



## SOUTH SUDAN: A NATION UPROOTED

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Front cover: Displaced women at a Protection of Civilians site in Bentiu, South Sudan.  
This page: Refugee women wait to be moved out of a transit center near Pagak, Ethiopia.

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# OVERVIEW

Since December 2013, conflict in South Sudan has forced 2 million people from their homes. In the north of the country, where fighting is most severe, populations have been pushed to the brink of starvation. Tragically, this war in South Sudan is unlikely to end anytime soon. Donors and aid organizations have mobilized to deliver significant amounts of humanitarian aid, but logistical and security challenges continue to hamper the effectiveness of the response. Improvements can and must be made, both to better respond to people in need and to prepare for new waves of displacement within South Sudan and into neighboring countries like Ethiopia, the largest South Sudanese refugee hosting country. This is a critical moment, before the rainy season begins in earnest in May and logistical challenges become even more difficult. United Nations peacekeepers, armed with a new mandate that prioritizes civilian protection, can also take steps to better implement that mandate and keep people safe.

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## RECOMMENDATIONS

### SOUTH SUDAN

- ❑ Donor governments must maintain strong financial support for emergency aid in South Sudan, particularly for logistics.
- ❑ South Sudan's government and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement in Opposition should cease practices that limit the reach and effectiveness of humanitarian assistance, especially the harassment and detention of humanitarian staff.
- ❑ The United Nations Humanitarian Air Service should dedicate a small number of aircraft to the humanitarian rapid response mechanism (RRM), with the option to reassign those aircraft to other routes if they are not needed for the RRM.
- ❑ The United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) and humanitarians must base decisions relating to assistance in and access to Protection of Civilians (PoC) sites on a thorough, shared analysis of displaced people's needs and the threats they face.
- ❑ The Special Representative of the UN Secretary General should ask the South Sudanese government to authorize an extension of Juba's PoC site, and donor governments should provide strong political and financial support for this extension.
- ❑ UNMISS's UN Police section should assign additional officers to community policing within the PoC sites, with a preference for officers who have experience in women's or youth affairs.
- ❑ UNMISS should continue to expand its PoC activities beyond its bases in consultation with humanitarian protection actors. To enable these activities, the international community must insist that South Sudanese authorities cease all actions that limit the movement of UNMISS staff and assets, while the UN should consistently pursue accountability for any failures by UNMISS personnel to protect civilians.

### ETHIOPIA

- ❑ Donor governments must press the Ethiopian government to provide suitable land for newly arriving refugees, and to expand options for cross-border aid delivery into South Sudan.
- ❑ Donor governments must increase support for education and vocational training opportunities for the large youth refugee population in Ethiopia.
- ❑ Donors should encourage UNHCR to robustly implement its protection mandate in Ethiopia.

## BACKGROUND

Fighting erupted in South Sudan's capital, Juba, in December 2013 when troops loyal to former Vice President Riek Machar clashed with government soldiers aligned with President Salva Kiir. Conflict soon engulfed a large portion of the country, with the northeastern states of Upper Nile, Unity, and Jonglei among the hardest hit. Thousands of civilians on both sides have been targeted and killed. As of February 2015, the number of South Sudanese thought to be displaced by the conflict had reached 2 million, including 1.5 million internally displaced people (IDPs) and roughly 500,000 refugees living in Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, and Sudan.

The majority of IDPs are living with host communities which are themselves impacted by decreasing food availability and disruptions to markets. According to the latest Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC), most of the Greater Upper Nile region is classified at a "crisis" level, while six counties are at the "emergency" level, one phase below famine.<sup>1</sup>

In January 2015, a RI team traveled to South Sudan and met with aid workers who said they were deeply concerned about conditions worsening toward the end of the dry season (April/May), a time when household food stocks are depleted and well before the next harvest. In some areas, fighting and displacement has prevented families from growing any food at all. Recounting a recent field assessment to Unity State, an aid worker told RI, "I met families who scavenged for water lilies. They told me, 'If we find water lilies, we eat. If not, we go hungry.'" In addition, the conflict has forced the displacement of millions of livestock, with large numbers of cattle dying from disease. This is devastating for a large part of the population which relies on animals for food, livelihoods, and asset accumulation.

The leaders of South Sudan's warring factions have been either unable or unwilling to bring the war to an end. But even if President Kiir and former Vice President Machar reach an agreement, the humanitarian fallout of the war will persist for some time. In addition, it is possible that in the event of an agreement, the parties themselves could fragment, creating lower-level conflicts that would continue to threaten civilians. Humanitarian agencies and the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) will therefore continue to play a role in protecting and assisting vulnerable South Sudanese, and donors must be prepared to support their efforts.

## IMPROVING THE HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE



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**“South Sudan has become a constraints-based response, not a needs-based response.”**

-Aid worker in Juba

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Recent figures from the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) show that donors provided 80 percent of the funds requested in the UN's 2014 humanitarian appeal for South Sudan – more than every other annual country appeal that year. There is no question that this aid saved lives. But with global humanitarian needs likely to remain high in 2015, and with new crises likely to emerge, aid agencies fear that funding for South Sudan will decline even though needs persist. Donors must maintain their 2014 levels of funding in the coming year, especially their support for the logistics budgets of UN agencies and NGOs.

Even in the best of times, South Sudan is an extremely difficult place for aid organizations to work. There are only 200 miles of paved roads and many areas are only accessible by air. During the rainy season (April/May to October/November), parts of the country can only be reached by helicopter. Prior to the outbreak of fighting in 2013, aid groups would utilize the dry season to pre-position supplies. However, as a result of the conflict, a number of pre-positioning warehouses and assets were destroyed and looted, and recent attempts to rebuild



An aerial view of the UNMISS base in Bentiu, South Sudan, with the Protection of Civilians site visible in the distance.

that network have been undermined by logistical and security constraints. Barring a major de-escalation in fighting, many populations will remain reachable only by air.

A major element of the humanitarian air operation in South Sudan is the rapid response mechanism (RRM) managed by the Operational Working Group. This group is comprised of roughly 30 organizations, including the two lead UN agencies, the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and the World Food Programme (WFP), and non-governmental organization (NGO) and UN partners. The RRM organizes two-to-three week interventions in remote areas, drawing mostly on the air assets of WFP and the UN Humanitarian Air Service (UNHAS), which provides airlift for the RRM’s NGO participants. While some of this assistance is flown out of Juba, much of it is deployed from airports in western Ethiopia. (Cross-border assistance is discussed further in the section on Ethiopia, below.)

With this system, some populations are reached on a monthly basis, others more infrequently, and some not at all. Daunting logistics, insecurity, and limited funding all pose challenges to the RRM, with 25 percent of its attempted aid movements failing when it began in March 2014. Although the success rate has improved since then, humanitarians acknowledge that, in the words of one aid worker with whom RI spoke, “South Sudan has become a constraints-based response, not a

needs-based response.”

Unfortunately, WFP has already indicated that it will have two fewer helicopters at its disposal compared to last year. This only reinforces the need for aid agencies to use donor funds as efficiently and effectively as possible. For example, aid workers told RI that the RRM deliveries are hindered by unpredictable access to UNHAS aircraft, with the service struggling to juggle irregular RRM movements with the rest of its flight schedule. This problem could be addressed by having UNHAS dedicate a small number of existing aircraft to RRM service, with the option to temporarily reassign these aircraft to other UNHAS routes if they are not needed for the RRM.

At the same time, donor governments need to increase pressure on the South Sudanese government, as well as members of the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement in Opposition (SPLM-IO), to improve the working environment for humanitarian actors so they can reach vulnerable populations more regularly. Of particular concern is the harassment and detention of humanitarians by both government and opposition authorities. Aid workers told RI that the situation at airports is especially dangerous, with South Sudanese aid staff being singled out on the basis of ethnicity and pulled off of flights during stopovers. One official also told RI that humanitarians taking part in RRM movements are sometimes held hostage at the conclusion of their field deployment, in an attempt by



Top left: Armored personnel carriers inside the UNMISS Base. Right: A detention facility for IDP offenders on the Protection of Civilians site. Bottom left: An UNMISS helicopter. Bentiu, South Sudan.

local authorities to extract more aid. Aid agencies, the UN, and donor governments have spoken out about these issues, and this must continue until the situation improves.

Economic mismanagement by the South Sudanese government has also diverted donor funding away from the people who need it most. Since 2011, the South Sudanese pound has essentially had two different exchange rates: an official exchange rate pegged to the U.S. dollar, and a market rate which floats according to prevailing economic conditions. As South Sudan's economy has weakened, these two rates have diverged: as of early March 2014, the official rate stood at 2.9 South Sudanese pounds per dollar, against a market rate of approximately 6.6 pounds per dollar. To convert currency, humanitarian agencies are obliged to use banks or licensed foreign exchange houses that use the official rate, but the goods and services they buy are usually priced at the market rate. This has caused heavy losses for aid agencies, but benefitted those South Sudanese companies and individuals who have, in the words of the International Monetary Fund, "privileged access" to the foreign currency they are selling.<sup>2</sup>

One aid worker told RI of having to take a nearly 100 percent loss on recent currency exchanges, while another told RI she had refused to authorize a currency exchange for her organization because the difference in rates was unacceptably large. According to one UN official with whom RI spoke, these losses have forced some small aid organizations to consider suspending their operations in South Sudan.

The International Monetary Fund has advised the South Sudanese government to better align its official and market exchange rates, but attempts at reform have so far failed due to "opposition by vested interests."<sup>3</sup> Though aid beneficiaries are far from the only people harmed by continued exchange rate distortions, donor governments, international financial institutions, and the South Sudanese government should keep their situation in mind when weighing future exchange rate reforms.

# INSIDE UNMISS BASES: PUTTING IDPS' NEEDS FIRST

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**“ Outside the fence, there are government agents. Soldiers and tribal militias occupy our old homes. People won't go back home just because UNMISS says it is safe. ”**

-Internally displaced man at a  
Protection of Civilians site in Juba

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Civilians began coming to UNMISS bases in search of protection in December 2013, when the fighting between government and opposition forces sparked targeted killings in cities and towns around the country, starting with the capital, Juba. At the time, it was hoped that the IDPs would only need temporary protection. Yet more than a year later, roughly 110,000 IDPs remain in temporary shelter on six UNMISS bases, with the largest populations in Bentiu (52,000), Juba (34,000), and Malakal (21,000).

UNMISS officials told RI that the presence of so many IDPs inside its bases has been challenging for the mission. They point to security incidents involving IDPs within the sites; an increased risk of assault on their bases by those who wish the IDPs harm; and the resources – both land and personnel – that are diverted from other mission priorities to the maintenance of the PoC sites. These concerns are valid. However, continuing to host these individuals is fundamental to UNMISS fulfilling its mandate to protect civilians. In that sense, UNMISS succeeds each day it keeps its gates open to people under threat of violence. Unfortunately, a number of aid staff told RI that UNMISS is moving too quickly to either dissuade new IDPs from entering the sites, encourage them to return, or relocate them to areas that remain unsafe. One aid official with whom RI spoke said that UNMISS is at risk of “snatching defeat from the jaws of victory.”

One of the clearest examples of this problem can be found in the PoC sites at Juba's UN House, which began to fill in late 2013 when government forces targeted the Nuer community, who were viewed as sympathizing with former Vice President Machar. In late 2014, UNMISS announced that no new IDPs would be allowed to register at these sites. New arrivals can enter, but they will not have access to services. UNMISS based this decision on the fact that “there is no immediate fighting in Juba.”<sup>4</sup> Further, some UNMISS staff told RI that anyone who is safe enough to travel to the Juba PoC sites should not be assumed to require physical protection, and they are wary of drawing more people to already-crowded camps. Although there is no active fighting in Juba, this does not mean that individual civilians do not face severe and persistent threats to their security. One IDP whom RI met said he felt safe to travel on the main road from the PoC site to the center of Juba because UNMISS patrols that road, but that he has not yet returned to his home neighborhood to check on his personal belongings, and he never stays out past 5 p.m. Another IDP told RI that Nuer with traditional facial markings sometimes never leave the PoC site because they can so easily be identified and targeted for abuse by government security forces.

Humanitarians expressed concern to RI that UNMISS's registration policy was not based on a thorough analysis of the needs of and threats faced by IDPs – or at least none that had been shared with them or to which they had contributed. Discouraging IDPs from entering a PoC site by restricting access to services when real threats persist could deprive vulnerable civilians of needed assistance.

The best way forward is to ensure that decisions about PoC site access and registration (as well as any plans for returns and relocations) are made in a transparent and fully consultative manner, based on shared analysis. Such an analysis should seek to identify the protection threats which IDPs face outside the sites, whether the community has viable protection strategies to counter those threats, and whether or not those strategies can be complemented by other actors (including UNMISS and humanitarian protection actors). It should also take into account the IDPs' humanitarian needs, and the extent to which those needs can be safely met outside of the PoC sites. It is vital that this analysis be guided by continuing consultations with the IDPs themselves, and to include women and other groups who may be under-represented within IDP leadership structures.

It is worth noting that one way to address UNMISS's concerns about the lack of space would be to acquire additional land from the government that is contiguous with the Juba PoC site known as PoC 3. Representatives from donors and aid agencies told RI that they would like to pursue this option, but nothing can move forward without government authorization

for the use of the land. The Special Representative of the UN Secretary General should seek this authorization and donor governments should provide strong political and financial support for this site extension.

As humanitarians and UNMISS seek to address these issues, it is important for the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) to be a strong advocate on behalf of the rights of IDPs and the need for access to appropriate services inside the PoC sites. In the early stages of the current crisis, UNHCR struggled to reorient itself from its role of working primarily with refugees within South Sudan to a more balanced approach that included IDPs. But to its credit, over the course of 2014, UNHCR increased resources to both carry out IDP protection activities in the field and to lead and coordinate the protection cluster, including the creation of rover cluster coordinator positions to improve the protection response at the point of delivery.

However, numerous NGO staff expressed concern that UNHCR had not always been effective in promoting the views of the protection cluster within the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) or in engagements with UNMISS on PoC site issues. Indeed, some of those whom RI interviewed expressed confusion about whether UNHCR should even be expected to play a role in decisions around the PoC sites. This is a cause for concern given UNHCR's capacity and expertise in IDP protection, both of which are needed in this difficult context. There is, however, new UNHCR leadership in Juba, and RI hopes this is an opportunity for UNHCR to reassert its responsibilities for IDP protection.

One positive development that RI noted in both the Juba and

Bentiu PoC sites was the presence of individual UNMISS police officers (UNPOL) performing regular patrols. Since the role of South Sudanese police within the sites is limited, UNPOL have a critical role in investigating crimes and assisting victims, including in cases of gender-based violence. IDPs and humanitarians with whom RI spoke also said that some UNPOL-led initiatives – including the establishment of community alert networks – had improved security in both Bentiu and Juba. However, in the Juba PoC sites, just two or three UNPOL community police officers actually circulate within each site, while many more are stationed at the site gates. Indeed, one UN police officer told RI that they believed UNMISS's community policing activities within the Juba PoC sites should be strengthened. Aid workers expressed to RI concerns about particular forms of criminality inside the camps, including gender-based violence, as well as gang activity and substance abuse among youth. Therefore, UNMISS should increase the number of UNPOL officers dedicated to community policing within all the PoC sites, and should aim to recruit officers with experience in women's or youth affairs.

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**“ When people leave, if they have tribal markings they can be arrested and we don't see them anymore. ”**

-Internally displaced man at a Protection of Civilians site in Juba

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Children gather outside a shelter in the Protection of Civilians site. Bentiu, South Sudan.



A group of children living inside a Protection of Civilians site. Juba, South Sudan.







Displaced people's shelters on one of Juba's Protection of Civilians sites.

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**“ UNMISS and humanitarians are working to serve the same people, but not understanding each other's approach. ”**

-UN aid worker, Juba

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## UNMISS: PROTECTION BEYOND THE BASES

As explained in the section above, there is a clear need for UNMISS to continue providing security for IDPs within its bases. Yet when the UN Security Council in May 2014 established the Protection of Civilians (PoC) as the mission's top priority, it did so in the expectation that UNMISS would apply that mandate throughout the country, and not just within its walls. Senior UNMISS staff whom RI interviewed keenly understood this fact, and in recent months there have been positive shifts in the mission's overall protection policies and strategy. Mission leadership wants UNMISS to be more responsive to protection threats and more present in communities. They also recognize that humanitarian actors are often closer to the ground than UNMISS, and that peacekeepers should be receptive to their concerns and priorities.

In an example of this positive shift, UNMISS recently instructed its commanders across the country to regularly solicit information from aid agencies about incidents and trends, and then to adjust the mission's patrols and other

activities accordingly. This approach is already paying off in Bentiu, where RI met displaced women who are now being accompanied more often by UNMISS soldiers when they go outside the base to gather firewood – a development that local aid workers encouraged. By undertaking such preventive activities, being responsive to threats, and simply by being present, UNMISS can provide meaningful security to vulnerable populations. The challenge will be implementing this approach across a large and complex mission and in the face of outside obstacles.

UN officials told RI that enhancing the mission's PoC role was limited by three main factors. The first is the number of soldiers that can be deployed beyond the bases. UN officials estimate that because of the resources UNMISS dedicates to securing the IDPs on its bases (among other priorities), of the roughly 11,400 military personnel currently assigned to UNMISS, only 3,000-4,000 can move beyond their bases at any one time. Clearly, there are limits to what such a small force can achieve in a setting as challenging as South Sudan. But by working in consultation with humanitarians and other protection actors, UNMISS should be able to identify areas where a relatively light footprint can provide some protection to significant numbers of civilians. UNMISS cannot wait

for IDPs to leave the bases before it starts moving into and protecting communities.

UNMISS's ability to protect civilians is not only limited by its military and logistical capacity: it is also limited by the mission's inability to enforce its decisions through its command structure. This is an issue that is common to other UN peacekeeping operations and pre-dates UNMISS's most recent mandate, as documented in a recent report by the UN's Office of Internal Oversight Services.<sup>5</sup> Yet both UN and non-UN officials in South Sudan told RI that while some UNMISS civilian and military personnel at field level now support a stronger approach to PoC, others do not. They raised questions about a continuing pattern of delayed responses to civilians under imminent threat of violence, with UNMISS soldiers declining to move beyond their bases during active fighting. They also cited cases in which civilians have been abducted within view of UNMISS bases with little-to-no response from UNMISS soldiers, as well as a reluctance on the part of some troops to leave their vehicles during patrols.

Given the serious threats civilians continue to face in South Sudan, and the Security Council's clear demand that they be protected, such incidents are not acceptable. It will be important for the UN Secretary General and his special representative for UNMISS to clearly and publicly communicate that stance, and then pursue accountability for failures to the extent permitted under UN disciplinary guidelines.<sup>6</sup>

A third limit is one imposed not by the mission itself, but by the parties to the conflict. South Sudanese authorities – in both government and opposition-held areas – have made UNMISS's task even more difficult through repeated violations of the mission's Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA). The present SOFA in South Sudan guarantees that with the exception of air travel (which should comply with appropriate national and international and aviation procedures), UNMISS "shall enjoy full and unrestricted freedom of movement without delay throughout South Sudan by the most direct route possible, without the need for travel permits or prior authorization or notification."<sup>7</sup>

However, UN officials told RI that the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) and South Sudan National Police Service (SSNPS) violate this agreement on a regular basis, thereby limiting the movement of UNMISS. For example, RI was told that because of repeated interference by the SPLA and SSNPS, UNMISS is unable to carry out nighttime patrols in Juba. The Secretary General has detailed these violations in his previous reports to the Security Council. However, both UN and non-UN officials told RI that UNMISS is not sufficiently persistent or forceful in raising these violations with South Sudanese authorities. If UNMISS is to carry out

more PoC activities beyond its bases, this problem must be addressed decisively. The government of South Sudan should therefore bring an end to all SOFA violations, and the Sudan People's Liberation Army in Opposition should take similar actions in areas under its control. Moreover, the UN Security Council and donor governments should press all parties to allow the free movement of UNMISS, while fully supporting the efforts of the Secretary General and the SRSG in this regard.

It is important to emphasize that to effectively protect civilians, UNMISS must have effective relationships with both the population it serves and the aid workers who serve that population. Yet both RI's recent mission and research conducted by other organizations identified a lack of trust in UNMISS amongst many IDPs and humanitarians,<sup>8</sup> and this lack of trust can make humanitarians and IDPs less willing to engage constructively with the mission. UNMISS's ability to protect civilians will always be constrained, but its willingness to do so should never be in doubt. If the mission can demonstrate that through its policies and actions, then it stands a chance of rebuilding these vital relationships.



IDP children outside their shelter at the UN Protection of Civilians site in Bentiu, South Sudan.

# ETHIOPIA

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Crowds gather for a food distribution at Tierkidi refugee camp in Gambella, Ethiopia.

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## BACKGROUND

In addition to the 1.5 million people displaced within South Sudan, the war has forced nearly half a million people to seek refuge in neighboring countries. Ethiopia is host to the largest number of these refugees, with the total number of new arrivals since December 2013 now at nearly 200,000. During the most recent rainy season, when fighting slowed and movement within South Sudan became more difficult, the number of daily arrivals decreased significantly. However, with the onset of the dry season and a new surge in fighting, refugee numbers are once again increasing, with about 1,000 new arrivals in January 2015.

UNHCR predicts that up to 110,000 new South Sudanese refugees will cross into Ethiopia this year. Thus far, most of the refugees have fled conflict in Jonglei and Upper Nile States, which border Ethiopia, but some of the newest arrivals at the Pagak entry point told RI that severe food insecurity in their home areas is also causing them to flee.

## ALLOCATION OF LAND: ENDING THE UNCERTAINTY

The Ethiopian government deserves credit for keeping its borders open and receiving so many South Sudanese refugees. However, the government's approach to allocating land for refugee camps has created major problems and has greatly weakened the effectiveness of the current humanitarian response. It has also made it nearly impossible for aid agencies to prepare for new arrivals.

The vast majority of registered South Sudanese refugees live in five camps in the western Gambella region. Two of the six refugee camps in Gambella are at capacity, and another two are being closed because they experienced severe flooding in 2014. After months of negotiations to find more suitable land, in early March, the government finally approved one new site to accommodate approximately 50,000 refugees. But once that site is opened, most of the spaces will be allocated to refugees from the flooded camps, leaving very limited capacity to house new arrivals.

The process of identifying land for camps in the Gambella region has been slow and difficult. Some aid officials in Ethiopia see the problem as one of land availability, with much of Gambella's land being flood-prone or sold to foreign investors for agricultural development. Most observers, however, believe the real obstacles are political. They cite a longstanding rivalry between Gambella's Nuer and Anyuak ethnic groups, which Ethiopian authorities at the federal level fear could be exacerbated by further arrivals of Nuer refugees from South Sudan. There is also a widespread perception among humanitarians whom RI interviewed in Ethiopia that despite their open-border policy, Ethiopian authorities do not wish to see any more South Sudanese crossing their border, and that stalling on land allocation – or allocating land that the refugees or aid agencies deem unsuitable – is one way to staunch the flow of new arrivals.

However, it is in Ethiopia's interest to find suitable new sites quickly, because failing to do so could lead to a crisis. In the absence of camp space to accommodate the expected large numbers of new refugees, these new arrivals could quickly overwhelm Gambella's small transit sites.

The situation at one transit site RI visited provided a preview of the problems that could be exacerbated going forward. At that time, refugees who had been stuck there for about two months were just beginning to move into camps. RI met some refugees who had lived on high-energy biscuits at the site for days or weeks because dry rations had been suspended at the government's request in an effort to discourage long-term settlement there. Aid workers told RI that during the previous

two months, many newly arrived refugees were disappearing into host communities or returning to South Sudan due to the lack of food.

Ethiopian officials told RI that they would not allow refugees to remain in the transit sites, because they did not want them to "become accustomed" to living there and resist being moved into camps. Yet if suitable camps are not opened in time, the refugees will be unable to move. One humanitarian recalled that earlier in the crisis, roughly 20,000 refugees – many of them unaccompanied children – had become stuck at the entry points, with very limited assistance and unable to move into camps. "The government says things will be different this time," the aid worker told RI, "but there's no substantive planning to support that." If future new arrivals face similar problems, some aid agencies also believe that spontaneous camps could form along the South Sudanese side of the border, where limited aid and protection could create a dire situation.

To their credit, donor government representatives, as well as high-level UNHCR officials, have pressed Ethiopia to resolve the land issue. As noted above, one new camp will soon replace two other flooded sites. However, if the number of new refugees this year meets projections, that will clearly not be enough. Sustained ambassadorial-level engagement with the Ethiopian Administration for Refugee and Returnee Affairs (ARRA) and with the Ministry of Federal Affairs, particularly by leading donors such as the U.S. and UK, is needed to secure enough adequate land for those refugees likely to arrive in 2015.

**“ There are people inside South Sudan who are unable to run away.**

**They are dying from sickness and hunger because there is no food. Please help those people.”**

**-South Sudanese refugee in Gambella, Ethiopia**



## BEYOND EMERGENCY AID FOR REFUGEES

In addition to preparing for new arrivals, there is a need to fill gaps in the response for the current refugee caseload, some of whom have lived in the Gambella camps for over a year. One such gap is funding and programming for education. A staggering 70 percent of the South Sudanese refugees in Gambella are children – many of whom arrived without their parents. Some children have been able to enroll in education programs established by aid organizations, and others attend local Ethiopian schools within neighboring communities. However, an education specialist who worked in Gambella told RI that even though more than half of primary school-aged children are enrolled in school, only about one third are estimated to actually attend on a regular basis, and fewer girls attend than boys. Additionally, opportunities for secondary education are almost non-existent. While a small number of teenagers attend class at local Ethiopian schools, there are limited education services in the refugee camps for youth older than 14 years.<sup>9</sup>

Education must be given the same importance as other life-saving services, since it is not only beneficial for refugees in the long term, but also for their current well-being. As UNHCR describes in its 2015 South Sudan Regional Response Plan, “Strengthening of education services provides a critical protective environment, a sense of normalcy for conflict-affected children, and facilitates integration and peaceful coexistence.”<sup>10</sup> Further, the classroom provides an opportunity to promote important messaging related to issues like hygiene and protection. UNHCR is asking for almost \$27 million to support education programming in Gambella – approximately 8 percent of the total response budget.<sup>11</sup> Globally, however, education usually accounts for only about 2 percent of humanitarian funding annually, so there is legitimate concern that there will be a significant shortfall compared to current needs in Ethiopia. Donors must move to provide this funding immediately.

Separately, donors must increase funding for vocational training for youth, who face pressure to join armed groups fighting in South Sudan. One aid agency working in Gambella told RI that in its discussions with refugees, youth said they expected to go home to fight once the raining season stopped, adding, “It is important to give them a reason to stay.”

## UNHCR AND ARRA: A DELICATE BALANCE

One unusual aspect of the refugee response in Ethiopia is the complex role of ARRA. Like other state refugee agencies, ARRA is responsible for refugee policy and oversight of humanitarian efforts. However, unlike its peer organizations, ARRA also implements a large number of humanitarian projects – projects that are almost entirely funded by UNHCR – and is a branch of Ethiopia’s national intelligence service. Previous reports by RI and the UN have pointed out some of the challenges resulting from this arrangement, including a diminished protection role for UNHCR.<sup>12</sup> In interviews during RI’s most recent mission, numerous aid workers and donors stated that even though some ARRA officials embrace the principles of humanitarian protection, there is a need for UNHCR to be stronger in its defense of refugees and humanitarian principles – particularly because many of its NGO partners do not feel free to do so.

UNHCR has been successful in creating space for additional NGOs to participate in the South Sudan response. However, NGO representatives told RI that they were reluctant to push Ethiopian authorities on sensitive issues such as land or conditions in transit sites, fearing a negative reaction that might limit their ability to provide services. Some aid officials encouraged UNHCR to raise sensitive issues consistently in refugee task force meetings (both in Gambella and in Addis Ababa) because other NGOs “don’t feel comfortable raising [them] on their own.”

As the leader of a complex and difficult humanitarian response, UNHCR should be as active and vocal as possible, especially at a time when new refugee arrivals are expected. Donors should encourage UNHCR leaders in both Geneva and Addis Ababa to robustly implement their protection mandate in Ethiopia.

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**“If new people come, where will they go? There’s no contingency plan – only a plan to deal with the flooded camps.”**”

-Aid worker in Addis Ababa

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## EXPANDING CROSS-BORDER ASSISTANCE

In addition to hosting refugees, Ethiopia is the launching point for a vital cross-border aid effort. As of late 2014, WFP was able to transport up to 10,500 metric tons of food and other supplies per month to conflict-affected areas of South Sudan through Ethiopia. One aid official told RI that if this cross-border aid had not been provided in 2014, twice as many South Sudanese refugees might now be in Ethiopia. One newly arrived refugee told RI that many people he encountered on his journey to Ethiopia were dying in South Sudan. He said he saw people “who were unable to run who were dying because of sickness and hunger because there is no food.” He pled for more aid to be brought directly to those people.

Given the extreme challenges with access aid agencies face inside South Sudan, and the aforementioned difficulties on the Ethiopian side, this cross-border effort is of critical importance. Donors should continue to support it. However, according to the latest figures available, 75 percent of cross-

border aid from Ethiopia is being delivered by air – an extremely expensive undertaking. Aid officials told RI that they were keen to bring more supplies into South Sudan by road, but have encountered bureaucratic delays on the part of the Ethiopian government on issues such as customs assessments, additional audits, and the treatment of assets and funds used for deliveries in South Sudan. Donor governments should encourage their Ethiopian counterparts to streamline the approval process for overland, cross-border assistance, including the creation of a model memorandum of understanding which can be used by different agencies for their own shipments.

*Michael Boyce and Mark Yarnell traveled to Ethiopia and South Sudan in January 2015 to assess the humanitarian response to refugees and internally displaced people, as well as the protection of civilians.*

A woman distributes flour to her fellow refugees in Ethiopia's Kule refugee camp.





## ENDNOTES



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