

UN report details killings, rapes in South Sudan as peace deal is questioned

by [Fredrick Nzwili](#) in the [April 13, 2016](#) issue

Churches and mosques have been centers of “searing” human rights abuses in South Sudan, where a civil war has been raging since 2013, according to a United Nations report.

President Salva Kiir’s government forces have been fighting with rebels led by his former deputy Riek Machar. The two sides have committed terrible atrocities, according to the report published in March.

Government spokesman Ateny Wek Ateny denied the charges leveled in the report, which describes civilians being killed in cruel ways. It also provides details of 1,300 women being raped from April to September 2015.

“Many civilians have been attacked and killed in their homes, as well as in places of shelter, including churches, mosques, hospitals, and in the United Nations bases,” said Zeid Ra’ad al-Hussein, the UN human rights chief.

Some 60 cattle herders suffocated to death while being detained in a container at an abandoned Catholic church compound in the town of Leer in October.

“Witnesses reported seeing the men being rounded up and brought to the container; others reported seeing the container being guarded by an SPLA [Sudan People’s Liberation Army] soldier at the Catholic Church compound,” al-Hussein said. “All the men, with the exception of one survivor, died within one or two days.”

Thousands have been killed in the conflict, and 1.5 million have been displaced, but the conflict still does not attract international attention, according to al-Hussein.

South Sudan is the world’s newest country, having declared independence from Sudan in 2011.

The war has carved most of the country along ethnic lines, among President Kiir’s Dinka people, Machar’s Nuer people, and several other ethnic groups. Contested areas, such as the strategic oil hub of Malakal, have become centers of violence.

In February government troops burned down most of a United Nations camp outside Malakal that was home to many Nuer and Shilluk people.

Peter Deng, who was made homeless a second time by the destruction, recognized the government soldiers in the camp from their uniforms.

“They started coming, burning the shelters,” he said.

Deng saw it as another example of the South Sudanese government’s attempt to grab land from the Shilluk tribe, South Sudan’s third-largest ethnic group, which has lived in this oil-rich region for centuries.

Many in these war-fatigued areas wonder how effective a peace deal signed last August will be. What is readily apparent in talking to the Nuer and Shilluk survivors of the UN camp attack is that they do not trust that Kiir’s government can fairly implement the deal. In some circles, the implementation of the peace deal could actually cause conflict.

“The peace agreement, which is essentially an elite pact at the top, will not positively effect ordinary citizens,” said Jok Madut of the Sudd Institute, a think tank in South Sudan. “Various conflicts have erupted in [parts of the country] that are directly or indirectly related to the peace agreement, whether it’s because people don’t feel included in the agreement, or think the agreement is against them.”

Madut noted that peace agreements that end civil wars rarely resolve all issues at once, and it is just as important to try to achieve reconciliation and public support at the ground level.

“It will take ten years of reconciliation, but it needs to be started right away,” he said. —Religion News Service; *The Christian Science Monitor*

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