



PRESS RELEASE

Rape, gang-rape, and beheadings among human right violations documented in Leer, South Sudan

Juba, 25 April 2022: The UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) strongly condemns the widespread sexual violence, killings including beheadings, burning alive of civilians, and attacks on humanitarians in Leer County. These are among the human rights violations documented during a surge in violence carried out by armed youth from Koch and Mayendit counties.

Between 17 February and 7 April, 72 civilians were killed, at least 11 injured, and 64 cases of sexual violence recorded, according to UNMISS human rights teams who have conducted 10 verification missions. Two survivors said that they were repeatedly raped and gang-raped after they came out of hiding to find food for their children. Another woman who had recently given birth recounted that she was raped and severely beaten for three days.

“I am strongly appalled by these horrific attacks on civilians in Leer. We must all do everything we can to ensure that victims and survivors get the justice they deserve and receive the care and support they need,” said the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for South Sudan Nicholas Haysom.

According to initial reports, some 40,000 people have fled the violence in Leer, with thousands reportedly crossing the Nile to Fangak in Jonglei State. Thousands of cattle were raided, and markets, homes, and humanitarian facilities and warehouses looted and burnt down. The wet season has already begun, along with the risk of floods, creating a dangerous situation for thousands of internally displaced families. Violence in Mayendit and Koch counties, including Mirmir Payam, is also being investigated.

UNMISS has deployed additional peacekeepers to conduct regular patrols, including night patrols in Leer town to prevent further loss of life. Peacekeepers are providing protection to displaced people and humanitarians responding to the needs of survivors. However, the protection of civilians is first and foremost the responsibility of the Government. The Mission welcomes initial steps taken in the formation of an investigation committee and the deployment of SSPDF to restore security.

“The Mission urges national and local authorities to take immediate measures to reduce tensions and prevent further escalations and retaliatory attacks. Impunity on violations of human rights must end and perpetrators held accountable for these horrible crimes,” said Haysom. UNMISS is also engaging with leadership at the capital and state level to mitigate violence while civil affairs teams are meeting with communities to conduct focus group discussions in conflict-affected areas.

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