



United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS)

Media & Spokesperson Unit
Communications & Public Information Office

PRESS RELEASE

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UNMISS uncovers human rights abuses during recent escalation of fighting in greater Upper Nile region

The United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) has found evidence of widespread human rights abuses allegedly committed by the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) and associated armed groups during the recent escalation of fighting in Unity State.

UNMISS staff members interviewed 115 victims and eyewitnesses from the Unity state counties of Rubkona, Guit, Koch, Leer and Mayom where the SPLA launched a major offensive against armed opposition forces starting in late April 2015.

The survivors of these attacks reported that SPLA and allied militias from Mayom County carried out a campaign against the local population that killed civilians, looted and destroyed villages and displaced over 100,000 people.

Some of the most disturbing allegations compiled by UNMISS human rights officers focused on the abduction and sexual abuse of women and girls, some of whom were reportedly burnt alive in their dwellings.

“This recent upsurge (in fighting) has not only been marked by allegations of killing, rape, abduction, looting, arson and displacement, but by a new brutality and intensity,” says the UNMISS report. “The scope and level of cruelty that has characterized the reports suggests a depth of antipathy that exceeds political differences.”

UNMISS sought to visit the sites of the alleged atrocities to verify the allegations but were routinely denied access by the SPLA, and they also encountered logistical obstacles.

Since the report was drafted, UNMISS human rights officers visited two additional sites of alleged atrocities and conducted more interviews of eyewitnesses and victims. The information gathered from those visits and interviews provided further corroboration of the earlier accounts.

As per usual practice, a copy of the report was furnished to South Sudan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs ten days before its release, but government officials have yet to comment on its findings. A copy has also been furnished to the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army In Opposition who have yet to comment.

The SPLA's official spokesperson has dismissed allegations of human rights abuses committed by government forces in the past, but he has also welcomed investigations of such accusations.

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“We call on the SPLA to fulfill this commitment and allow our human rights officers unfettered access to the sites of these reported violations,” said Ellen Margrethe Loej, the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for South Sudan and head of UNMISS. “Revealing the truth of what happened offers the best hope for ensuring accountability for such terrible violence and ending the cycle of impunity that allows these abuses to continue.”

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