.sudanspost.com/olony-orders-troops-to-spare-no-lives-in-jonglei-offensive/>. Video of Olony on file with Amnesty International. Olony's presence in Nuer territory likely fuels combative sentiments and fear among Nuer due to past violence and unresolved grievances. Much of the fighting between Shilluk, Nuer and Dinka in Greater Upper Nile has ethnic undertones.

¹⁴ UN, "South Sudan: UN and rights experts warn against risk of mass violence in Jonglei", 26 January 2026, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2026/01/1166831>; CHRSS, "South Sudan: UN Commission warns incitement and command failures risk mass atrocities, ethnic mobilization and further unraveling of peace agreement", 26 January 2026, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2026/01/south-sudan-un-commission-warns-incitement-and-command-failures-risk-mass>

¹⁵ Eyeradio, "Government rejects Gen. Olony's remarks, reaffirms duty to protect civilians in Jonglei", 27 January 2026, <https://www.eyeradio.org/govt-rejects-gen-olonys-remarks-reaffirms-duty-to-protect-civilians-in-jonglei/>

¹⁶ AP, "South Sudan villagers killed after being lured from homes with promise of aid, witnesses say", 3 February 2026, <https://apnews.com/article/south-sudan-jonglei-ayod-killings-3a80749870051de4bcebf2083415dc97>

¹⁷ Eyeradio, "SSPDF regrets civilian killings in Ayod, vows to punish perpetrators", 4 March 2026, <https://www.eyeradio.org/sspdf-regrets-civilian-killings-in-ayod-vows-to-punish-perpetrators/>

¹⁸ OCHA, "South Sudan: Conflict in Jonglei State Flash Update No 11 (as of 6 March 2026)", <https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/south-sudan/south-sudan-conflict-jonglei-state-flash-update-no-11-6-march-2026>;

OCHA, "South Sudan: Conflict in Jonglei State - Flash Update No. 2 (as of 27 January 2026), <https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/south-sudan/south-sudan-conflict-jonglei-state-flash-update-no-2-27-january-2026#:~:text=As%20of%2026%20January%2C%20more%20than%2030%2C000%20people,according%20to%20the%20Relie>

destroyed, civilians killed in the crossfire, and families repeatedly forced to flee.”¹⁹ On 10 March, the UN reported receiving accounts about the “gruesome killings of civilians, the destruction and poisoning of key water sources, and fresh waves of mass displacement”.²⁰

Civilians continue to bear the brunt of these clashes. In December 2025, the government reportedly imposed restrictions on humanitarian access exclusively in parts of opposition-held areas in Jonglei state.²¹ Civilian populations are cut off from medical access, and the fighting has prevented the early delivery of aid.²² The UN’s World Food Programme has warned that 60% of Jonglei’s population is expected to face crisis-level hunger during the upcoming rainy season (April-May).²³

On 3 March, media reported that armed youth allegedly allied to opposition forces, in Ruweng Administrative Area, close to the Sudanese border, killed at least 169 people in a village raid. The main opposition group has denied their involvement.²⁴

Whilst there was some movement towards the establishment of the Commission for Truth, Reconciliation and Healing, albeit with procedural concerns, the process to establish the AU-backed Hybrid Court for South Sudan (HCSS) to investigate and prosecute crimes under international law and other human rights violations committed in the conflict since 2013, remains stalled.²⁵ For years national authorities have actively sought to block this to the extent that, in 2019, they contracted a US-based lobby firm to delay and ultimately block the establishment of the HCSS.²⁶ External pressure, including from the Human Rights Council, is urgently needed to end impunity in South Sudan. The Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan remains the only viable and independent mechanism to collect and preserve evidence in view of future criminal proceedings. To this end the Human Rights Council, should continue its scrutiny on the human rights situation in South Sudan and should, at its ongoing 61st session, extend the mandate of the Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan for two years.

Background

This public statement is based on an oral statement Amnesty International delivered to the Human Rights Council on 27 February 2026, during the interactive dialogue with the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights.

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¹⁹ AP, “Aid agencies in South Sudan decry restricted access as government and opposition troops fight”, 2 February 2026, <https://apnews.com/article/south-sudan-fighting-jonglei-aid-agencies-access-174d9f4bb51b107f497891beb03fe98f>

²⁰ OHCHR, “South Sudan: Türk urges immediate ceasefire as war crimes fears mount”, 10 March 2026, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2026/03/south-sudan-turk-urges-immediate-ceasefire-war-crimes-fears-mount>

²¹ MSF, “South Sudan: MSF hospital bombed by Government forces”, 4 February 2026, <https://msf.org.uk/article/south-sudan-msf-hospital-bombarded-government-forces>

²² AP, “Aid agencies in South Sudan decry restricted access as government and opposition troops fight”, 2 February 2026, <https://apnews.com/article/south-sudan-fighting-jonglei-aid-agencies-access-174d9f4bb51b107f497891beb03fe98f>

²³ AP, “Aid agencies in South Sudan decry restricted access as government and opposition troops fight”, 2 February 2026, <https://apnews.com/article/south-sudan-fighting-jonglei-aid-agencies-access-174d9f4bb51b107f497891beb03fe98f>

²⁴ The Guardian, “South Sudan risks returning to full-blown civil war as violence escalates”, 3 March 2026, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2026/mar/03/south-sudan-risks-return-civil-war-violence-escalates>; BBC, “Death toll in ‘surprise’ attack in South Sudan rises to 178, local official says”, 3 March 2026, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c0mgkvy4wr8o>

²⁵ Amnesty International, “South Sudan: The UN Human Rights Council should renew the mandate for the CHRSS by at least two years”, 20 February 2025, AFR 65/9052/2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr65/9052/2025/en/>

²⁶ Amnesty International, *South Sudan: “Do you think we will prosecute ourselves?” No prospects for accountability in South Sudan*, 7 October 2019, AFR 65/1105/2019, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr65/1105/2019/en/>