

Aid agencies suspend operations as church leaders work to end conflict in South Sudan

by [Fredrick Nzwili](#) in the [June 10, 2015](#) issue

Amid killings, rapes, and abductions, the humanitarian agency World Vision indefinitely suspended its operations in South Sudan's Unity State.

Other aid agencies have taken similar action, including Doctors Without Borders, which evacuated international staff under threat of attack at a hospital in Unity State that was burned and looted last year.

On May 13, gunmen torched towns in some of the heaviest fighting in the 17-month-long conflict in the predominantly Christian country.

World Vision partnered with the United Nations to distribute shelter materials and other emergency relief supplies, including food, water and sanitation services, and mosquito nets.

In addition, the organization's nutrition programs target children under age five.

Samar Abboud, the group's acting national director, said aid workers could no longer work in Unity State, which is in the north central part of the nation.

"We estimate that more than 10,000 children under five face malnutrition and nearly 300,000 throughout Unity State are left in need of aid," he said.

Africa's newest nation returned to conflict in December 2013 after a dispute in the ruling party, the Sudan People's Liberation Movement. Since then, fighting between President Salva Kiir's government forces and rebels loyal to former vice president Riek Machar has left more than 1.5 million people displaced. Unity State is Machar's home state.

"We, the church leaders, have consistently stated that there is no moral justification and no excuse to continue fighting and killing," said Peter Gai Lual, head of the Presbyterian Church from Malakal, in the nation's northeast, and chair of the South Sudan Council of Churches, in a World Council of Churches statement. "We are ambassadors for peace and mandated by God to reconcile."

The WCC has partnered with Sudanese churches for more than 40 years. In April, the WCC and the South Sudan Council of Churches convened 20 church leaders and representatives from South Sudan and Ethiopia, along with related agencies, in Addis Ababa, to discuss the conflict in South Sudan, the collapse of peace talks, and ways forward, according to the WCC website.

“In many parts of the country there is virtual anarchy, with no effective government,” the gathered church leaders said in a statement. “The culture of revenge reigns supreme, and the longer the war continues, the more deeply this culture will be ingrained.” —Religion News Service; added sources

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