

Protecting some of the people some of the time

Civilian perspectives on peacekeeping forces
in South Sudan



About the International Refugee Rights Initiative

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IRRI redresses the imbalances in power that fuel the violent exclusion of vulnerable populations from protection through:

- tackling the root causes of exile, statelessness, discriminatory violence, and conflict through which state protection is lost;
- enhancing the agency and protection of those who are forcibly displaced or threatened with displacement; and
- promoting the re-building of just and inclusive communities in which genuine citizenship is forged and displacement and exile comes to an end.

IRRI grounds its advocacy in regional and international human rights instruments and strives to make these guarantees effective at the local level.

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Background to the Paper

This report is based on field research conducted by Dr. Lucy Hovil, Senior Researcher at IRRI, and two external consultants one of whom was Peter Wai Wai. Lucy Hovil was the primary drafter of the report, with input and support from the consultants, and Olivia Bueno and Andie Lambe of IRRI. The team would like to express their enormous gratitude to all those who gave their time and participated in the study.

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Executive Summary

The outbreak of war in South Sudan on 15 December 2013 saw an abrupt change in the trajectory of peacekeeping in the country. The speed with which the situation escalated forced the peacekeeping mission (the UN Mission in South Sudan, or UNMISS) to adapt from a predominant focus on peacebuilding to protecting civilians from mass atrocity.

The decision by UNMISS to open their gates to thousands of civilians fleeing violence undoubtedly saved many lives. However, while grateful for the protection offered by the camps, two years on civilians express disappointment that the UN has not been able to do more. The mission has not prevented atrocities from being committed, and civilians are frustrated that protection appears to be available only inside the camps. In the words of one man: “They tell us they can only protect us if we stay here. They say that if you go out far from the camp, we can’t protect you.”² Meanwhile, inside the camps there are concerns about poor humanitarian conditions and inadequate security.

“This camp is horrific. I am safe, yes, but I am only here because there is nowhere else to go.”¹

This report, the first of a three-part comparative study on peacekeeping across Africa, examines civilian perspectives of peacekeeping forces in South Sudan. It is not an assessment of the operations of UNMISS per se, but an analysis of UNMISS as seen by the civilians they are supposed to protect. It is hoped that this research will enable those actors involved with peacekeeping – from international NGOs advocating for reform within the UN and UN policy makers in New York, to peacekeepers on the ground – to better understand the views of civilians. It highlights ways in which the peacekeeping operation might better respond to the needs of the population they are mandated to protect, albeit recognising the limitations placed on the mission as a result of resource constraints and the political environment in which they operate.

The report presents perspectives on UNMISS within the broader context of the conflict and the protection challenges facing civilians, including the need for protection from atrocities. Although the conflict was triggered by disagreements within the government, its evolution and current contours are coloured by the years of conflict prior to the country’s independence in 2011; and subsequent failures to establish rule of law. Two years on, and despite a new peace agreement in place (which few civilians believe will be implemented), many have not left protection of civilian sites (PoC sites)³ since they entered, while those on the outside remain without protection due to the difficulty of UNMISS in protecting civilians outside the camps and the perceived inaccessibility of the sites to certain ethnic groups.

Key findings

Protection by UNMISS in PoC sites is visible and welcome, but protection outside of the PoC sites is neither visible nor well understood. The PoC sites are the most visible manifestation of the presence of UNMISS, and many both inside and outside the camps believe that their sole job is to protect PoC sites. As a result, the mission’s mandate is not well understood by the local population.

The legacy of past mass atrocities affects people’s perception of their current security. The memory of specific atrocities plays a dominant role in people’s understanding of their broader security situation. For many, their last

¹ Interview with PoC resident, man, Malakal PoC, 4 November 2015.

² Interview with two PoC residents, men from Unity State, Bor PoC, 20 October 2015.

³ This report refers to the sites interchangeably as PoC sites, PoC camps and camps.

direct encounter with communities outside of the camp was the witnessing of atrocities that had compelled them to come to the PoC camp to seek safety. Return, therefore, has to go hand-in-hand with transitional justice measures.

PoC sites, which have become increasingly mono-ethnic and/or divided internally along ethnic lines are reinforcing the ethnic divisions that have characterised the conflict. While the ethnicisation of PoC sites was not entirely unexpected, in effect it has changed the dynamics of the broader conflict.

The artificial borders of PoC sites create unintended consequences. The “hard” perimeters of PoC sites are effectively a catch-22: on the one hand, they limit interaction that could spark identity-based violence; on the other, they do not allow for inter-communal interaction needed to move beyond communities’ last reference point of those relations – instances of mass atrocity.

Recommendations

- **UNMISS needs to improve its capacity to protect civilians both inside and outside of the PoC sites.** Although UNMISS has performed admirably in offering protection to many civilians, significant gaps still remain in protection both within and outside of camps. While acknowledging UNMISS resource constraints, to address these deficiencies in both the short and longer-term, UNMISS must ensure that:
 - Protection of civilians is not reduced or deprioritised as the mandate of UNMISS increases;
 - There is an increase of the protection of civilians outside of the PoC sites by increasing its capacity to undertake patrols outside of the PoC sites, as well as the character of those patrols;
 - UNMISS needs to address the disparity in performance between contingents of different troop contributing countries. Not only is this an operational difficulty for the mission, it is also visible to the civilian population and is undermining the credibility of the mission.⁴
 - UNMISS must show independence and neutrality, especially *vis a vis* the government of South Sudan in order to retain credibility with the civilian population;
 - There is more accurate and regular communication between communities living inside and outside of the PoC sites; and
 - It does not inadvertently reinforce the increasing polarisation of communities within South Sudan.
- **The UN Security Council (UNSC) must ensure that the protection of civilians remains a priority.** UNMISS is already struggling to provide sufficient protection to all those civilians in need. The UNSC must ensure that as UNMISS takes up its additional responsibilities in supporting the implementation of the August 2015 peace agreement, additional troops and resources are provided to prevent any reduction in the protection of civilians.
- **UNMISS and the wider donor community must ensure adequate humanitarian assistance is provided to those living in the PoC sites.** In some sites, people have resorted to eating leaves and burning plastic due to food and charcoal shortages. This is unacceptable. Therefore, UNMISS must ensure that they are able to

⁴ This has been recognised elsewhere with a number of recommendations made on how to address this, see for example, the Center for Civilians in Conflict (CIVIC) “Within and beyond the gates: The protection of civilians by the UN Mission in South Sudan.” CIVIC, 2015, available at <http://civiliansinconflict.org/resources/pub/within-and-beyond-the-gates-the-protection-of-civilians-by-the-un-mission-i> which recommends that information be shared about failures to follow standard operating procedures. They also suggest measures to improve training. The HIPPO report also recommends training and treating any national caveats not accepted by the secretariat as disobedience of lawful command. See, Report of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations on uniting our strengths for peace: politics, partnership and people, 16 June 2015, available at http://www.un.org/sg/pdf/HIPPO_Report_1_June_2015.pdf (hereinafter “HIPPO report”).

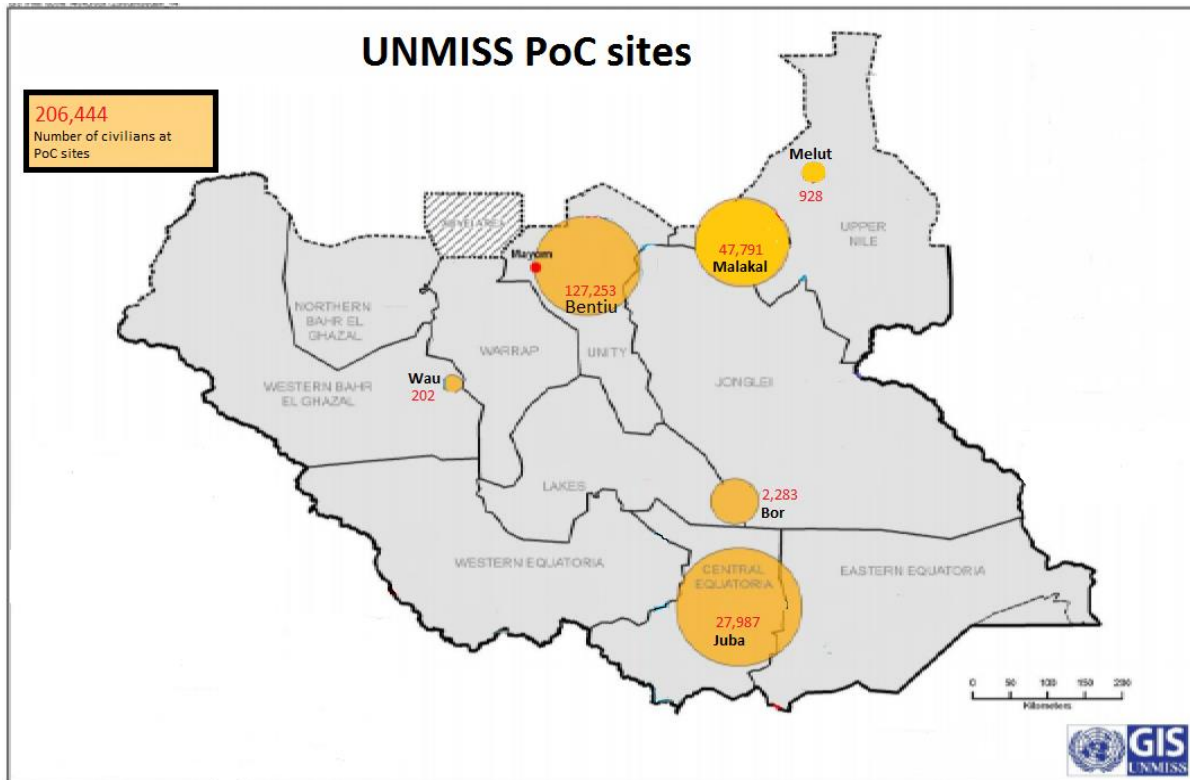
provide – directly or through external humanitarian actors – sufficient resources to enable those living within the PoC sites to have an acceptable basic standard of living in the short term.

- **UNMISS needs to ensure it communicates more effectively with the local population.** There are a number UNMISS, minimise the risk of an irreparable loss of trust between the mission and the local population and enhance its ability to increase security – and perceptions of security – among civilians. In particular, UNMISS should:
 - Increase awareness of how the mission’s mandate applies outside the camps. A common belief, both inside and outside of the PoC sites, is that the sole job of UNMISS is to protect PoC sites
 - Communicate more robustly about UNMISS’ activities in support of the implementation of the peace agreement. Civilians want a political resolution to the conflict and rightly believe that this is the only viable mechanism for protection in the long term. Their frustration at the perceived lack of engagement by UNMISS is demoralising and could be improved by a better understanding of the current activities under the mandate;
 - Address the widely held perception that certain troop contingents are unable or unwilling to protect civilians, which is undermining both the civilian’s sense of security and the credibility of UNMISS as a whole; and
 - Explain that UNMISS is mandated to operate in South Sudan regardless of the consent of the government. While operational support from the government is helpful, the perception that the mission is dependent on the government of South Sudan is clearly damaging the mission’s credibility in the eyes of the civilian population.
- **UNMISS needs to ensure that PoC sites remain available for those who need this form of protection.** The creation of PoC sites in this conflict has set a welcome precedent for the protection of civilians. However, it means that UNMISS (and potentially other peacekeeping missions) need to be prepared to re-open their gates or apply the same strategy in other areas should renewed violence break out.
- **UNMISS should ensure that it has a clear and evolving understanding of how all of its activities – and in particular management of the PoC sites – are interacting with the conflict context, in order to minimise harm.** This will require a more nuanced and ongoing understanding of the conflict context in South Sudan, which could be reinforced by increased engagement with civilians, enhanced early warning capacity and better intelligence gathering. A mechanism for the measurement and improvement of conflict sensitivity to the protection of civilians should be established. This will minimise the potential harm that, for example, PoC sites can cause through their interaction with the conflict context.
- **UNMISS should start strategising now for the safest and most durable way to enable people to exit from the PoC sites.** Specifically, UNMISS should do this by:
 - Ensuring that those within the camps are receiving regular, accurate and unbiased information from outside the camps to enable those sheltered within to make informed choices;
 - Enabling direct contact between civilians inside and outside the PoC sites through, for example, the facilitation of escorted “go and see” visits to home areas and “come and tell” visits by individuals who stayed in home communities or through the creation of a forum or forums for regular exchange on issues of return, including UNMISS and humanitarian actors, to facilitate dialogue and ensure common understanding;

- Creating secure and structured spaces for cross-community dialogue on protection issues between those inside and those outside the camps, including community leaders and local government officials;
- Supporting transitional justice measures to ensure that return is more sustainable by encouraging or supporting local efforts to rebuild trust by, for example providing logistical support to inter-communal dialogues, facilitation of dialogue between local community leaders and participation in community-led processes;
- Adopting standards for return in line with international law, which would emphasise the need to ensure return in safety and dignity; and
- Improving the protection of civilians and access to humanitarian assistance outside of PoC sites to make leaving the sites a more viable option.

Background

Conflict in South Sudan



Adapted from a UNMISS GIS Map, numbers of PoC residents as per International Organisation for Migration, South Sudan humanitarian Update, 14-27 November 2015.

The violence that broke out in South Sudan on 15 December 2013 was both predictable and appalling. What started off as a power struggle between President Salva Kiir and former deputy president Riek Machar (the latter under the auspices of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army in Opposition (SPLM/A-IO)) was soon manipulated into an ethnically-aligned conflagration that allowed fighting to spread with extraordinary speed and intensity. Although the towns of Juba, Bor, Malakal and Bentiu have suffered the brunt of the fighting, all parts of South Sudan have been affected to some degree. Two years on, the conflict has led to thousands of deaths and one in five South Sudanese is displaced: while over 600,000 have fled to the neighbouring states of Uganda, Ethiopia, Kenya and Sudan, 1.6 million are internally displaced.⁵

Although the conflict was triggered by disagreements within the government, it is deeply entangled with unresolved issues from the years of conflict prior to the country's independence. For decades, and through two excruciatingly drawn-out and devastating wars, the majority of those who are now South Sudanese were alienated from a minority central power source in Khartoum that fought to control not only political and economic resources, but also to define what it meant to be Sudanese in social and cultural terms. While the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (2005 CPA) was supposed to resolve Sudan's multiple conflicts by promoting more inclusive forms of belonging and a more

⁵ UNOCHA, "South Sudan Update," November 2015, available at <http://www.unocha.org/south-sudan/>

democratic governance, the agreement was eventually whittled down to only one of its elements – the referendum on the independence of the south, which led to the creation of South Sudan in 2011.

Following the referendum that led to the division of Sudan into two states, South Sudan had the opportunity to break with its history of abuse of power and to form a cohesive state built on inclusive forms of citizenship and belonging.⁷

“We fought the North for all of us, not just the Dinka.”⁶

However, in reality the ruling Sudan People’s Liberation Movement (SPLM), a politico-military organisation led by President Salva Kiir, began to replicate the exclusionary and partisan policies out of which the new state had been born. As a result, the 2005 CPA, although

successful in ending the devastating north-south war, neither resolved conflict in the reduced state of Sudan (as evidenced by renewed conflict in Darfur, Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile States), nor consolidated peace in the newly-created state of South Sudan.

Much effort, particularly at a regional level under the leadership of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), has been invested in trying to resolve this latest conflict within South Sudan, and at least seven ceasefires have been agreed and broken since the conflict started in December 2013. With the recent signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement on 26 August 2015 (2015 CPA), there is an understandable focus by IGAD, the UN and the international community on taking advantage of this framework to promote peace. However, there are numerous reasons for caution. Not only did President Kiir only sign the agreement with “reservations”,⁸ he later unilaterally divided South Sudan’s 10 states into 28, in what the rebels termed a “clear violation of the peace agreement”,⁹ and the parties are already behind schedule in the formation of the transitional government.¹⁰ Furthermore, and despite its provisions on root issues such as land, corruption and accountability, there are concerns about the ability of the agreement to transform political culture given that the same two men, Kiir and Machar, remain at the centre of the conflict and at the helm of the transitional government.

Concern is heightened by the fact that the African Union Commission of Inquiry into South Sudan, drafted in 2014 but only officially released in October 2015, highlights serious violations of human rights and international crimes committed by both sides. For instance, it alleges that the killings of Nuer soldiers and civilians in Juba were “committed pursuant to or in furtherance of a state policy” as part of “an organised military operation.”¹¹ State responsibility for what has taken place, therefore, is placed at the forefront of the report.

The report also emphasises the brutality of the atrocities committed by both government and rebel forces against civilians. The war has become defined by the scale and nature of these atrocities, which have primarily targeted non-combatants and have created huge divisions within communities. The use of ethnicity by those in power as a tool for mobilising constituents within the conflict has been a particularly pernicious strategy. It has torn apart the social fabric

Two years on, the conflict has left one in five South Sudanese displaced. 600,000 have fled to neighbouring states of Uganda, Ethiopia, Kenya and Sudan, and 1.6 million are internally displaced.

⁶ Interview with PoC resident, man, Bor PoC, 20 October 2015.

⁷ Jok Madut Jok, “Which way South Sudan? Cultural Diversity and the Fundamentals of Nation-Building,” African Arguments blog, Royal African Studies and Social Science Research Council, 28 March 2011, available at <http://africanarguments.org/2011/03/28/which-way-south-sudan-cultural-diversity-and-the-fundamentals-of-nation-building/>

⁸ “South Sudan’s President Salva Kiir signs peace deal despite ‘serious reservations’” *The Guardian*, 27 August 2015, available at <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/aug/27/south-sudan-president-salva-kiir-signs-peace-deal-despite-serious-reservations>

⁹ “South Sudan armed opposition says 28 states order derails peace agreement,” *Sudan Tribune*, 20 November 2015, available at <http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article57095>

¹⁰ US Department of State, “Statement on the South Sudan Peace Process,” 25 November 2015, available at <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2015/11/250012.htm>

¹¹ Final Report of the African Union Commission of Inquiry into South Sudan, Addis Ababa, 15 October 2014, available at http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/auiciss.final_report.pdf

that had already been weakened by decades of conflict and injustice, such that the potential legacies of this violent conflict at both a national and local level are hard to overstate. In this regard, the 2015 CPA also recognises the need for accountability and foresees the creation of both a Truth Commission and a Hybrid Court for South Sudan and provides that any individuals who are indicted would be dismissed from government. Questions remain, however, about the commitment of the parties to implement these measures particularly if, as seems likely in any credible process, the leaders on both sides were to be targeted.

In addition, high levels of displacement within and from South Sudan have exacerbated the terrible toll of the conflict on the civilian population. Indeed, displacement has been a defining feature of many people's lives for decades. Prior to independence, many had spent years in exile and had returned with hope but also a strong level of realism regarding the stability of the country. Since 2011, the huge deficit in both the rule of law and in state provided security has meant that civilians have been unable to rely on the state for protection. As a result, movement has been a key survival strategy for those who have been forced to create their own protection.¹²

When violence broke out in December 2013, therefore, it seems likely that the speed with which people fled in search of safety built on this broader pattern and history of displacement. Many of those seen to be allied with the government fled to northern Uganda, some of them assisted by the Ugandan People's Defence Army (UPDF) who had moved into South Sudan soon after the fighting began, while many of those associated with the opposition fled to neighbouring Ethiopia. Others fled to Sudan and Kenya. Those who are internally displaced are both in *ad hoc* camps and in urban areas. Yet movement itself has often failed to provide protection. Lack of access to displaced persons, alongside a huge deficit in funding for humanitarian assistance, has meant that malnutrition levels are reaching critical levels in many parts of the country, particularly for those who are displaced and are without access to any form of livelihood.¹³

UNMISS

It is within this context that UNMISS has been operating. UNMISS was originally deployed in July 2011 under a Chapter VII mandate, taking over from the United Nations Mission to Sudan (UNMIS), established in March 2005 to support the implementation of the 2005 CPA. UNMISS was envisaged as a *peacebuilding* mission. Its core mandate was to consolidate peace and security and help establish the conditions for development in South Sudan in order to strengthen the capacity of the state to govern effectively and democratically. However, protection of civilians was included in the mandate from the start and it is important to remember that some regions were insecure from the initial deployment of UNMISS in 2011. With the outbreak of hostilities in December 2013, the emphasis was rebalanced to focus on protection of civilians.¹⁴ Then in October 2015, the mission was given a number of new responsibilities related to encouraging implementation of the 2015 CPA.

Prior to the outbreak of violence in December 2013, UNMISS had established county support bases in 35 counties in addition to its presence in the 10 South Sudanese state capitals. In theory, this allowed for a UNMISS presence in 45 out of 79 counties spread over 10 South Sudanese states, about 56% of the country.¹⁵

¹² See, for instance, Lucy Hovil "Hoping for peace, afraid of war: the dilemmas of repatriation and belonging on the borders of Uganda and South Sudan," New Issues in Refugee Research no. 196, UNHCR Development and Policy Evaluation Unit, December 2010, available at <http://www.unhcr.org/4cf5018b1.pdf>

¹³ See, for instance, International Rescue Committee, "Bearing the Cost of Crisis: Nutrition in South Sudan," May 2015, available at http://www.rescue.org/sites/default/files/resource-file/IRC_Nutrition_SSudan_v4.pdf

¹⁴ UNMISS mandate available at <http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/missions/unmiss/mandate.shtml>

¹⁵ UNMISS, "Facts and Figures", available at <http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/missions/unmiss/facts.shtml>

The scale of what took place in December 2013 caught UNMISS by surprise. While it seems that there was an awareness within UNMISS that trouble was brewing, particularly following the split between President Kiir and former deputy Machar, the timing and speed of the conflict was not foreseen. There appears to have been little contingency planning, and the mission was left unprepared for conflict.

Despite being caught off-guard, however, UNMISS responded by opening up a number of its bases to civilians fleeing the conflict. As of June 2015, UNMISS numbered around 12,250 troops (out of an authorised force of 12,500),¹⁷ as of November 2015, UNMISS was providing protection to over 206,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) at five PoC sites.¹⁸ This protection has been absorbing approximately 40% of UNMISS' resources.¹⁹ While UNMISS also carries out some air and ground patrols, albeit limited, the PoC sites have become a defining feature of the mission's profile and activities.

“No, we did not see this coming.”¹⁶

Many of those who were forced to leave their homes when the violence broke out fled to UNMISS bases in Juba (Central Equatoria State), Bor (Jonglei State), Malakal (Upper Nile State), Bentiu (Unity State) and Wau (Western Bahr el Ghazal State). These sites, some of which have subsequently been relocated to nearby areas due to the need to increase the space for those seeking protection and to allow space for other mission operations, have now effectively become IDP camps.

While originally the PoC sites hosted people from all sections of the communities, over time, and reflecting the broader manipulation of ethnicity within the conflict, the sites have increasingly taken on distinct ethnic profiles. In the case of Bentiu and Malakal where civilians are unable to live in the neighbouring towns, the sites have been divided up internally along ethnic lines; and in the case of Juba and Bor, where a significant number of civilians left the PoC sites from early 2014 (attributed by a number of interviewees to the presence of the UPDF, which was seen to offer them protection), the sites have become increasingly associated with one ethnic group, namely the Nuer – who, in turn, are associated with the opposition. In reality, members of minority groups including the Shilluk and Anyok are also present in Bor and Juba PoC sites.

While the opening of the PoC sites undoubtedly saved many lives, thousands were killed or injured in the initial stages of the conflict, and atrocities against civilians have continued over the past two years. Ongoing fighting in parts of Unity State, including Leer County which has been on the frontline between government and rebel forces (partly linked to its symbolic value as Machar's birthplace),²⁰ is one example. In April 2015, government forces attempted to and briefly retook the town from the rebels. Since then the region has shifted between government and rebel control.²¹ Between April and September 2015 in Leer County and two other counties in southern Unity State, at least 1,000 civilians were killed, 1,300 women and girls raped, and 1,600 women and girls abducted.²² Following an all too familiar pattern, fighting re-erupted when rebels briefly captured Leer town, before government forces recaptured it and allegedly carried out reprisal attacks throughout the county. Although the fighting broke out in April, UNMISS apparently only managed to patrol between 15 and 18 October when there was a pause in the fighting.²³ The

¹⁶ Kelvin J. Kelley, “UN admits it was caught off-guard in South Sudan,” *The East African*, 27 December 2013, available at <http://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/news/UN-admits-it-was-caught-off-guard-in-South-Sudan/-/2558/2127000/-/w0j2cxz/-/index.html>

¹⁷ UNMISS, “Facts and Figures”, available at <http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/missions/unmiss/facts.shtml>

¹⁸ IOM, “South Sudan Humanitarian Update,” 14-27 November 2015, available at <http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/IOM%20South%20Sudan%20Humanitarian%20Update%20%2359.pdf>

¹⁹ Interview with UN official, New York, 15 October 2015.

²⁰ See the UN's South Sudan Report, Sept 2015, leaked to Inner City Press, available at: <http://www.scribd.com/doc/283091745/UN-s-South-Sudan-Report-Sept-2015-Leaked-to-Inner-City-Press>

²¹ Human Security Baseline Assessment for Sudan and South Sudan, “Conflict in Unity State,” available at <http://www.smallarmssurveysudan.org/facts-figures/south-sudan/conflict-of-2013-14/the-conflict-in-unity.html>

²² UNHCR and Protection Cluster, “Protection Situation Update: Southern and Central Unity (April – September 2015)”, October 2015, available at a <http://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/protection-situation-update-southern-and-central-unity-april-september-2015>

²³ Jason Patinkin, “Hiding from horror in the swamps of South Sudan,” *Al Jazeera*, 4 November 2015, available at <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2015/11/hiding-horror-swamps-south-sudan-151103065640643.html>

limitations of the peacekeeping mission in being able to protect civilians (and also of the peace agreement) continue to be painfully obvious.

As a result, concerns have repeatedly been raised by local civil society and the international community over the ability of UNMISS to cope with the impact of this ever-changing and complex war on its mandate, including the protection of civilians. As the conflict has evolved, it has become increasingly clear that UNMISS has been “overwhelmed by the scale of conflict and, racing to manage each new challenge without adequate resources or holistic plans.”²⁴ A number of actors have already critiqued the mission.



UNMISS helicopters, Bor airstrip
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Human Rights Watch, in a broader reporting on the conflict in South Sudan, commented on the mission’s human rights reporting function saying that it had done important investigations, but “this work has been stymied because staff have been unable to visit many locations after helicopter trips have been cancelled, in some cases because of security concerns but often because these assets have been otherwise prioritised.”²⁵ They also critiqued the lack of access to services for survivors of sexual violence in the UNMISS PoC sites.²⁶ In addition, the Center for Civilians in Conflict and the Better World Campaign recently released a comprehensive assessment of the mission, which recognises that the mission has performed admirably in many respects, including through the creation of the PoC sites, but recognises that the force has faced difficulties in protecting civilians outside the PoC sites for reasons of resources, obstruction by the parties to the conflict, and unwillingness of troop contributing countries to take risks.²⁷

Our report builds on these previous analyses with a particular focus on the views of civilians. It seeks to understand civilian perspectives, why they are as they are, and – crucially – what can be done to better address the needs and aspirations of these communities in South Sudan with a view to building the understanding needed to address the needs of these populations elsewhere as well.

Methodology

Interviews with civilians living both within and outside PoC sites are the primary source of data. The report is not intended as an overall assessment of UNMISS, but to provide insight into civilian perspectives on the peacekeepers in order to assess to what extent the mission can better address their concerns. The methodology responds to a growing recognition that the need to develop better responses to situations of conflict in which atrocities take place

²⁴ Laurie Mincieli, “United Nations Peace Operations Facing Dual Crises in the Sudans,” 5 May 2014, available at: <http://securityobserver.org/united-nations-peace-operations-facing-dual-crises-in-the-sudans/>

²⁵ Human Rights Watch, “‘They Burned It All’: Destruction of Villages, Killings and Sexual Violence in Unity State, South Sudan,” 2015, p. 16, available at https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/report_pdf/southsudan0715_web_0.pdf

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Centre for Civilians in Conflict and the Better World Campaign, “Within and Beyond the Gates: The Protection of Civilians by the UN Mission in South Sudan,” 2015, available at http://civiliansinconflict.org/uploads/files/publications/SouthSudanReport_Web.pdf (hereinafter CIVIC report).

has not been matched by an in depth understanding of the needs and aspirations of those most affected, nor an adequate understanding of the political, historical and social context in which these atrocities happen.

By listening to the perspectives of civilians on one of the key mechanisms currently mandated to protect them from atrocities, the intention is to highlight areas where UNMISS' actions (as opposed to its mandate) shape people's perceptions of their safety and, consequently, the protection they perceive they need. In turn, the research points to areas in which there is a need to deliberately change perceptions of civilians that are either harmful or out-dated; and to suggest ways in which UNMISS can re-align its activities to better reflect the situation on the ground. The fact that atrocities have been committed in South Sudan is not in question. What is in question is how lessons can be learned from the context regarding the role of peacekeeping forces in improving the situation in South Sudan and in responding to and preventing future atrocities.

In order to narrow down our inquiry, field research, which took place from 16 October to 5 November 2015 and was qualitative in nature, was conducted in Juba, Bor and Malakal, three of the five urban areas where there are current PoC sites. In the case of Juba and Bor, interviews were conducted both with those living inside the PoC sites and IDPs living outside of them. In Malakal, where the town remains largely deserted by civilians due to ongoing insecurity, interviews only took place within the PoC site.

A total of 84 interviews were conducted with civilians, and 16 interviews were conducted with government, NGO and UN officials, including UNMISS staff, in South Sudan and New York. While the majority of interviews were conducted with individuals, a few focus group discussions took place, particularly when the research team first entered a PoC site in order to explain to the communities the purpose of our research. Every effort was made to ensure that we interviewed a cross-section of people within the PoC sites, including individuals from the different sections of the camps (which was particularly important in the case of Malakal, where the camp is divided along ethnic lines); those who were in situations of leadership as well as those who were not; a wide age-range; and both men and women. Meetings with IDPs living outside the PoC sites, on some occasions for fear of their safety, were held in quiet meeting places, mostly in small discussion groups.

The invisibility of protection outside the PoC sites

The interviews demonstrate clearly that the PoC sites saved lives. While the opening of PoC sites did not prevent mass violence from taking place, it certainly reduced the number of people killed or injured in a context in which civilians had almost no other options for seeking safety. As one man said, "If it was not because of peacekeepers all of us would have been killed."²⁸ The speed with which the decision was taken to open the gates was crucial, and it was telling that in interviews with UNMISS personnel there was reference to the fact that the opening of UNMISS bases had avoided another "Rwanda situation", a particular failure to act that has haunted peacekeeping missions since 1994.

"They don't come to you"²⁸

Of course, the interviews do not capture the stories of those who were unable to make it to the PoC sites and who either lost their lives or were injured as a result. However, there was consensus that many more lives would have been lost had people not been allowed into the UNMISS bases.

²⁸ Interview with PoC resident, man, Juba PoC3, 27 October 2015.

²⁹ Interview with PoC resident, man, Juba PoC3, 27 October 2015.

The mandate of UNMISS is not well understood

The speed with which thousands moved into the PoC sites did not, however, reflect an understanding of UNMISS' mandate beyond a general notion that they were part of the UN. For instance, a woman who was living in Juba when the fighting broke out explained why she had come to the PoC site: "Nobody told me to come here, but I knew that UN is a place where you get assistance. When we entered, I knew this was somewhere safe. We no longer saw dead bodies on the ground."³¹ Another woman told of how civilians were initially scared of UNMISS when the fighting broke out:

"UNMISS' mandate is up to the fence."³⁰

Before December 2013, people didn't know what [UNMISS] were doing here. I heard that in Bentiu, everyone from the town ran out to the bush when the fighting broke out. Even when they saw UNMISS vehicles they ran from them because they thought they were the enemy. Then someone came to them and told them UNMISS is there to protect. These were educated people who could read and knew what UNMISS was about – they knew they could go to them for protection. People who knew talked to those in the bush, and then they moved to the PoC site there.³²

Yet despite having lived inside a PoC site surrounded by peacekeepers for almost two years, most of those interviewed were still unclear about UNMISS' mandate. While a few had a clear understanding of the broader mandate of UNMISS, there was a prevalent understanding of peacekeeping as synonymous with PoC sites and a lack of awareness of any mandate outside of this. As one of the leaders of Juba's PoC3 site said, "UNMISS does not operate outside perimeters, their role is to keep people safe inside the camp..."³³ This opinion was echoed by numerous others: "Peacekeepers' work is to protect us, but when you go outside [of PoC camps] it is not their power or their mandate to protect."³⁴ A similar sentiment was echoed by interviewees in the Malakal PoC site. As one woman said: "No it is not the responsibility of the peacekeepers to protect the civilians outside the UN camp."³⁵ Instead, numerous interviewees pointed to the fact that it was the responsibility of the government to protect them outside of the camps, which although perhaps reflective of the international consensus that protection is *primarily* the responsibility of the government, shows that UNMISS was not seen as playing a strong role in protection outside. The fact that many had previously been in one of the other PoC sites, or had relatives and friends in other PoC sites, had reinforced the idea that the protection of displaced people within specific enclosed locations was the only activity of the mission. While understandable, the fact that civilians do not understand UNMISS' mandate is clearly a problem for the mission.

Although civilians did not think it was UNMISS' mandate to operate outside of the camps, people also expressed frustration that UNMISS was not doing more. For instance, a number of people talked about the fact that they want them to engage with the peace process. As one man in Malakal said, "It is hard to predict whether the recent peace agreement signed in Addis Ababa will ever be fruitful. The attitude of our leaders is very clear: at any time they may spoil the peace again. So we need UNMISS to work with the leaders to implement this."³⁶ Others talked about the need for them to carry out patrols outside of the camps. While in both cases these are activities that UNMISS is engaged with, at least at some level, it seems that it is doing so in a way that is either insufficient or insufficiently communicated.

³⁰ Interview with PoC resident, man, Juba PoC1, 17 October 2015.

³¹ Interview with PoC resident, woman, Juba PoC1, 17 October 2015.

³² Interview with PoC resident, woman, Juba PoC1, 17 October 2015.

³³ Interview with PoC resident, man, Juba PoC3, 27 October 2015.

³⁴ Focus group discussion with three PoC residents, Juba PoC3, 27 October 2015.

³⁵ Interview with PoC resident, woman, Malakal PoC, 4 November 2015.

³⁶ Interview with PoC resident, man, Malakal PoC, 4 November 2015.

It is clear, therefore, that UNMISS must do more to communicate its mission effectively to the population – but with the caveat that it must avoid raising unrealistic expectations by recognising the gap between its mandate on paper and its capabilities in practice. Nonetheless, for civilians who are frustrated that the UN is not providing protection outside of the camps, it might be comforting for them to know that there is at least an attempt to do so. And undoubtedly, improvement of performance in this area would be helpful for changing perceptions.

Even within camps, protection is limited

However, even within the camps, many referred to the limitations of UNMISS' ability to protect them. As one man said, "they are good, neutral. But the main weakness is they can't do anything when crimes are committed in front of them. They can't act, only just reporting. Reporting doesn't bring people back to life."³⁷ Or as another man said, "They have guns to protect themselves but not to protect people"³⁸

In the PoC site in Bor, for instance, every interviewee referred to an incident on 17 April 2014 in which the camp was attacked and at least 47 people were killed.³⁹ The perpetrators of the attack were consistently referred to as people from Bor town – who, by implication, were still there. One man described what he witnessed on that day:

When we were in [the initial UNMISS camp] the Minister of Information wanted to take out all the men to kill them – that was in January 2014. But the UN was very firm and didn't let them. The minister went and mobilised and armed the youth in Bor town. They came and attacked the POC, with 49 killed including women and children. One woman was killed with her seven children. The peacekeepers kept quiet. Eventually the Indian soldiers shot and killed six then they ran. The Nepalese sat and watched. It was in day time, maybe 10am.⁴⁰

As a teenager who showed the bullet wound from being shot that day said, "[t]he problem is, because the UN wasn't given the power to shoot, they were just killing us and the UN was just watching us being killed – like they were watching us on TV."⁴¹ Reinforcing the confusion over people's understanding of UNMISS' mandate, many of those interviewed talked of how they were not scared of a similar attack happening because not only had the PoC site subsequently been moved and security reinforced, but also because UNMISS now had the mandate to shoot: "After what happened, UNMISS was given the order to shoot if someone comes in."⁴²

The way in which this incident was talked about reflects not only the confusion over UNMISS' mandate, but also the extent to which civilians saw little consistency in the mission. In particular, many interviewees saw particular contingents of soldiers as being less effective than others. As one man in Juba said, "The Bangladeshis – the main ones here – are not effective."⁴³ Or as another man said, "The Indians are good professionally, but because they know their mandate and are always waiting for an order from Geneva or whatever, they don't act. But the Ethiopians, they just act... They see that they are here to stop the physical threat. Indians don't do anything about that."⁴⁴ Indeed, both in Juba and Bor PoC sites, the arrival of an Ethiopian contingent was seen as positive in this regard. As one man said,

³⁷ Interview with PoC resident, man, Juba PoC1, 17 October 2015.

³⁸ Focus group discussion with four displaced men, Juba, 19 October 2015.

³⁹ UNMISS, "Attacks on Civilians in Bentiu and Bor, April 2014," 9 January 2015, available at <http://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/attacks-civilians-bentiu-bor-april-2014>

⁴⁰ Interview with PoC resident, man, Bor PoC, 20 October 2015.

⁴¹ Interview with PoC resident, teenage boy, Bor PoC, 21 October 2015.

⁴² Focus group discussion with PoC residents, 5 women, Bor PoC, 21 October 2015.

⁴³ Interview with PoC resident, man, PoC1 Juba, 17 October 2015.

⁴⁴ Interview with PoC resident, man, Bor PoC, 20 October 2015.

“Since the deployment of Ethiopian troops there is no fear at all [in PoC]. [But] when someone decides to shoot outside, UNMISS does not respond.”⁴⁵

While interviewees conceded that protection within the sites had recently improved, the lack of consistency in response is of serious concern. This problem has been noted previously both in relation to UNMISS and other missions, and is addressed in the Report of the High-Level Implementation Panel on United Nations Peace operations which recommends that troops need to be “trained, equipped and commanded so as to be able to deliver on their responsibilities to protect civilians,” and that “[a]ny national caveats beyond the national restrictions expressly accepted by the Secretariat at the outset be treated as disobedience of lawful command.”⁴⁶

Our interviews show, that this is not just creating internal problems within the UN but is also recognised by civilians and seen as problematic on the ground. Not only is it damaging the reputation of the mission, but it has created an environment in which civilians hope that UNMISS will protect them, but are not sure whether or not they will: they believe that their protection is contingent upon which particular peacekeepers are present should an incident take place. Therefore, there is a clear need for civilians to know exactly what they can expect from the peacekeepers; and the peacekeepers need to be held accountable to the civilian population as well as to the UN for any failure to carry out their mandate.⁴⁷



UN Base in Bor
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Humanitarian challenges

In addition, there were numerous issues raised among PoC residents about the lack of humanitarian aid and the poor living conditions in the camps. The extent to which physical safety cannot be disassociated from humanitarian needs has created a situation in which UNMISS has been drawn into increased involvement in humanitarian activity – a role that is as problematic for UNMISS as it is for the humanitarian actors seeking to work within the camp. As a result, people’s main criticism of the peacekeepers often related to the lack of humanitarian assistance more than the lack of security.

For instance, many talked about the number of children who die of disease or malnutrition within the camps; and a woman in Malakal told of how she has had to resort to feeding her children with leaves from the trees outside the camp.⁴⁸ In Bor, they have had to burn their plastic chairs and jerry cans to cook their food because charcoal is no longer being distributed. Although most of those interviewed differentiated between the role of UNMISS and the role of humanitarian actors, there was still a strong sense that UNMISS was ultimately responsible. In another interview, a woman talked of the fact that there was not an adequate supply of clean water in the camp. When asked if she thought that was the responsibility of UNMISS or the humanitarian actors working in the camp, she replied, “I blame UNMISS for this because they are responsible for all the agencies in the camp. They should make sure that organisations bring

⁴⁵ Interview with PoC resident, man, Juba PoC3, 27 October 2015.

⁴⁶ HIPPO report, 2015.

⁴⁷ CIVIC report 2015, p. 5-6.

⁴⁸ Interview with PoC resident, woman, Malakal, 4 November 2015.

proper services.”⁴⁹ As a result, interviewees talked of how members of the community get angry with UNMISS personnel during the distribution of food and water points, and throw stones at them.⁵⁰ These concerns show an urgent need to improve conditions in the short term even as long term alternatives are explored.

The desire for protection outside the gates

The extent to which UNMISS was equated with the PoC sites was also echoed by IDPs living outside of the sites. As one man living in Juba said, “UNMISS are people who protect, but only when you leave your place and go to them. They don’t come to you.”⁵¹ Not surprisingly, for those who are displaced but not living in the PoC sites, the link between protection by UNMISS and displacement was seen to be highly selective. As another displaced man said: “[UNMISS] don’t do anything outside of the camps... The role of UNMISS is to protect every civilian but that’s not the case now. UNMISS’ focus now is just for the PoC as they think if they [go out to] patrol, Dinka might attack the Nuer in the camp.”⁵² Or as another IDP said when asked what the mission of UNMISS is, “[w]e don’t know. You can only know someone who comes to your place – to where you are. They never come here. Only those in the PoC are the ones who know.”⁵³

In part, this perception of UNMISS as synonymous with PoC sites is not surprising given the visibility of the sites and the fact that their protection is one of the key activities the mission is carrying out. Although there was some recognition of UNMISS patrols outside the camps, particularly in Malakal, these were seen as limited: “UNMISS are patrolling outside near our homes, but only main roads, not moving on small roads.”⁵⁴ With limited information to the contrary, therefore, people can only assess the mandate of UNMISS by what they see. However, there was an underlying frustration with the limitations of the mission, particularly its lack of presence outside of the PoC sites. For those who had a clearer idea of UNMISS’ mandate there was an understanding that the mission was not fulfilling its wider mandate; while for others, their assessment was simply based on the fact that there is a need for greater UNMISS presence outside of the camps.

As a man in the PoC in Bor said, “[w]e want them here, and it is good what they are doing. But we also want them to protect us outside because we want to go home. So we want them increased so they can do both... Their mandate is to protect people – but not just people in PoC sites. They must also protect people in towns.”⁵⁵ Indeed, and as a number of interviewees pointed out, the fact that atrocities were taking place in Leer County at the time the interviews were happening was seen as evidence of UNMISS’ inability to protect civilians beyond the PoC sites.

In addition, a number of those interviewed viewed UNMISS as too close to the government and attributed their failure to patrol outside PoC sites to their dependence on, or unwillingness to challenge, the government. Comments such as, “UNMISS ... is only here because the government allows it to be;”⁵⁶ and “UNMISS can only go where government is”⁵⁷ were common. Or as another interviewee said, “[i]f UNMISS were not here, I would be dead. But now they should live up to their mandate and not be intimidated by the government.”⁵⁸ A number understood both the mission’s presence in the country and its specific activities to be dependent on government approval. Indeed, some believed that if the government decided to attack the PoC sites, then UNMISS would not be able to defend those within it.

⁴⁹ Interview with PoC resident, woman, Juba PoC1, 17 October 2015.

⁵⁰ Interview with PoC resident, man, Juba PoC1, 18 October 2015.

⁵¹ Focus group discussion with five displaced men, Juba, 17 October 2015.

⁵² Focus group discussion with three displaced men, Bor town, 21 October 2015.

⁵³ Focus group discussion with five displaced men and one woman, Bor town, 21 October 2015.

⁵⁴ Focus group discussion with three PoC residents, Juba PoC3, 27 October 2015.

⁵⁵ Interview with PoC resident, man, Bor PoC, 21 October 2015.

⁵⁶ Interview with PoC resident, Juba PoC1, 17 October 2015.

⁵⁷ Interview with displaced man, Bor town, 20 October 2015.

⁵⁸ Interview with PoC resident, woman, Juba PoC1, 17 October 2015.

Others expressed concern that the mission is not patrolling in opposition areas which, again, was linked to the fact that it could only operate with the government's endorsement.⁵⁹ Another concern raised in the media and by NGOs was that the government was accompanying UNMISS on patrols, which compromised the ability of the mission to interact with civilians. The Center for Civilians in Conflict and the Better World Campaign, for example, expressed concern about members of the mission turning around at government checkpoints without forcefully attempting to negotiate access.⁶⁰

In other words, there was an understanding that UNMISS' presence in the country is contingent upon the government allowing them to remain – and that this compromises the mission and makes them unwilling to challenge the authorities. Clearly, this is deeply problematic as it undermines both the mission's actual and perceived neutrality, as well as its ability to play a mediating role between the parties. This is additionally troubling as it also aligns UNMISS with a government that is strongly associated with committing atrocities against its own citizens.

Without a doubt, the mission needs to walk a fine line. While a Chapter VII mandate should, in theory, negate the need for host country acceptance of the mission, experience has shown that without host government acceptance, missions face extreme difficulties in operating. The comments above also need to be put in a wider context in which many civilians described the mission as neutral; and those perceived to be affiliated with the opposition still felt able to turn to the mission for protection. Regardless, it is clear that the mission's credibility is being damaged, and more needs to be done to proactively challenge the government on protection issues.

The need for political engagement

Ultimately, it was recognised that any action by UNMISS is, by its very nature, temporary, and that the only durable protection will come as a result of a political solution to the problem whereby the government becomes the protector of its people rather than a party in the conflict. As a woman who saw five members of her family killed by government forces before fleeing to the camp said, "No, it is not the responsibility of the peacekeepers to offer security to the people staying outside the camp, it is the government that must stop fighting and offer us security and protection."⁶¹ In order to achieve this more durable form of protection outside the camps, a number of interviewees expressed a desire for UNMISS to engage with political actors at both a local and a national level. As an IDP man said, "This fighting came as being between brothers. We need help now to reconcile. We need mediators like UNMISS. Before the crisis, people were together. Our daughters were marrying those of other tribes... Yet now, those from the PoC site come to see their houses during the day, but they have to go back to the PoC because they fear for their lives."⁶²

While the mission is mandated to engage politically by providing support to the ceasefire monitors, to support agreed transitional security measures, support constitutional review, assist the parties in creating disarmament strategies, monitor the withdrawal of "State and non-State security actors, allied to either Party...", and participate actively in the monitoring mechanism,⁶³ there was no understanding either within the PoC sites or outside of whether or not – or how – this was taking place. It is not clear whether this is because that aspect of the mission is relatively new, or because UNMISS has not prioritised it, or because engagement has not been sufficiently communicated – or a combination of the above. Regardless, UNMISS should ensure that it engages this element of its mandate robustly and communicates it effectively.

⁵⁹ This was expressed in two separate interviews with NGO workers, Juba, 25 and 28 October 2015.

⁶⁰ CIVIC 2015, p. 12.

⁶¹ Interview with PoC resident, woman, Malakal PoC, 4 November 2015.

⁶² Focus group discussion with five displaced men and one woman, Bor town, 21 October 2015.

⁶³ Security Council Resolution 2241, 9 October 2015, available at http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_res_2241.pdf

Political engagement was also seen as necessary at the local level. Or, as a local government official said, “We need two peace agreements. The one in Addis, and the one in the communities.”⁶⁴ In this context, civilians were convinced that UNMISS could and should play a positive role in mediating between or among communities at the local level. Such activities would also seem to be included in UNMISS’ mandate – which provides that the mission should “exercise good offices, confidence-building ... to facilitate the prevention, mitigation and resolution of inter-communal conflict in order to foster sustainable local and national reconciliation as an essential part of preventing violence.”⁶⁵ One NGO representative interviewed for the report indicated that, while UNMISS had played a positive role in participating in community reconciliation activities organised by civil society in a number of instances, the engagement had been inconsistent and had been dependent on the personnel engaged.⁶⁶ For the most part, however, civilians were not aware of any such engagement, indicating a need for the mission to do more and engage more publicly.

The legacy of mass atrocity

In a context in which people are living largely isolated within the camps, the findings showed that the memory of specific atrocities plays a dominant role in people’s understanding of their broader security situation. Given the nature of the conflict and the appalling toll it has taken on civilians, it was not surprising that many of those within the camps had appalling stories to tell of atrocities they had witnessed or heard about. As one man said, “In March in Unity State the government castrated 25 boys. They want to wipe out Nuer.”⁶⁷ Another man told of how he had seen some of his relatives killed: “In Juba my brother in law, a Brigadier, and my son were both called out and shot. My son survived and is in Juba PoC.”⁶⁸



Graves of those killed in church attack
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For many, their last direct encounter with communities outside of the camp was witnessing the atrocities that had compelled them to flee. As a woman in Malakal said, “People have been fighting, and many people have seen atrocities. These things don’t leave you easily... Here, we sit and we remember. Even when there is peace there should be UNMISS who can separate the communities and facilitate protection by the government [for the people].”⁶⁹ These atrocities have taken on a strongly symbolic nature and, with little or no contact with other communities in the interim, divisions within and between communities have remained stark. Relationships between communities have become somewhat frozen in time.

⁶⁴ Interview with local government official, Bor town, 22 October 2015.

⁶⁵ Security Council Resolution 2241, 9 October 2015, available at http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_res_2241.pdf

⁶⁶ This point was also made in an interview with NGO representative, New York, 14 October 2015.

⁶⁷ Interview with PoC resident, man, Bor PoC, 20 October 2015.

⁶⁸ Interview with PoC resident, man, Bor PoC, 20 October 2015.

⁶⁹ Interview with PoC resident, woman, Malakal PoC, 4 November 2015.

Communities living outside the PoC sites also talked about atrocities that had been committed. In Bor, the research team was shown a mass grave next to a church where 20 women and two pastors had been killed by attackers, identified as the “White Army”, a Nuer militia which was active in the North-South civil war and which has re-emerged in the current conflict.⁷⁰ The women had apparently been inside the church fasting when they were attacked, and the two pastors were outside. The research team were told that they were all shot, and there was evidence that the women had been sexually abused. For others, these atrocities had taken place within the PoC sites. One IDP man talked of an experience in which a group of young men were attacked within the Bor PoC site in a separate incident to the one described above: “There was a group who came in and started asking for Dinkas to be killed. I was captured – there were 16 of us who were taken. But a friend said that I was Nuer so they let me go – I speak Nuer. The rest were taken from inside the camp and killed. UNMISS were there – they saw that happen. This shows that they are easily intimidated, especially outside the camps.”⁷¹ Creating an environment in which appropriate mechanisms are put in place to help communities deal with and recover from such atrocities presents extraordinary challenges across the country.

However, it was telling that residents in Bor talked of how the communities outside the camps want the PoC sites to close, as they recognised that their presence is creating barriers between those inside and those outside of the sites. As one man said, “The PoC camps have become a source of division among the community. Here [in Bor town] we are keen to see it closed down. It just creates barriers, reinforces difference.”⁷² While some come from other parts of Jonglei State, many of those within the PoC site are from Bor town, and there was a recognition that allowing for the different communities to once more live alongside each other was going to be vital in any post-conflict environment.

The extent to which atrocities create cycles of violence and revenge is a highly complex issue that is not unique to the dynamics created by the PoC sites. Indeed, a recent report by the South Sudan Law Society, based on a survey of over 1000 people across the country, asserts that peace without accountability will not be sustainable in the long term.⁷³ There is, therefore, a need for adequate transitional justice mechanisms to be put in place to foster healing and reconciliation. Indeed, a number of mechanisms are foreseen in the 2015 CPA, which presents a clear opportunity for UNMISS to provide support as part of its broader mandate to promote implementation. Unless this is actively supported, however, it is quite possible that whether people stay in ethnically divided camps or leave the camps for more ethnically homogenous areas, this separation could “freeze” relationships at the moment of highest conflict, reinforcing, rather than addressing tensions.

PoC sites are reinforcing ethnic divisions

Throughout the interviews, there was reference to the fact that the conflict, which had started off as a political dispute, was manipulated into an ethnic conflict by those seeking power. In other words, although ethnicity is not a root cause of the violence it has been used as a means of organising people to violence. Thus, the conflict has become politically ethnicised: it has taken on a strongly ethnic dimension, but one that is being driven by political agendas. Numerous interviewees pointed to the ethnicisation of the conflict as being the most devastating aspect of what has taken place.

⁷⁰ The White Army was formed as a community defence group, but increasingly developed independence from the community. In the context of the current conflict, they are seen as aligned with the SPLM-IO. Brian Adeba, “Making Sense of the White Army’s Return in South Sudan,” Centre for Security Governance Papers, February 2015; John Young, “The White Army: An Introduction and Overview,” Small Arms Survey, June 2007, available at <http://www.smallarmssurveysudan.org/fileadmin/docs/working-papers/HSBA-WP-05-White-Army.pdf>

⁷¹ Focus group discussion with five displaced men, Juba, 17 October 2015.

⁷² Interview with local leader, Bor town, 20 October 2015.

⁷³ South Sudan Law Society, UNDP and the Kingdom of the Netherlands, “Search for a New Beginning: Perceptions of truth, justice, reconciliation and healing in South Sudan,” October 2015 available at http://www.ss.undp.org/content/south_sudan/en/home/library/south-sudan--other-reports/-search-for-a-new-beginning--perceptions-of-truth--justice--reco.html

As one man asked, “Why did the government make this an ethnic problem when it is political? That is the worst thing about this war.”⁷⁴ This political ethnicisation of the conflict has effectively established innumerable “front lines” wherever inter-communal tension is both present and unrestrained by rule of law. Not only have national structures of protection failed – and at times become a source of violence – but many localised forms of protection that would normally function independent of the state have also been undermined. The extent to which communities have become divided as a result, therefore, was seen as one of the most complex issues preventing a genuine resolution to the conflict.

The evolution of the conflict from a political dispute to a situation in which communities were mobilised and divided along ethnic lines has been reflected in the changing nature of the PoC sites. In the initial stages of the conflict, the PoC sites were multi-ethnic. As one man living in Bor town said, “The first time, on 18 December, everyone in Bor went to UNMISS regardless. This is when we thought that it was a government problem, the fighting. But by the second round of fighting [when the town once more changed hands], this thing of Dinka/Nuer had come in so we couldn’t go. We knew they were our enemy now, even though they are civilians.”⁷⁵ This was echoed by a man inside the Bor PoC site:

When the conflict first broke out, it was us coming not as Nuer but just as civilians... We left after a few days. Then in January, SPLM captured Jonglei and they defeated the opposition so we rushed back in. This time those who don’t have a problem with government came out – Dinka, Merle, Anyok, Shilluk. Then in February, the rebels recaptured. We went out then, no problem. Then government came back and recaptured Bor again and were trying to flush out rebels, so we had to come back in and remained here only Nuer.⁷⁶

Malakal and Bentiu still host people from different ethnic groups, given that the towns are still too unsafe for anyone to leave regardless of with which side of the conflict they are associated. Yet even there, ethnic tensions have been widespread, reflecting the broader conflict dynamics, leading to a number of serious incidents within the camps. A number of IDPs interviewed in Juba told of how they had fled the PoC site in Malakal as a result of such attacks: “In Malakal, Nuer were going out of the camp, meeting with Nuer groups who told them to kill Dinka. They went back in, killed Dinka in front of peacekeepers. Pangas [machetes] were smuggled into the camp, they got you any time of the day.”⁷⁷ “When we were [in the Malakal PoC site], we were threatened by Nuer – whipped with a heavy stick. But we escaped [from the camp].”⁷⁸

By contrast, in Bor and Juba, the camps have become predominantly associated with the Nuer ethnic group, which, in turn, is associated with the SPLM-IO: “Little by little the other tribes went out, and only we Nuer remain.”⁷⁹ In the case of Bor, a number of interviewees talked about the fact that the town had become safe for government-aligned communities as a result of the presence of the UPDF who crossed over into South Sudan within days of the fighting breaking out to help President Kiir. The withdrawal of the UPDF in November 2015, (which is a condition of the peace agreement) is positive inasmuch as it was not seen to be a neutral party to the conflict; however, it raises questions about its impact on the those communities that saw it as a source of protection.

Regardless, the extent to which both the Juba and Bor PoC sites have become strongly associated with one particular ethnic group, the Nuer, was feared by those within the camps and resented by those outside, for the same reasons that people feared and resented the ethnicisation of the conflict as a whole. In other words, the sites were seen to be reinforcing one of the most harmful aspects of the conflict. IDPs living outside of the PoC sites, who are receiving no

⁷⁴ Interview with PoC resident, man, Bor PoC, 21 October 2015.

⁷⁵ Interview with displaced man, Bor town, 20 October 2015.

⁷⁶ Interview with two PoC residents, men, Bor PoC, 20 October 2015.

⁷⁷ Focus group discussion with four displaced men, Juba, 19 October 2015.

⁷⁸ Focus group discussion with four displaced men, Juba, 19 October 2015.

⁷⁹ Interview with PoC resident, man, Bor PoC, 20 October 2015.

assistance, expressed strong resentment: “Because of the war, we [Dinka and Nuer] have become enemies. The Nuer were in the PoC so we settled here. This is the bad thing that the fighting had done to us – it has now divided us.”⁸⁰

Indeed, there was a strong belief that the camps were being used as a place to harbour and protect combatants for the opposition. An IDP man in Bor town alleged that members of the White Army had gone into the PoC for protection: “UNMISS told them just to remove their uniform and weapons and then they would become civilians. They handed [their equipment] to the government, because they didn’t want to keep their uniform. But now they can’t come out.”⁸¹ Likewise as another man said, “This PoC thing is political. The rebels are keeping them there or else it looks like there is peace. Rebels told Nuer in the beginning that if they find them outside camp they will be slaughtered.”⁸² In addition, a number of women within the PoC sites talked of how their husbands had left them there while they went to the bush to fight for the SPLM-IO.

As a result, those outside of the camps saw them as a place of danger rather than potential protection. As one IDP said, when asked if he would flee to a PoC site should fighting break out again: “No. Now I wouldn’t. People are more scared to go back to them [PoC sites] now because they don’t know what is happening inside the camps. So we don’t know if it is safe to go there.”⁸³ Or as an IDP living in Bor said, “If we go to UNMISS for safety then they [Nuer] will attack us.”⁸⁴ The political ethnicisation of the conflict, therefore, has led to a situation in which protection in specific areas is seen to exclude particular ethnic groups. In that respect, protection has, inadvertently, become ethnicised. While UNMISS is aware of this dynamic,⁸⁵ the implications are particularly critical around discussions on return, as discussed below.

Isolation of PoC sites create unintended consequences

While those interviewed within the PoC sites were clearly grateful to UNMISS for providing immediate protection, two years later they were more ambivalent in their support for them as a longer term form of protection. Increasingly, they recognise that the hard perimeters of the camps are creating a number of unintended consequences. Increasingly, some of the perils associated with camps in other contexts of displacement – perils that have been recognised, at least at a policy level, through the de-emphasising of camps as the default response to situations of displacement⁸⁶ – appear to be accentuated by the specific nature of the PoC camps.



Bor PoC Camp
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The intention here is not to suggest that UNMISS has done the wrong thing by keeping the PoC camps open – indeed, quite the opposite. Furthermore, UNMISS shares many of the concerns expressed by civilians. The camps were never intended to be anything but a short term solution, and there is acknowledgement that they were set up with no clear

⁸⁰ Interview with displaced man, Bor town, 20 October 2015.

⁸¹ Interview with displaced man, Bor town, 20 October 2015.

⁸² Focus group discussion with four displaced men, Juba, 19 October 2015.

⁸³ Focus group discussion with five displaced men, Juba, 17 October 2015.

⁸⁴ Focus group discussion with three displaced men, Bor town, 21 October 2015.

⁸⁵ Interview with UNMISS staff, Juba, 23 October 2015.

⁸⁶ See UNHCR’s new Alternative to Camps policy, available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/5422b8f09.html>

exit strategy.⁸⁷ At the same time, in a context in which security is unstable and in which ethnic divisions exist both inside and outside camps, it is important to ensure that individuals are not pushed out of PoC prematurely. UNMISS, therefore, is having to tread a fine line between enabling people to leave the PoC where possible, but maintaining the protective capability of the camps in the meantime so as not to create push factors. It is clear that closing PoC sites is an extremely complex process, and will remain so for as long as spaces for protection outside of the sites are limited and unpredictable. In the meantime, it is important that the changing nature of the sites is understood and negative elements are mitigated to the extent possible.

Prevalent throughout the interviews was a general frustration that while the perimeter around the PoC sites has provided security, it has also created social isolation for those inside. As a man in a Juba PoC site answered when asked what he thought peace looks like, “It is the opposite of here. This place is like being in a shell. I don’t know what’s going on outside.”⁸⁹ Although many people within the sites had mobile phones and listen to the radio, the reliability of information coming into the camps from outside was questionable. People remain largely insulated within the camps, and many have not stepped outside for almost two years. For instance, when the research team visited the PoC site in Bor, a number of interviewees referred to the fact that there had been gunfire the previous day. This gunfire had generated a certain level of fear within the camp, and a number of interviewees said that the peacekeepers had been carrying out extra patrols around the perimeters in response. Discussions outside of the camp revealed that this was celebratory gunfire following President Kiir’s announcement that he was creating 28 states out of the current 10. Because people inside the camp were isolated, they did not know the reason for the gunfire and were fearful of an attack.

“It is like being in prison”⁸⁸

This incident illustrates one of the negative impacts of isolation, which is compounded by the fact that many of the decision makers within the camps – largely male elders – seemed to be particularly unlikely to venture outside (due to the fact they believed they would be targeted for attack by government forces), and therefore do not get a regular feel for the day-to-day security dynamics. Indeed, many of the leaders of the camps said they had not left the sites since they entered. For them, the last interaction they had with those communities was fleeing from them towards the PoC sites.

However, many others are moving in and out of the camps on a daily basis – certainly in Bor and Juba, although less so in Malakal. As one woman in Juba said, “At times I move in and out [of the camp] if I need food. I don’t have problems as long as I come back around 3pm. As a woman I am safer moving around than the men. They are the ones who are in danger. The government knows who they are.”⁹⁰ In Bor, residents from the camp were seen leaving the camp to a market just outside the perimeter where they were selling their food rations to people living in the town. Others were going further afield, not least in search of firewood. However, in both Bor and Malakal, it was also clear that women were putting themselves at risk by doing this: “We go outside sometimes to get firewood, but it is dangerous because there are soldiers out there who hassle us. They killed one man and raped one woman when she was collecting firewood.”⁹¹

The risk of collecting firewood in Bor, however, points to many of the issues around people’s ability to assess danger outside the camp from within the camp. The area around the PoC site was one in which cattle-keepers graze their cows. In a context in which most cattle-keepers own guns, and where they are protecting their land, the likelihood of tension between PoC residents collecting firewood and these cattle-keepers is high. Without a doubt, therefore, it is dangerous for people to be forced to go outside of the camp and collect firewood. Yet if someone is attacked, it is

⁸⁷ Interview with UNMISS staff, Juba, 23 October 2015.

⁸⁸ Interview with PoC resident, man, Malakal PoC, 4 November 2015.

⁸⁹ Interview with PoC resident, man, Juba PoC1, 18 October 2015.

⁹⁰ Interview with PoC resident, woman, Juba PoC1, 18 October 2015.

⁹¹ Focus group discussion with five female PoC residents, Bor PoC, 21 October 2015.

difficult to assess whether their death is part of the broader conflict dynamics or a result of criminal violence, although this is crucial to people's ability to assess the risks of leaving the camp and the broader dynamics of an evolving conflict. Although differentiating between rumour and fact, and between criminal and political violence is a challenge in many settings, and in particular where there is ongoing conflict, it is exacerbated in the camps by people's lack of mobility and access to reliable information.

Thus, while UNMISS does not prevent people from coming and going from the sites if and when they choose, many are too scared to leave. This fear leads to a common perception of the PoC sites as being like a prison. As a man living in the PoC site in Bor said: "I am safe in here, but it is like being in jail..."⁹² Likewise a man in Juba explained how he saw the situation:

Some people can't move out because they will be killed. I have not been outside of this camp since 16 December 2013. There are forces nearby here – government forces. Can you see the flag over there [points to South Sudan flag a few hundred metres outside camp]? There are the government forces. If I go out they will arrest me and kill me. The government are there to keep an eye and spy on the camp and they know all the people who are dangerous to the government. So only when I am sure that Kiir and all his government have been changed and removed will I be free to leave this place. The younger boys here have no problem because the government doesn't know them – they can move during the day. But at night they would be killed. It is the elders who they target.⁹³

The hard perimeters of PoC sites are effectively a catch-22, particularly in a context in which the camps – or components within the camps – have become effectively mono-ethnic. On the one hand, they stop interaction between communities and therefore limit opportunities for identity-based violence; on the other, they do not allow for the day-to-day inter-communal interaction needed to move towards reconciliation. Of course, in non-camp settings other, less visible perimeters can develop, particularly in conflict situations in which ethnic groups divide along neighbourhood or other lines. The problem here, is that these divisions can be intensified by the hard perimeter of the camp. In this respect, protection strategies must shift over time, and inter-community dialogue strategies must be pursued wherever divisions exist, whether inside or out of camps.

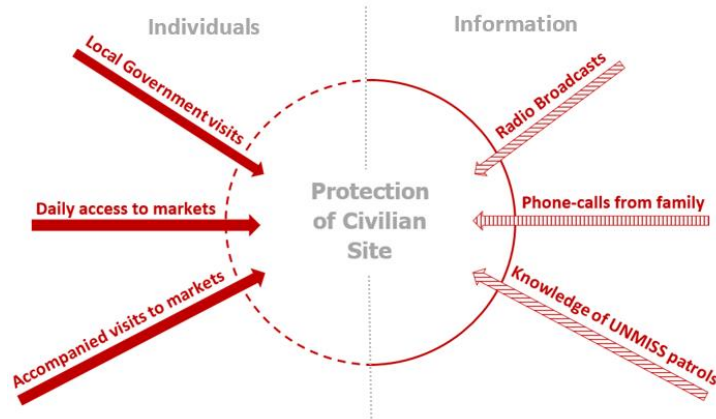
If protection strategies do not shift over time they may become inappropriate to the realities of the conflict as it evolves. A key implication of this is the need to ensure that the right messaging reaches those inside the camps. While many of those interviewed had mobile phones and talked about the fact that they have access to radio, and while there is certainly significant daily movement in and out of the camps, there is considerable scope for ensuring that those within the camps receive accurate and timely information, not least on the situation in proximity to the camps. Part of this might include UNMISS facilitating temporary exit, and/or escorting people into adjoining areas to interact with other communities, however UNMISS could also specifically investigate particular security concerns, such as the shooting mentioned above in Bor, and provide information to the population within the camp.

⁹² Interview with PoC resident, man, Bor PoC, 21 October 2015.

⁹³ Interview with camp leader, PoC resident, Juba PoC1, 17 October 2015.

Perceptions in PoC camps change through the flow of information, across hard perimeters, or through the flow of individuals through permeable perimeters.

UNMISS should work to facilitate the change in perceptions to ensure dynamics outside of the PoC camps are understood.



Implications for return

It is within this context that people are trying to assess the viability not only of moving in and out of the camps on a temporary basis, but of leaving the camps permanently and either returning to where they were living before they fled, or, if different, to their ancestral homes. While many people have left the camps, particularly those whose home areas are currently under opposition control, (even in Malakal a number had apparently recently returned to Wau Shilluk, an area that had come under rebel control), many continue to live with terrible uncertainty about whether or not return is viable. One man, when asked about this, replied: “It is possible [to return home] if the arrangement is done by a white man. They would have to supervise all the movement. If it is done by the authorities, then we would not even make it as far as the airport. We would just be slaughtered on the way.”⁹⁴ This was echoed by numerous interviewees in the Juba PoC sites who believed that they would be killed if they tried to travel between the site and the airport on account of the fact that their prolonged stay in the camps will have identified them as rebel sympathisers.

It is important to note that the broader context in which discussions around safety and return are taking place is one in which people’s ability to survive inside the PoC camps is becoming unviable. People have used up the few resources they had prior to the war, and are living in an increasingly precarious situation. Decisions around return, therefore, are being made in a context in which people are very, very hungry – and in which they know that their land, which is the major source of livelihoods for most in the camps, is lying vacant. Although the same is true of hundreds of thousands of people living outside of the PoC sites – and, indeed, in refugee and IDP camps throughout the region – the fact that they are there under international protection reinforces the responsibility that UNMISS has to care for those within these camps.

From the perspective of civilians interviewed, there was a strong consensus that return could only take place as the result of a political negotiation between UNMISS and the government. Without this negotiation, there was a fear that they would be seen by the government as being rebels: “When war broke out, if you returned [to your homes] straight away it would be fine, but if you delayed by a few months then they are suspicious that you were in the bush having joined the guerrillas.”⁹⁵ Furthermore, the fact that many have subsequently lost their homes and land while they have been away, was further cause for concern. For instance one of the camp leaders in the Bor PoC site knew that his home was now being used by the government. In addition, with many returning to Bor from Uganda – as was evident during the research by a significant number of vehicles arriving with people and luggage – the likelihood of tensions

⁹⁴ Interview, PoC resident, camp leader, Juba PoC1, 17 October 2015.

⁹⁵ Focus group discussion with PoC Residents, five men and two women, Juba PoC1, 16 October 2015.

emerging during any return process is high. As a result, many of those interviewed said that they would only go home if UNMISS went with them: “We need UNMISS to be with us when we go home.”⁹⁶

This political negotiation, however, needs to take place at a local and national level. In the case of the latter, the extent to which return was contingent upon a broader political negotiation was evident in the fact that many talked of the return of Machar and other senior opposition politicians to Juba as a key factor in giving them the confidence to return home. “I will truly believe that there is peace when Dr Machar will eventually come back to Juba.”⁹⁷ Or, as another man said, “Unless Riek Machar is here in Juba no-one will go out and home”⁹⁸ His return, therefore, was seen as a tangible demonstration of the implementation, rather than simply the signing of, the peace agreement.

It is encouraging that the new mandate talks specifically about UNMISS’ role in return of displaced populations more generally, stating that the mission is to “foster a secure environment for the eventual safe and voluntary return of IDPs and refugees including through monitoring of, ensuring respect for human rights by, and where in strict compliance with the United Nations Human Rights Due Diligence Policy....” It also stresses that “any returns or other durable solutions for IDPs or refugees must be undertaken on a voluntary and informed basis in conditions of dignity and safely.”⁹⁹

Much thought and effort is also clearly going into planning for the return of those inside the camps, as numerous intention surveys have been conducted to assess what people would like to do after leaving the camp. However, there has been little action following the surveys, meaning that these have repeatedly raised expectations that return was imminent, and then failed to deliver. UN staff presented a number of reasons for this. For instance, it was reported that humanitarian actors routinely raised questions about the safety of returnees and expressed concern about the actions of UNMISS in creating push factors. Other concerns raised were that PoC residents expressed a desire to return to their ancestral homes, rather than their most recent places of residence. Where these were in rebel held areas, it was claimed that there was government resistance to the idea as this was seen to be bolstering rebel positions. In other cases, concerns were expressed about the desires of some to go to more ethnically homogenous areas and the broader implications that this might have on conflict dynamics and longer term efforts of reconciliation.¹⁰⁰ In sum, the research team received conflicting explanations on the blockages to return.

Clearly, this is a difficult maze to navigate. However, UNMISS could improve the situation by convening stakeholders in a regular discussion forum. At a minimum, creating a regular space for discussion would likely help key actors to form a consensus view on the obstacles to allowing people to exit the PoC sites and could create joint strategies for addressing them. Articulating principles for return could reassure stakeholders that any actions taken would respect the rights of camp residents; while reinforcing the flow of information and facilitating “go and see” visits to home



PoC site
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⁹⁶ Focus group discussion with four PoC residents, Juba PoC3, 27 October 2015.

⁹⁷ Interview with PoC resident, Juba PoC3, 27 October 2015.

⁹⁸ Focus group discussion with three PoC residents, Juba PoC3, 27 October 2015.

⁹⁹ UN Security Council Resolution 2241, 09 October 2015, available at http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_res_2241.pdf

¹⁰⁰ Interviews with UN staff, New York, 14-15 October 2015.

areas could assist PoC residents to more accurately assess conditions. And ultimately, increasing protection outside of the camps would make exit more palatable in the short term and resolution of the conflict as a whole would create longer term solutions.

Conclusion

Thousands of civilians have been targeted in a war that has metamorphosed from a power struggle between political elites into atrocities committed at the heart of communities. Ultimately, it is important to remember that the antidote to these atrocities is not a peacekeeping force but a political solution to the conflict and accountability for what has taken place. The fact that the government has not only failed in its responsibility to protect its own citizens but is a key actor in the conflict means that much of the responsibility for what has taken place lies squarely at its feet – although blame also lies with the SPLM-IO, who have shown an equal disregard for civilians' lives. At one level, therefore, there has to be strong realism about what UNMISS can achieve – and where other actors need to step up to the plate.

“There should always be a camp like this ready for civilians in danger.”¹⁰¹

At the same time, the extent to which civilians have borne the brunt of the conflict clearly flies in the face of the fact that the protection of civilians is now seen to lie at the heart of peacekeeping operations.¹⁰² In this regard, the international community is painfully aware of its failures to find appropriate mechanisms to protect civilians from atrocities. As one interviewee said: “We have to acknowledge the collective failure of the international community. And UNMISS has played a big part in that.”¹⁰³

This study has pointed to one mechanism, the creation of PoC sites, which have offered protection, though limited, to a relatively large number of people although a very small proportion of the overall population. The sites might not be perfect, but they are clearly a step in the right direction and have set a precedent for future situations – whether in South Sudan or other parts of the world. It is important, therefore, that any decisions that are made moving forward are based on careful analysis not only of the positive aspects of the PoC sites, but also the unintended negative consequences.

This study demonstrates that, while the sites have achieved much, their ongoing existence has created a number of dilemmas for civilians and UNMISS alike – as well as for the broader humanitarian community. On the one hand, they continue to be a vital source of current and potential future protection, particularly in Malakal and Bentiu where the situation remains particularly tense. On the other, ensuring a timely transition out of the PoC sites has become increasingly problematic for both civilians and UNMISS. These dilemmas relate to the fact that protection is, by definition, highly fluid. This fluidity is recognised in the Report of the High-Level Implementation Panel on United Nations Peace operations, which emphasises the extent to which peace operations must be more flexible in responding to changing needs on the ground.¹⁰⁴ Sequencing and prioritisation are seen as crucial in this regard – as is the need for far smoother transitions between different phases of the operation. The findings clearly enforce this, showing that any effective form of protection needs to be able to respond to the changing nature of how it is defined at a given moment, particularly in a context in which not only is the conflict evolving all the time, but the ever present threat of atrocities hangs heavy in peoples' minds. Yet far from being dynamic and fluid, the PoC sites have

¹⁰¹ Interview with civilian, Juba PoC 3, 27 October 2015.

¹⁰² See, for instance, Paul D. Williams, “Enhancing Civilian Protection in Peace Operations: Insights from Africa” Africa Center for Strategic Studies, Research Paper No. 1, National Defence University Press Washington, D.C., 2010. Available at http://africacenter.org/2010/09/acss_research_paper-1/ Indeed, ten out of 16 current UN peacekeeping missions have Protection of Civilians mandates, which involve more than 95% of all UN peacekeepers.

¹⁰³ Interview with member of the donor community, Juba, 24 October 2015.

¹⁰⁴ HIPPO report, 16 June 2015, Executive Summary.

effectively fixed protection to a physical location and a point in time. They have remained PoC sites regardless of the context outside them.

The fact that the PoC sites have inadvertently become part of the broader dynamics of the conflict at both a local and a national level makes political engagement by UNMISS crucial. This echoes another of the key recommendations of the Report of the High-Level Implementation Panel on United Nations Peace operations, namely that politics needs to drive the design and implementation of peace operations. As it states: "Lasting peace is achieved not through military and technical engagements, but through political solutions."¹⁰⁵ Political engagement needs to take place at both a local and national level, otherwise the camps have the potential to become a source of future conflict. This points to the fact that the creation and maintenance of PoC sites needs to be done with the necessary analytical understanding of how it interacts with both national and local conflict dynamics over time.

Moving forward, the challenges UNMISS now faces are considerable. On the one hand, the peace agreement has led to a number of positive changes in its mandate; on the other, there have been numerous violations of the ceasefire and fighting continues. In addition to the challenges of poor governance and a weak state structure, the conflict's geopolitical positioning creates enormous challenges. With both the SPLM and SPLM-IO allegedly stockpiling weapons, which are in plentiful supply,¹⁰⁶ and with another internal war taking place over the border in neighbouring Sudan's Blue Nile and Southern Kordofan states coupled with long-established networks for destabilisation at the disposal of neighbouring governments; many of the ingredients are in place for a protracted conflict.

Within this highly complex context, this report has sought to explore how some of those civilians in need of protection perceive a mission that is officially mandated to protect them. While some protection for some of the people some of the time has been achieved, ultimately the level of atrocities committed against civilians in South Sudan over the past two years calls into question the ability for concepts such as the responsibility to protect to be translated into workable mechanisms that do actually protect on anything more than a highly selective basis. Undoubtedly, the opening up of PoC sites was a step in the right direction albeit one that needs careful scrutiny. However, while their actions are appreciated by the thousands in the sites, there are millions more outside who are suffering, for whom much more needs to be done.

¹⁰⁵ HIPPO report, 16 June 2015, Executive Summary.

¹⁰⁶ BBC, 5 November 2015. "South Sudan warring sides 'stockpiling weapons' – UN". <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-34730886>