



Protection Cluster Update: Conflict displacement in Jonglei

5 May 2017

Following incidents of intense fighting between government and opposition forces in the newly established state of Bieh (north western Jonglei), commencing on 13 April 2017 and continuing to date intermittently, there have been reports of large scale civilian displacement and reports from survivors reaching Akobo of many civilian casualties in the area including children, women and men.

Fighting commenced when reportedly government forces advanced from Yuai town to the Waat area allegedly launching attacks in the areas of Pulchuol, Pieri, Mwotot, Waat and Walgak, according to people who arrived in Akobo from these areas.

People fleeing these areas report alleged initial indiscriminate shelling and shooting by government forces and cross-fire from opposition forces, causing deaths of civilians, including women and children. Scenes of chaos have been described as people fled in all directions during attacks, resulting further in cases of missing family members, including children and vulnerable persons, and the destruction of properties and looting during the fighting.

Unverified estimates are that up to 100,000 civilians have been displaced and many are reported to feel trapped with fear of further attacks by government forces from one side and alleged harassment and looting of civilians by armed youth east and south east of Waat of those civilians trying to reach Akobo or Ulang for safety and those trying to seek asylum in Ethiopia. In addition to insecurity, the absence of drinking water on the 2-3 day walk from the Waat area to Akobo and lack of money to hire vehicles for the journey are reportedly preventing civilians from reaching this area.

The majority of the IDPs arriving in Akobo are those with the means to hire transport and move in convoy for added safety, risking ambush by armed youth. However IDPs are increasingly risking the 2-3 day journey on foot through the bush, moving in groups for an added sense of safety, despite the security risk including reported attacks by armed youth, looting, hunger and thirst. Those who arrived by foot stated they chose to risk the journey due to a greater fear of attacks by government soldiers had they remained where they were.

To date 900 IDP households have been registered in Akobo town by Oxfam since 17 April 2017 from the Yuai, Mwotot, Waat, Walgak and surrounding areas. The number is increasing each day. There are 80 to 100 refugees per day reported to be crossing into Ethiopia by authorities however access constraints in Ethiopia are preventing facilitation of movement at border entry points where immediate humanitarian support is needed.

IDPs and the host community in Akobo also report fear of attack by government forces and fear they will be forced to seek asylum in Ethiopia if government forces reach Akobo town where there is a current civilian population of approximately 63,000, many of this population are IDPs who arrived since the start of the 2013 conflict in South Sudan.

NGOs are currently responding to humanitarian needs in Akobo, although at a reduced capacity due to insecurity whilst the needs are increasing.

For protection; IMC, Intersos, Nile Hope, Save the Children and Oxfam are responding to GBV and child protection needs and distribution of emergency food and NFIs for the most vulnerable persons.

The Protection Cluster is calling for:



- An immediate cease fire by all armed elements to allow for peace negotiations, unhindered freedom of movement, the protection of civilians and safe access for humanitarians to provide urgent lifesaving assistance and response to all humanitarian needs