

## Flash Update

### Protection Situation in Southern and Central Unity (September – October 2015)

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*In its 25 September update, the Protection Cluster provided an overview of key protection concerns and human rights violations reported in Leer, Mayendit and Koch Counties between May and the end of August. According to reports, an estimated 1,000 people were killed, 1,300 raped, and 1,600 abducted during this period alone. Unfortunately, violence continued in the weeks that followed. This briefing note provides an update on the situation in affected counties in September and October.*

#### **Overview**

Since the signing of the *Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan* in late August, the Protection Cluster has received reports of violence in over twenty locations in southern and central Unity State. The relative calm witnessed in mid-September has largely evaporated, and communities have been forced to either return to their places of hiding or make long and perilous journeys to safer areas. As of 3 October, all static humanitarian operations had been suspended in Leer and Koch Counties, leaving an estimated 250,000<sup>1</sup> people without humanitarian assistance.

#### **New Violence and Targeting of Civilians**

Over a three week period between 4 and 22 October, at least 80 civilians were reportedly killed in Leer County. Among these were at least 57 children, 29 of whom drowned while fleeing attacks.<sup>2</sup> Widespread use of sexual violence was also reported, with contacts on the ground reporting over 50 cases of rape. IDPs further reported that Government forces shot into swamps at fleeing civilians, burned houses, and abducted women and children.

This new wave of violence began in Leer and Koch Counties in the last week of September, with clashes reported between Opposition and Government forces. The Opposition reportedly took control of Leer and Koch towns briefly on 2 and 4 October respectively, before they were recaptured by Government forces later those same days. Violence continued in Leer County during subsequent weeks, with clashes ongoing at the time of writing.

On 10 October, forces allegedly affiliated with the Government attacked Buaw, an area perceived to be an Opposition stronghold in Koch County. Government troops left the following day, but in light of the ongoing tensions and the lack of essential food and medicines, many civilians reported that they would try to move to the Bentiu Protection of Civilians (POC) site. Following the attack on Buaw, Government forces moved into Rubkona County, where the destruction of some towns was reportedly severe.

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<sup>1</sup> OCHA baseline population figures, sourced from the National Bureau of Statistics. Estimated baseline population is 135,205 for Koch County and 115,798 for Leer County.

<sup>2</sup> Data collected from a variety of sources, including human rights reports, local authorities, operational agencies and the media. Whenever possible, information was verified by contacts on the ground, although some of the data could not be independently cross-checked.

## **Forced Displacement**

IDPs have continued to flee southern and central Unity State into nearby counties and to the Bentiu POC site. In September and October to date, nearly 6,000 people have arrived into the Bentiu POC site, including 720 who arrived in a period of four days alone following the clashes in Rubkona County in the second week of October. Displacement was also observed into Rumbek town in neighbouring Lakes State, where 172 IDPs, most of whom are from Mayendit and Panyijiar Counties, were registered by partners on 7 October. About 70 per cent of the IDPs who were registered are children. As a result of this new wave of violence, it is estimated that nearly 1,200 children are unaccompanied and separated in southern and central Unity State.

## **Impact on Humanitarian Operations and Staff**

At least one NGO staff member has been killed during this new wave of violence, bringing the total number of humanitarians killed in southern and central Unity since April to at least 13. On 3 October, the last two remaining international humanitarian organizations working in Leer County, MSF and ICRC, were forced to suspend their operations and evacuate their staff. Another group of NGOs that had planned an interagency return mission in late September had to cancel their assessment and suspend the resumption of their programming. The volatility of the security situation in Koch County has likewise prevented static humanitarian operations. While a humanitarian response is underway in the south of Mayendit County, activities in northern Mayendit are limited due to insecurity in the surrounding areas.

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For more information, please contact [protectionclustersouthsudan@gmail.com](mailto:protectionclustersouthsudan@gmail.com)