South Sudan

Three and a half years of conflict have dramatically altered the trajectory of the world’s newest nation, as the devastating effects of the war which erupted in December 2013 have deepened and spread across the whole country. The past year has seen particularly troubling developments, as famine was declared in parts of South Sudan, displacement significantly increased, and the UN Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide warned of a strong risk of violence escalating along ethnic lines, with the potential for genocide.

South Sudan became independent from Sudan in 2011 and, despite significant challenges as one of the least developed countries in the world, South Sudanese were buoyant as Africa’s longest running civil war in Sudan had finally come to an end. The conflict which erupted in December 2013 reflected a split within the ruling Sudan People’s Liberation Movement party (SPLM), but quickly escalated into a national crisis, dividing communities along ethnic fault lines. A peace agreement, brokered by the regional Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), was signed in August 2015, and in May 2016 a Transitional Government of National Unity was formed. However, in July 2016 conflict erupted once again in Juba, and 2017 has seen escalating conflict and heightened tensions.
South Sudan’s crisis in numbers

- 7.5 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance, with 6 million severely food insecure (out of a population of approximately 12 million)

- 1.8 million people have sought refuge in neighbouring countries (Bidibidi in neighbouring Uganda has become the world’s largest refugee camp) with 2 million displaced internally. Women and children make up more than 85 per cent of the refugees arriving in neighbouring countries.

- Disease outbreaks, including cholera, kala-azar and measles, with more than 2 million cases of malaria reported between January and November 2016 and at least 246 deaths from cholera since the first case was reported in June 2016.

- At least 82 humanitarian workers have lost their lives, and access restrictions and operational impediments have worsened.

- Continued attacks against civilians and human rights violations, including widespread sexual violence.

- The economic crisis has escalated as hyperinflation hit record levels in 2016, with the South Sudanese Pound reaching all time lows while the cost of living has risen exponentially.

- More than 1.17 million children aged 3 – 18 have lost access to education due to conflict and displacement, while about 31% of schools have suffered attacks. An adolescent girl is three times more likely to die in childbirth than to complete primary school and 76% of school aged girls are not in school.

The UK has an important and influential role to play as the second-largest bilateral donor to South Sudan and a member of the “Troika” (along with the US and Norway) which helped broker the Comprehensive Peace Agreement and continues to play a significant role in supporting the current mediation. In 2017, the UK is deploying 400 support troops to the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), principally medics and engineers.

Recommendations

We urge the UK government to:

**Address the root causes of conflict**

- Invest in community-based peacebuilding and locally-led reconciliation initiatives, maintaining a conflict sensitive approach to support. The link between the national and local conflict is critical.

- Ensure that the commitment to mechanisms outlined in Chapter 5 of the peace agreement – including transitional justice mechanisms such as the Hybrid Court, truth, healing and reconciliation – is strongly adhered to and that these mechanisms are implemented without delay.

- Robustly support civil society space, press freedom and freedom of expression – all of which have been reduced extensively - as critical to meaningful peace and dialogue.

- Continue to call for all actors to stop human rights violations, investigate alleged abuses and hold perpetrators to account.

**Political solution to the conflict**

- Engage strongly in the political process, in coordination with the Troika and other regional and international actors, to push for a renewed process and increased diplomatic investment. Long-term engagement is critical, and without a political solution to the conflict the humanitarian situation will continue to worsen.

- Ensure that processes are inclusive, and that the voices of South Sudanese, including the churches, civil society, traditional leaders, and grassroots community, faith, women and youth groups are given a strong platform for engagement.

**Support for humanitarian assistance and protection**

- Strongly and publicly support humanitarian responses in South Sudan and in neighbouring countries for refugees. In particular, safeguard humanitarian access and the operational environment against bureaucratic constraints.
and impediments, and ensure the safety of humanitarian workers, so that the response can effectively reach those in need. Local actors should be strongly supported.

- Ensure timely and predictable availability of flexible funds for emergency response, and work with other international donors to commit their fair share.

- Ensure that UNMISS fulfills its mandate and is accountable to affected populations, especially delivering on its promise of protection.

- Integrate a long-term perspective that addresses South Sudan’s acute development needs and ensure that any intervention is conflict sensitive.

Case study

Building understanding and peace between youth in Wau

Wau in South Sudan has seen a recent rise in inter-ethnic tensions. Years of civil war have exacerbated communal divisions, culminating in violent conflict between mainly Dinka militia groups affiliated with the government and the Fertit rebels. In June 2016, a fresh eruption of violence forced thousands of Fertit community members into displacement, settling in a newly established UN protection of civilians (PoC) site.

A source of hostility and mistrust has come from rumours circulating within the youth groups, spurring on rivalries and increasing violence. In late 2016, Saferworld and local partner Community Empowerment for Progress Organisation (CEPO) brought together 40 youth from both groups to ease tensions, form a sense of common understanding and avert violence.

Tensions between the youth groups had been running high, with one side accusing the other of violence. After a hostile start to the dialogue, where the participants expressed strong feelings of mistrust towards the other group, the youth began to address misunderstandings, challenge misconceptions, and learn about each other’s communities.

Leader of the youth group from the Wau UN Protection of Civilians (PoC) camp Joseph noted, “today marks the beginning of a new relationship among the youth group…. a relationship based on mutual trust and togetherness”.

Relations between the two youth groups showed visible signs of improvement after the dialogue. Before the youth had feared being attacked if they moved outside of the PoC, but PoC youth leaders have been able to leave the site and enter Wau town. Freedom of movement has improved for both communities. The ongoing national conflict in South Sudan however, continues to impact Wau’s security and stability.