

**27th session of the Human Rights Council**



**Address by Ms. Flavia Pansieri  
United Nations Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights**

**Panel debate on South Sudan**

**Geneva, 24 September 2014  
Salle XX, Palais des Nations**

Thank you for this opportunity to speak about the **human rights situation in South Sudan**, which continues to be of grave concern. I commend the Council for taking the initiative to convene this discussion

At the twenty-sixth session, the Human Rights Council requested the High Commissioner to submit a **report** on the situation of human rights to serve as a basis for this panel discussion. The report before you has been prepared in cooperation with the Human Rights Division of the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), and I wish to thank UNMISS for its substantive input.

In June, I alerted you to the deteriorating human rights situation in South Sudan, citing High Commissioner Navi Pillay's **visit to the country in April 2014** which revealed a critical level of violence, including ethnically motivated mass slaughter and gruesome and massive revenge killings.

Similarly, a **report by UNMISS** from May described the damaging impact of the conflict on human rights across the country, including gross violations

committed by all parties to the conflict, such as extra-judicial killings, enforced disappearances, rape, other forms of sexual violence, and attacks on hospitals and UN facilities. Some of these elements may constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity.

During **this reporting period**, the scale and severity of reported violations and abuses of human rights and violations of international humanitarian law declined compared to the first months of the conflict.

However, **civilians have continued to bear the brunt of the ongoing armed conflict** and of their leaders' failure to stop the fighting.

The Government and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army in Opposition (SPLM/A-IO) have continued to **mobilize forces and amass weapons** in an effort to consolidate their respective power bases – and to undermine the protection of civilians and life-saving work of humanitarian agencies and UNMISS.

The numbers of civilians **displaced** across and from South Sudan has continued to rise, with no likelihood that people will return to their homes soon. Since the conflict began in December 2013, some 1.5 million people have been internally displaced inside the country and a reported 400,000 people have sought refuge in neighbouring Kenya, Uganda, Ethiopia and the Sudan.

The country is experiencing extreme food insecurity and facing a possible **famine**. On 6 August 2014, the UN declared that the South Sudan aid operation is the biggest of any single country – but that it still falls far short in the face of overwhelming needs.

The reports of **killings and wounding of civilians** by all parties to the armed conflict and other armed groups have continued unabated.

So have incidents of **conflict-related sexual violence** - not only in the context of the hostilities but also in cyclical inter-communal clashes.

Arbitrary arrests, prolonged detentions and lack of fair trial guarantees persist, and we continue to receive allegations of torture and ill-treatment in custody.

These and other serious challenges facing South Sudan's already **weak administration of justice system** have been exacerbated by the conflict.

As concerns **freedom of expression and access to information, as well as freedom of the press**, South Sudan's transitional constitution provides for their protection. Yet the reporting period saw a steep deterioration in the respect for these rights, with incidents of detention of journalists, harassment of civil society, confiscation of newspapers, censorship of political news programming and closure of radio stations.

Excellencies,

The report before you concludes with several **recommendations** addressed to the participants of this discussion, the parties to the conflict, the UN and the African Union.

Among them is the need to **step up efforts to protect civilians and to ensure accountability** for crimes and human rights violations.

UNMISS has opened its gates to civilians who fled the violence. Around 100,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) are now seeking shelter in **Protection of Civilians (PoC)** sites within UNMISS compounds – an entirely unprecedented influx in the history of the UN, which presents the Mission with unique challenges. Insecurity in these sites is becoming a major concern, as a result of violence and disorderly conduct by some IDPs. In addition, some IDPs who allegedly committed crimes in PoC sites have been held for too long periods since there are no functioning civilian justice institutions in conflict

areas that they can be handed over to. UNMISS is doing its best to address these complex concerns.

Up to now, neither the Government nor the SPLM/A-IO has demonstrated any real interest in ensuring **accountability** for widespread violations and abuses committed in the course of the conflict. Despite numerous commitments by both parties to hold perpetrators to account, no concrete steps have been taken by either of them to indicate that they had begun to seriously pursue justice and redress for victims. The Government has announced various measures to hold perpetrators to account, but none of these measures meet the minimum requirements of accountability under international human rights law.

A **legacy of impunity** for serious human rights violations in the past has contributed to the current crisis in South Sudan. To ensure sustainable peace, security and development in South Sudan, it is vital that perpetrators of human rights abuses and violations of international humanitarian law and other international crimes be held accountable – and that the measures taken to ensure accountability meet international standards of independence, transparency and impartiality. South Sudan should not repeat the mistakes of the past.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The **international community** must put pressure on the country's leaders to prevent further violations by forces under their command and to make it clear that anyone committing crimes and human rights violations will be arrested and prosecuted

We welcome the fact that the Security Council has recognized the importance of human rights promotion and protection in the current conflict and identified human rights monitoring and reporting as one of the four **priority areas for UNMISS**. OHCHR will continue to support UNMISS Human Rights in its

efforts to monitor, investigate, verify and report regularly and publicly on the human rights situation in South Sudan.

I hope that your discussion today will pave the way for **better strategies** to address the human rights situation in South Sudan – around which all the stakeholders gathered here today can unite.

Thank you.

[1023 words or 7 mins]

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