

## Protection Situation Update: Outbreak of Conflict in Juba (08 July – 21 July 2016)

### Introduction

At around 5pm on 08 July, fighting erupted in Juba between members of the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) and the SPLA-In Opposition (IO). Over a period of four days, hundreds of people were killed, tens of thousands of people were displaced, and millions of dollars' worth of humanitarian assistance was looted or destroyed. This Situation Update provides an overview of the first two weeks of the crisis and the protection impact on the civilian population.

### Context and Chronology

The first week of July was marked by growing tensions between SPLA and IO troops. A series of small clashes and retaliatory attacks between the two groups finally led to an outbreak of hostilities on the evening of Thursday, 07 July at a checkpoint in the Gudele neighborhood in which at least five people were killed. The following day, heavy checkpoints were visible throughout the city, and at 5pm small arms fire erupted while President Salva Kiir and First Vice President Riek Machar were delivering a press conference. The exact trigger for this Friday clash remains disputed, but almost immediately reports of violence began emerging from multiple locations around the city.

Saturday, 09 July was largely calm and staff of humanitarian organizations attempted to take stock of new displacement and immediate needs. New arrivals were noted at the UN House Protection of Civilians Sites (POCs) and the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) base in Tomping, and UNMISS and humanitarians worked to try to accommodate them. On Sunday morning however, fighting resumed throughout Juba and continued until the evening of Monday, 11 July. Heavy artillery, as well as tanks and helicopter gunships were used in the fighting and caused significant harm to civilians and civilian infrastructure.

### Violence against Civilians

On Sunday, 10 July, the Protection Cluster began receiving worrying reports of violence against civilians. In many cases civilians did not appear to be the direct target of attacks, but rather were affected as a byproduct of clashes between the two groups (both sides fought from and fired into residential areas for example, disregarding the civilian presence but seemingly not targeting them).

In addition to this however, the Protection Cluster received a smaller number of reports of deliberate targeting of civilians. House to house searches reportedly took place in at least five neighborhoods in Juba, with soldiers asking questions in their local language to "test" the ethnicity of the person. Nuer men and women appear to have been particularly targeted, and would reportedly be killed (or raped and then killed, in the case of women) on the spot if they were discovered. Nuer with tribal markings were particularly vulnerable, and those who could not make it to one of the UN Sites were reportedly forced into hiding. These house to house searches do not appear to have reached the scale or level of organization that occurred in 2013, but are nevertheless extremely concerning.

The Protection Cluster was also deeply alarmed by reports of SPLA soldiers attempting to block civilians from reaching the UN bases for protection. At the UNMISS base in Tomping, SPLA soldiers were stationed in front of each main gate and reportedly shot at approaching civilians.

To date, there is no reliable estimate of the number of casualties. The media reported that around 200 combatants may have been killed in the first night of fighting on Friday, 08 July, however given the intensity of the clashes on Sunday and Monday 10-11 July, it is likely that the total figures are much higher. Many bodies could still be seen in the streets on 15 and 16 July, and the South Sudan Red Cross reported being overwhelmed with the numbers of requests received for collection. Humanitarian

organizations have exhausted their supply of body bags and are currently awaiting additional shipments. It is unclear whether there is a record of the total number of bodies buried to date.

### **Gender Based Violence**

During the first days of fighting, very few cases of sexual violence were reported. This was likely due to a combination of factors, both related to conflict dynamics, as well as the availability of services and a probable reluctance among many survivors to report incidents or seek help. As the situation began to stabilize however, humanitarian partners began receiving more reports of incidents and increased numbers of people seeking post-assault medical care. A significant spike in reported cases was observed on 18 July when large numbers of women began leaving UN House to travel to markets in town in search of food. General food distributions (GFD) in both the POCs in UN house were overdue, and many of the new arrivals had arrived without any supplies. In desperation, women were forced to walk through heavily militarized areas to reach a road where they could access transport.

The characteristics of the sexual violence reported around UN House are highly concerning. Many of the incidents have reportedly involved multiple perpetrators in uniform, and in some instances women have been abducted just outside the gates of the POC. A large majority of incidents have happened in the so-called Checkpoint area, and the Protection Cluster is deeply concerned about reports of women being held captive and used as sex slaves. At least two victims of sexual violence are known to have died as a result of their injuries.

The Protection Cluster has advocated with UNMISS to increase patrolling in the most affected areas, and UNMISS is now doing multiple road patrols per day. The Protection Cluster hopes that UNMISS will expand this to foot patrols, as many of the highest risk areas cannot be reached by vehicle. Additionally, until the situation stabilizes the Protection Cluster urges UNMISS to open the main gate to IDPs so that they can avoid the dangerous bush areas. Protection actors are ready to work jointly with UNMISS in making arrangements for internal bussing within the UN compound so that IDPs do not disturb UNMISS property or operations.

Humanitarian organizations have worked to scale up their prevention and response activities relating to sexual violence. Gender based violence (GBV) caseworkers are available in both POCs at UN House to deliver case management and psychological first aid, and there are medical staff trained to deliver clinical management of rape (CMR). At UNMISS Topping, there is likewise an identified GBV focal point who can make referrals to the IOM clinic for CMR. Staff in both locations are increasing outreach services to encourage women to seek treatment within 72 hours if they are exposed to sexual violence.

### **Child Protection**

During the first days of the crisis, community members reported very high levels of family separation. Many children had become separated from their families during flight, but as soon as the clashes reduced, large numbers were able to reunify without the support of humanitarian actors. As of 21 July, 264 new cases of unaccompanied, separated, or missing children had been registered in Juba, 34 of which have since been reunified.

Psychosocial support needs among the entire population are high, but particularly among children. Child Protection actors have reached over 2,300 children with psychosocial support activities, but many more mothers are still reluctant to allow their children to participate in organized activities for fear that they will become separated if there is renewed fighting. In UNMISS Topping, new arrivals are currently occupying the child-friendly space, which has created further challenges in providing support.

Nevertheless, child protection actors are working together with the education sector to look at creative options for supporting psychosocial support and a return to normalcy. Together they have organized informal learning spaces, and have supported recreation activities outside of shelters rather than in collective areas.

### **Psychosocial distress**

As highlighted above, the level of psychosocial distress among the population is noticeably high. Psychosocial support programs for children and survivors of GBV were implemented as soon as active fighting ceased, and protection partners are now working to expand this support to other members of the community. Partners are also working to organize diffusing sessions for national staff members, as many teachers, outreach workers, and medical staff have themselves been exposed to highly traumatic experiences. Many of these individuals will then be trained on delivering psychological first aid to others to expand the network of support.

### **Mine Action**

Between 08 and 21 July, Mine Action partners surveyed and cleared 15 unexploded ordnance (UXO) and explosive remnants of war (including rocket propelled grenades, mortars, and other projectiles) from locations around Juba. Mine Action partners prioritized areas that would be most critical to the safety of the civilian population, as well as to the safe and secure delivery of life-saving assistance by humanitarian partners. This included surveying and clearing a number of UXOs and ERWs that fell inside the UNMISS compound, POCs, the WFP/Jebel area, as well as civilian areas in Gudele. Mine Action partners also assisted with searches in the POCs to ensure that the sites retained their civilian character. Together with education and child protection partners, Mine Action partners also conducted mine risk education and proactively disseminated safety messaging and contact details for reporting suspicious hazards.

### **Displacement**

In the first days of fighting, displacement within Juba was significant. Approximately 40,000 people fled to churches, schools, and UN and NGO bases seeking protection. On Tuesday, 12 July, many of these people started to return to their homes, particularly from the urban sites. While people reported that they did not feel completely safe, they said that they could not go any longer without food. Humanitarians distributed some high protein biscuits, but were reluctant to do a full food distribution for fear of creating a pull factor. By Thursday, 14 July, nearly all of the urban/collective centers had emptied.

On Thursday, 14 July, significant numbers of people also started moving towards the Ugandan border. The Nimule crossing was reopened on 16 July after having been closed for days, and thousands of people Juba, the Equatorias, and even Jonglei surged across the border – including many national staff members of NGOs and UN agencies. Between 07 and 21 July, an estimated 26,500 South Sudanese had crossed into Uganda, including 8,337 crossing during a single day on 21 July.

A second wave of displacement into UNMISS Topping began at the same time as the outflow to Uganda. Many people cited fears that their neighborhoods were emptying out and they would be left isolated and increasingly vulnerable. The UNMISS Topping population went from 4,000 on Sunday 10 July, to 1,200 on Tuesday 12 July, back up to 4,000 by Sunday 17 July. Combined with the more than 6,000 people who fled to UN house, the total new displacement into UN bases stands at over 10,000.

### **UN House**

The current situation in UN House remains extremely challenging. The two IDP sites, POC 1 and POC 3 were already overcrowded even before the recent crisis. The influx of an additional 6,800 people has placed a further strain, particularly in regard to shelter space, WASH facilities, and communal services (schools, medical clinics, etc). Many of the IDPs are staying in the communal areas, which has further inhibited the restart and delivery of core services.

One of the greatest challenges in UN House is the issue of registration. An estimated 20,000 unregistered people were living in the POC prior to the recent crisis, and humanitarians cannot deliver assistance (including much needed food) to the 6,800 new arrivals without also serving the previously unregistered population. As such, a new blanket registration needs to be undertaken. Discussions with UNMISS about this are ongoing.

## UNMISS Topping

Despite having housed IDPs at the start of the 2013 crisis, UNMISS Topping was not designed to host IDPs and there were almost no humanitarian supplies prepositioned at the site at the outbreak of fighting on 08 July. Humanitarians had held a contingency planning meeting on 07 July and had agreed to preposition some basic materials, but unfortunately this could not be completed before the fighting began. On 08 July when there were only 63 IDP arrivals, UNMISS was able to provide water, light provisions, and some basic shelter. As the number started to rise however, UNMISS could not sustain this.

When humanitarians were able to begin moving on Tuesday and Wednesday 12 and 13 July, supplies were urgently brought to Topping. A new challenge arose however on the type of support that could be provided: in an effort to avoid the establishment of another POC Site, UNMISS did not permit the distribution of tarps or shelter materials, or the digging of more lasting hygiene facilities. UNMISS instead prioritized relocating the IDPs in Topping to UN House, which was originally planned to begin on Saturday 16 July, and then was postponed.

While humanitarians recognize the need to avoid creating POC Sites if at all possible, the challenges in relocating people from Topping to UN House are significant. The UN House POCs are already overcrowded, and there is limited space to put shelters for an additional 4,000 people. A number of suspected cholera cases have been reported in UNMISS Topping and UN House, and relocating the IDPs could potentially further exacerbate an outbreak in UN House. Transporting IDPs through town to UN House is also exceedingly dangerous, particularly given that the government has indicated that it believes a large number of IO fighters may be among the displaced population. There are likewise people in Topping who had previously been forced to leave UN House due to tensions between the communities there and who may be unable to return.

Humanitarians are grateful that UNMISS has been accommodating of these concerns thus far and we strongly recommend that the relocation is only undertaken when the safety and dignity of IDPs can be ensured (including after adequate security arrangements have been made for the transportation, and after adequate basic services at UN House are established). In the meantime, it is important that IDPs at UNMISS Topping are able to live in safety and dignity. Partners are appreciative that UNMISS has now allowed basic communal shelters to be constructed, however protection partners report ongoing challenges for IDPs in accessing the site. The main gates are only opened to IDPs twice a day (from 9-10am and 4-6pm), and many women who leave to collect food are subsequently stuck outside for six hours. Given the ongoing security risks, the Protection Cluster urges UNMISS to at minimum reopen the gates for an hour in the middle of the day to allow IDPs to re-enter.

## Elsewhere in South Sudan

The Protection Cluster continues to maintain a close watch on other areas of South Sudan. New clashes have been observed in Wau, Leer, and the Equatorias, though it is not clear to what extent these are related to the macro level conflict. The deterioration and evacuation of staff from Leer is particularly discouraging given the extensive efforts that had been made by humanitarians over the past six months to reestablish programming.

There have been new population influxes into the Bentiu POC as well, which is also a concerning trend. Humanitarians had been able to support many people to return home through the “Beyond Bentiu” strategy, but the increased insecurity has largely compromised these movements. Additionally, there have been reports of White Army mobilization in Jonglei and suggestions of possible attacks on Bor and Malakal, but to date there have not yet been any movements in these directions. All partners and coordination structures in the field have been encouraged to undertake contingency planning.

## Recommendations

- Parties to the conflict should commit to upholding the current ceasefire and should refrain from deliberate provocations of the other party. All sides should uphold their obligations under international humanitarian, human rights, and criminal law to protect civilians in times of conflict, and should respect the civilian character of the POC sites and other locations inhabited by civilians.
- To reduce the risk of sexual violence against IDPs, UNMISS should undertake foot patrols in the known hazardous areas near UN House (particularly between the main gate and the POC 1 gate, and along the eastern and southern passage to POC 3). UNMISS should further allow women to enter through the main gate until the threat reduces (humanitarians can arrange internal bussing).
- UNMISS should allow humanitarian partners to conduct a full registration at UN House to ensure assistance (including food) can be provided to those in need.
- No relocation should be undertaken from Topping to UN House until the safety and dignity of IDPs can be ensured. This includes developing a comprehensive plan for security en route, as well as alternative options for those IDPs who are unable to relocate due to dynamics in UN House.
- Until a relocation to UN House is completed, UNMISS should ensure that humanitarians are permitted to deliver services within Topping according to minimum standards, and that IDPs are able to access the site safely and with dignity. UNMISS should urgently change the gate hours to include an extra hour in the middle of the day to prevent IDPs from being trapped outside.
- Those responsible for attacks against civilians should be held accountable and brought to justice. The African Union should consider expediting the creation of the Hybrid Court for this purpose.

25 July 2016

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