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SOUTH SUDAN: DISPLACEMENT PLAGUES WORLD'S NEWEST NATION

The Republic of South Sudan (RoSS) is going through a major displacement crisis. The country is playing host to tens of thousands of refugees who fled fighting in Sudan's Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile States. In addition to this, hundreds of thousands of people are displaced due to violence within South Sudan itself. The country also has to contend with a large influx of southerners returning from northern cities. This crisis could soon become overwhelming for the world's newest country – a country already struggling to deliver security and basic services to its citizens. If this displacement crisis is not adequately addressed, all the positive efforts now being made to incorporate returnees into the social, political, and economic fabric of South Sudan will be short lived.

REFUGEES FLEEING SUDAN'S SOUTHERN KORDOFAN STATE

Fighting broke out in Southern Kordofan in June of this year, despite attempts by the government to disarm fighters allied with the Sudan's People Liberation Movement North (SPLM-N). This group (which was formerly associated with the now ruling party in independent South Sudan) has been negotiating with Khartoum for nearly a decade over political rights for the Nuba people in Southern Kordofan – so far with no success.

Months of bombing and fighting has created a dire humanitarian situation in Southern Kordofan. Food supplies in the city of Kauda are depleted, and subsequent food drops have been limited. More than 300,000 people are currently displaced in the SPLM-N controlled areas of the state. Meanwhile, with the exception of the Sudanese Red Crescent, Khartoum is not allowing humanitarian organizations to operate in the state. Humanitarian agencies' international staff were expelled in June, and the local staff who remain have limited means to provide aid to the population.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- The United States government, through the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, must ensure that the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) has the necessary resources to adequately help increasing numbers of refugees fleeing Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile States into South Sudan.
- The U.S. Embassy in Juba, with the assistance of the Conflict Stabilization Office (formerly S/CRS), must assist the new country with conflict mapping and conflict mitigation strategies to address inter-tribal violence within South Sudan.
- The International Organization for Migration (IOM), in collaboration with the South Sudanese government, must use all available modes of transport to ensure that the large backlog of southerners are able to return quickly. Additionally, an information campaign should be launched clarifying when and how those returns will happen.
- IOM, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and other UN and non-governmental agencies need to recognize that many of the returnees will be coming from urban environments. This must be considered with respect to land allocation and basic services when addressing the returnees' longer-term reintegration needs.

Because of ongoing aerial bombardment of the Nuba Mountains, there has been limited cultivation of crops. Now, there are indications that people in the region are beginning to starve. UN agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have requested access to the affected population multiple times, but the response from Khartoum has been silence. Khartoum's continued refusals to allow access can only be addressed by the kind of aerial lifeline that existed during the Sudanese civil war in the 1990s – when food and medical relief was flown in to prevent famine from wiping out the Nuba people and others in Southern Kordofan.

Over 20,000 people have fled Southern Kordofan to Unity State in South Sudan, and their numbers are increasing daily. The new arrivals are in worse physical condition than those who crossed the border at an earlier time. During September and October, roughly 200 refugees from the Nuba Mountains arrived daily at the Yida refugee camp, located near the border with Sudan in Unity State. By November, the number of arrivals had grown to 500 people per day, with many of the refugees weak from their travels and showing signs of malnutrition.

In September, the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) began preparations to relocate the Nuba refugees from Yida camp because of its proximity to the border and its inaccessibility to aid workers. The 1969 Organization of African Unity refugee convention stipulates that “for reasons of security, countries of asylum shall, as far as possible, settle refugees at a reasonable distance from the frontier of their country of origin.” The camp's perilous situation was made abundantly clear on November 10th, when it was bombed by the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF). Consistent with the OAU convention, UNHCR has started to plan for moving the refugees to a site further away from the border, to provide greater security and access to the refugees. With the rainy season at an end, access to the camp is becoming somewhat easier, and UNHCR must seize this opportunity to move the refugees quickly.

The SPLM-N and Khartoum have also clashed in Blue Nile State, and the situation there is similarly dire. More than 30,000 people have fled Blue Nile State into Upper Nile State in South Sudan, while an equal number have also fled to Ethiopia.

The U.S. State Department's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration must lead the effort among donors to ensure UNHCR receives the resources necessary to assist and protect this vulnerable population. In addition, the U.S., the United Kingdom, and other concerned

governments must find ways to bring diplomatic pressure on the government of Sudan to allow humanitarian access to the hundreds of thousands of displaced persons still trapped in Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile States.

THE SITUATION IN ABYEI AREA

In May of this year, around 100,000 people fled the border areas of Abyei due to fighting between the SAF and the Sudan's People Liberation Army (SPLA). It was the latest episode in an ongoing dispute between Khartoum and Juba over the sovereignty of this territory. Many homes were looted or destroyed. Many of those displaced by the fighting fled south to the small town of Agok and to Twic County in South Sudan's Warrap State. Others fled further to Wau and Aweil. The fighting also delayed a planned referendum in which Abyei residents – predominantly Ngok Dinka, but also seasonal Misseriya Arabs – were to choose between becoming part of Sudan or being integrated into South Sudan.

The food situation in Abyei and nearby Warrap State, as well as in other regions along RoSS's northern border, is desperate. The region has seen a dramatic increase in food prices due to a trade blockade imposed by the government of Sudan, with one aid worker telling RI that people are surviving by begging nearby farmers for food. RI's team was also told that the lack of media attention makes it difficult to raise awareness of how acute the crisis has become. According to the aid worker RI spoke to: “People are dying of hunger and the humanitarian community has no resources to cope with the situation...People are going for two or three days without food.”

A lack of resources at one point forced the World Food Programme to cut food supplies to the area by 50 per cent. During RI's visit, adequate stocks were available to feed about 6,000 people – just one-tenth of the population in need. The desperate situation is further compounded by the fact that host communities who once shared food with the displaced have exhausted their reserves; now, they are in need of food assistance themselves.

Since our visit, the World Food Programme has begun bringing in additional food shipments. But this will not be enough to address the long-term nature of the crisis. The Food and Agriculture Organization and its partners must expand their efforts to increase local capacity to produce crops.

SOUTH-SOUTH VIOLENCE

Since the beginning of 2011, approximately 330,000 civilians have been displaced by violence within South Sudan. Different militia groups in several states are fighting to win political concessions from the national government in Juba. This politically-motivated violence is especially prevalent in Unity, Upper Nile, and Jonglei States. Meanwhile, additional ethnic violence is occurring in the form of cattle raids both within and between several states.

One of the strongest militia groups, led by George Athor, holds sway in the marshy areas in the north of Jonglei. At the same time, cattle raids in Jonglei between the Lou Nuer and Murle ethnic groups have turned the center of the state into an extremely contested area. The region is largely inaccessible by road, and thus beyond the reach of the national police or army. The widespread use of assault rifles and grenade launchers has left hundreds dead and many more wounded.

The oil-producing states of Upper Nile and Unity are also affected by intra-state violence. In September, a cattle raid launched from Warrap State into Unity displaced an estimated 20,000 people in Mayendiet County alone. Unity State is also home to two militia groups, some members of which use landmines to maintain control and to fend off the SPLA's efforts to disarm them.

While efforts to contain South-South violence have yet to bring peace to any one state, several experts interviewed by RI reported that progress is being made in setting up frameworks for future success. For instance, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) provided the national police with communication equipment that has helped the police be informed of, and respond to, attacks. There are also U.S.-supported efforts underway to involve citizens and civil society groups at the grassroots level, such as local peace conferences. These initiatives should continue and be reinforced. Ultimately, long-term development can only be sustained if inter-ethnic violence is reduced and viable alternatives are available to those involved in raiding or fighting. Economic opportunities must be created for young men of every ethnic group.

Given the historic and ongoing strife in RoSS, conflict mitigation and peace-building initiatives should form the backbone of all humanitarian and development initiatives. Donors must support these initiatives with multi-year packages rather than short-term funding, as is the case now. They also need to help the government's disarmament efforts move beyond simply using overwhelming force to clear weapons from communities. Within the government

of South Sudan, the Ministry of Interior's Bureau of Community Stabilization and Small Arms Control (CSSAC) favors longer-term approaches – such as encouraging communities to discuss their security needs with local, state, and national security officials. In the end, these approaches will help stakeholders to understand the reasons behind cattle raiding and fighting, as well as identify attractive alternatives to these criminal activities.

THE NEEDS OF RETURNED INTERNALLY-DISPLACED PEOPLE

In the past year, at least 350,000 “returnees” – southerners moving from cities in Sudan to their places of origin in South Sudan – began the journey back home. The return process, however, has been fraught with problems. During a visit to Sudan and South Sudan in early 2011, RI noted significant bottlenecks in the return process, with thousands of people waiting for onward transport in camps near Khartoum and at the transit site at the port of Kosti, in White Nile State.

During our most recent visit in October, RI saw that some progress had been made to relocate people from both cities. However, new returnees rapidly repopulated the site, leading to significant overcrowding in Kosti. While unable to visit Sudan on this visit, RI's team received reports of thousands of people stuck in Khartoum and Kosti. Additionally, in Renk (a new transit site in Upper Nile, just across the border from White Nile State) the RI team spoke with returnees in three separate camps. While provision of water and medical services was seemingly sufficient, food supplies had long since run low and people were finding it difficult to cope. Returnees complained that they were given little to no information about when and how they would be assisted in their movement further south.

The RoSS government wants southerners to move to South Sudan as quickly as possible. However, there has been no provision of the required practical means to assist people reaching their desired destinations in the South. The Return and Reintegration Commission (RRC), the agency responsible for overseeing the movement of the returnees, requires assistance from the northern Sudanese Humanitarian Affairs Commission (HAC). But unfortunately, HAC has shown little interest in helping southerners who want to leave. There are also logistical constraints, including a lack of available barges and insufficient funds to meet the inflated prices charged by barge owners.

Ultimately, the RoSS government, though eager to manage the process on its own, will have to rely on the international

humanitarian community – and especially the International Organization of Migration (IOM) – to implement a successful return process. But despite knowing the challenges facing the return process, RRC and IOM are not communicating clearly with the returnees about what they might expect in transit sites, how long they might stay, or when they might hope to arrive at their final destination. The IOM, in collaboration with the RoSS government, must work to overcome some of these challenges. All available modes of transport – including barges, buses, and trains – must be used to ensure that the large backlog of southerners are able to return quickly. Furthermore, an information campaign should be launched to clarify when and how those returns will happen.

Beyond the difficulties associated with the return process, returnees face enormous challenges in restarting their lives once they finally complete their journey home. The first returnees to arrive in South Sudan received a food package sufficient for three months. Now, that has been reduced to just one-month's supply. This is due in part to shortages in food reserves. However, it is also the result of an attempt by humanitarian agencies to reduce what some have characterized as South Sudan's "chronic hyper-dependency on outside food," and to stimulate instead the cultivation of the nation's plentiful farm land. But unless there is a coherent and integrated plan which addresses the basic needs of returnees simultaneously, rural development policies will fail. For instance, southerners being encouraged to take up farming in certain regions must have access to basic services, such as clinics and schools for their children.

In terms of shelter provision, many of the projects implemented in 2011 suffered from poor donor readiness – particularly slow project approval procedures. This put agencies in the impossible position of trying to build homes in the rainy season, which runs from May to October. Thus when the dry season came, numerous NGOs were all trying to buy building materials, causing a spike in prices and resulting in fewer shelters being built. A better system, which is currently under discussion among aid agencies, might be to use cash grants to allow each returnee head of household to take responsibility for sourcing and organizing the building of his or her home.

Plans to facilitate the long-term reintegration of returnees have been under discussion at the national and state levels in South Sudan since late 2010. In November 2010, the then pre-independence government of South Sudan presented a development plan that incorporated the assessed needs of each of the 10 states. The government proposed to finance the plan at a cost of \$60 million. Inter-

national donors, however, have yet to agree to directly finance this development plan. There is concern that the plan sees the return and reintegration of hundreds of thousands of people as a short-term issue, requiring only a food package and assistance with shelter. However, this assistance – valuable as it is – does not help the long-term development of the new nation. It also does not help the returnees to integrate into South Sudan's social, political, and economic life.

Further, the issue of land allocation has proven to be enormously difficult. The plan, conceived at the national level, calls for land to be given to returnees free of charge, wherever they settle. However, allocation of land parcels is carried out by neither the national government nor the state governments, but rather at the county level. County commissioners have enormous power to decide who gets land and who does not. For returnees, many of whom have been living outside the area for years – and likely dwelling in urban areas – it can be difficult to acquire the right kind of land. This is especially true in areas where there are ethnic tensions among communities, as well as in urban areas like state capitals.

The former problem requires outside advocacy and conflict mitigation in order to ensure that returnees' needs are met without creating conflict. The latter requires that authorities at all levels take into account the expectations of many returnees who have come from cities and are unable (or unwilling) to transition to rural life. IOM, UNDP, and non-governmental organizations must ensure that the specific needs of urban returnees are taken into account within reintegration activities. Fortunately, a database exists which identifies both the areas where returnees are concentrated, as well as any needed improvements (building of schools, wells, etc.). Donors can and should access this database in order to fund targeted projects.

Peter Orr and Takawira Kapikinyu assessed the humanitarian situation for displaced people and returnees in South Sudan in September and October 2011.