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SOUTH SUDAN: URGENT ACTION NEEDED TO AVERT COLLAPSE

International engagement is urgently needed to rescue south Sudan from the brink of an unfolding crisis. The perilous situation is being ignored amid the focus on the indictment of President Al-Bashir by the International Criminal Court. Approximately two million people have returned to south Sudan since 2005 to extreme poverty. Social services and livelihood opportunities for communities remain minimal while tribal tensions and localized conflicts are on the rise. South Sudan is also facing an economic crisis due to the drop in oil prices, creating the potential for new insecurity. If these threats are not addressed, the implosion of the south will shatter any realistic prospect for peace in Sudan as a whole, including the Darfur region.

RECOMMIT TO THE COMPREHENSIVE PEACE AGREEMENT

In 2005 the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) halted twenty-one years of war between north and south Sudan. It requires a number of steps, including country-wide elections in 2009, leading up to a referendum on independence for south Sudan in 2011. Immediate political and financial re-engagement is required to ensure that these steps occur and that the agreement does not fail. Its fragility is particularly evident in the transitional areas between north and south (the Three Areas) because of delays in border demarcation, lack of clarity regarding their political future and increasing tensions which have erupted in open fighting between armed forces from south and north Sudan. The CPA was an enormous achievement for Sudan, and the international community pledged its full diplomatic and economic support for its implementation. As of today, however, the attention of the international community has waned.

FOCUS ON REINTEGRATION, NOT ON MORE RETURNS

In the last few months, returns of both refugees and internally displaced people (IDPs) to south Sudan have gone down significantly, while organized returns of IDPs have

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- ❑ The U.S. Government should urge the Government of Southern Sudan (GoSS) to devise and fund a reintegration strategy that addresses needs for basic social services and livelihoods. The U.S. and other donor governments should increase funding for reintegration and maintain existing humanitarian funding levels.
- ❑ UNMIS and UNHCR should shift their focus from assisting returns to supporting reintegration activities and protection of returnees. They should also draft and implement a clear protection strategy to make the GoSS more capable of protecting its own people.
- ❑ The U.S. Government should lead the international effort to identify an appropriate emergency package to address the current budget shortfall of the GoSS to avoid security consequences.
- ❑ International NGOs should dedicate resources to women's programs in south Sudan and the Three Areas. Donor countries should support GoSS Ministry of Gender initiatives to protect women's rights and increase funding to the United Nations Population Fund.

stopped. Nonetheless, the Government of Southern Sudan (GoSS) and international agencies have not shifted their focus to the reintegration of returnees. There has been very little progress in expanding access to clean water, primary health care and education and micro-credit schemes. Livelihood opportunities for returnees and receiving communities remain limited to subsistence agriculture and small commerce which fail to guarantee adequate food security. This results in non-sustainable returns and drift towards urban areas. A holistic reintegration strategy and accompanying resources are urgently needed to help the millions of people who have returned rebuild their lives, obtain basic services and access livelihoods.

Remarkably, four years since the start of large-scale returns to south Sudan neither the GoSS nor the United Nations Mission in Sudan (UNMIS) has a strategy for reintegration of returnees. The Southern Sudan Relief and Rehabilitation Commission is extremely weak, has failed to develop key policies, and lacks resources to implement projects. The relevant government line ministries do not prioritize reintegration of returnees. The UNMIS Return Reintegration and Recovery (RRR) section has not developed a policy framework for reintegration, has not organized a structured dialogue between the UN and the GoSS, and has had a gap in leadership for eight months in south Sudan and for one year in Khartoum. Now that these posts have belatedly been filled, UNMIS/RRR must engage in high-level discussions with the GoSS to urgently develop a holistic reintegration strategy. The GoSS must set up a mechanism to coordinate reintegration activities with each relevant line ministry, and must allocate resources specifically for reintegration of returnees.

Staff of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in south Sudan acknowledged to Refugees International (RI) that there was a need to shift their operational focus from refugee return to reintegration, but that they had failed to achieve this shift thus far. Last year they undertook some reintegration projects, but nearly all of their budget was spent on recurring costs for transport and logistics.

Current discussions about reintegration within the UN and the GoSS are focusing on an initiative to provide travel costs to bring back 500,000 internally displaced people by 2011 and build schools in 200 areas of high return. It is unclear how the figure of 500,000 potential returnees has been reached, and the attention on further assisted returns distracts from the urgent need to focus on reintegration. Providing school buildings falls well short of addressing the overall reintegration needs of returnees and receiving com-

munities. While organized returns should be arranged for the small group of the most vulnerable internally displaced people, the GoSS and international humanitarian agencies should put their energies and resources into reintegration programs now, which would also benefit those who may choose to return for voter registration and for the referendum.

During the twenty-one year civil war, international non-governmental organizations dominated the provision of services by necessity. Capacity-building of indigenous south Sudanese NGOs is now essential and local ownership of programs must become a priority. Local groups' officials need to be included in priority-setting and decision-making. They require training in program management and financial reporting.

ENABLE WOMEN TO PARTICIPATE IN REINTEGRATION

Increasing access to basic services will help expand women's ability to participate in reintegration. Without water points, health care, and educational services the burden of their traditional role in the household and their overall vulnerability increase tremendously. According to the World Health Organization, one out of seven women who become pregnant in south Sudan will probably die from pregnancy-related causes. Only 10% of all births in south Sudan are attended by skilled health personnel. Many women told RI that they could not even get the help of traditional birth attendants because they require payment.

Until the level of service provision improves, women (both returnees and those living in host communities) will be held back from participating fully in social, economic and political reintegration. The few vocational training programs are available mainly in urban areas. Despite aiming to involve women, they fail to take into account the limitations on women's time and freedom of movement. Therefore, they are often not accessible to women in practice.

There have been advances at the policy level for women in south Sudan, but funding is needed to implement the new policies. For example, a gender policy has been passed by Parliament, a Standard Operating Procedures framework on gender-based violence (GBV) has been developed, and Women and Children's Desks are being set up in police stations. The challenge lies in implementing these policies, and donors need to support the Ministry of Gender, Social Welfare and Religious Affairs in its work. This ministry is severely under-funded, and its budget ceiling is only \$4 million.

International agencies also need to invest resources in GBV programs in south Sudan and in the transitional areas between north and south. Few agencies are working in this field despite the fact that domestic violence, sexual violence, and early/forced marriages are very widespread problems. International NGOs have focused their work on GBV in Darfur, despite its prevalence in south Sudan. Rape was frequently used as a weapon during the long north-south war, and many rape survivors have never received assistance. The UN Population Fund, UNFPA, is doing valuable work on access to reproductive health care and on response to GBV in the few geographical areas where they are present, such as Southern Kordofan. But donor funding is required to extend programs to new areas.

IMPROVE PROTECTION

Increasing localized tribal conflicts and instances of insecurity are progressively eroding the relative stability in the south. According to UN statistics, from January to November 2008, 187,000 people were forcibly displaced by tribal and armed conflict in south Sudan.

The GoSS is primarily responsible for protecting its citizens and it must professionalize its police and judicial system if it wants to increase stability. Communities visited by RI often complained that they do not see the police patrolling their areas and many admitted that people have armed themselves with AK-47s in self-defense. Last year's compulsory disarmament of civilians was ineffective and led to many casualties, while the long-awaited disarmament, demobilization and reintegration program aimed at reducing the size of the SPLA and its formerly allied militias is just starting. In Jonglei State, the major worry expressed by communities to RI was child abduction, which is not a new phenomenon, but has now reached the alarming number of at least 300 children abducted a year in the State alone.

Tribal infighting related to cattle grazing routes, access to water points and cattle rustling, a source of tension in the past, is becoming more frequent. With the proliferation of small arms, this infighting is resulting in high numbers of casualties, including hundreds of victims reported last week by the Commissioner of Pibor County, also in Jonglei.

The judiciary's ability to redress abuses and crimes is deteriorating and the support from the GoSS to those institutions seems to be fading. Since most people turn to the customary courts in rural areas rather than the statutory courts for conflict-resolution, a focus on improving the customary courts is essential. A humanitarian official told RI, "A lot of

people are in jail for the wrong reason and many get freed for other unclear reasons." The customary court system also routinely fails to protect women's rights, which are guaranteed in the Interim National Constitution of Southern Sudan.

The lack of security restricts returnees' freedom of movement and damages the prospects of successful reintegration. The fear of child abductions, for instance, means that parents are reluctant to send their children to school. Problems of access to livelihoods are also compounded: villagers told RI they were forced to reorganize their hamlets in smaller and more concentrated areas to enhance protection and limit cultivation to closer fields, resulting in reduced crop production.

UNMIS, the UN and non-governmental operational agencies, have yet to develop a clear and coherent protection strategy to complement and support the GoSS role in this area. UNHCR has increased its protection capacity, but it is still inadequate. When RI raised the lack of a protection strategy with several officials, it was clear that for them protection work meant mainly monitoring, identifying patterns of abuses, and reporting and sharing information among agencies. This set of activities is important but it represents just the beginning: the ultimate goal is to respond to violations, work with the competent authorities, address impunity, and achieve redress. In cases of ethnic tensions, greater support for local authorities in organizing peace-building meetings would reduce conflict and foster reconciliation between communities.

UNMIS should take a more proactive stance to provide physical protection to civilians under imminent threat of violence, which is part of its mandate. Given the current status of forces and equipment, the mission should focus on conflict prevention and tension diffusion initiatives. When conflict is likely to erupt, joint contingency plans between the mission and humanitarian agencies should be paramount in order to mitigate the impact on affected communities. (See "Sudan: UNMIS Must be More Proactive in Protecting Civilians," Jan. 7, 2009.)

Finally, RI found it very disturbing that the UN Common Humanitarian Fund this year did not allocate resources for protection. Protection and returnee monitoring need to be supported and resources provided to local and international groups that offer counseling, guidance and legal support to victims of abuses. Funding also needs to be found to support police forces and the judicial system.

INCREASE REINTEGRATION FUNDING AND ADDRESS THE FINANCIAL CRISIS

The current level of international donor assistance is inadequate to the enormous needs of a huge region where decades of civil war have created an environment in which social services are minimal and essential infrastructure is non-existent. There is a common misconception that south Sudan receives enough international funding. But costs in south Sudan are extremely high. For example, to build the 120 mile road from Juba to the border with Uganda would cost \$322 million. To put this in perspective, in four years the World Bank-managed Multi-Donor Trust Fund South disbursed only \$317 million for all its projects. Additionally, more than €300 million in European Commission development funding has been unavailable to south Sudan due to the failure of the Government of Sudan to sign key agreements. Funding allocated to reintegration and community recovery activities is scarce.

The recently established UN Sudan Recovery Fund was a welcome step forward since it tries to fill the gap between humanitarian and development programs. It allocates funding to the states and has provided resources to local NGOs. Currently, only the UK and the Netherlands contribute, however, and the initial allocation is only \$20 million. The U.S. BRIDGE Project, which has allocated \$100 million over 3 years to south Sudan and the transitional areas to build state capacity to provide basic services, is another welcome initiative which addresses the transition from relief to development.

Donors also have the misimpression that humanitarian needs are declining, but available statistics are alarming. Health indicators, such as maternal and child mortality, immunization coverage and prevalence of preventable diseases, are significantly worse than those in Darfur. It is estimated that only 25 to 30 per cent of the population has access to health care. At a minimum, humanitarian funding needs to be retained at current levels to respond to emergencies as well as to chronic problems. Recent examples of humanitarian emergencies in south Sudan are those created by conflicts in Malakal and in Pibor, as well as outbreaks of epidemics and flooding. The European humanitarian funding agency, ECHO, is maintaining its funding levels for south Sudan. Major donors such as the U.S. and the UK should follow suit.

The GoSS allocates a large percentage of its budget to defense, leaving insufficient allocations for reintegration of returnees, basic social services, livelihood support, and

microfinance schemes. Many of these services should be provided at state level, and 2009 is supposed to be the year of decentralization, but state governments have insufficient funding to carry out their roles adequately.

The drop in oil prices is an additional shock, as it has severely decreased revenue for the GoSS and is causing a huge strain. This creates a serious security risk. The GoSS has been unable to pay salaries for months, including army salaries, and it has a cash flow shortage of \$100 million per month. International donors and the south Sudanese government need to identify ways to deal with this temporary financial crisis. Emergency measures could be tied to a revenue diversification process that reduces over-dependence on oil revenue and boosts other economic sectors. A concerted financial rescue is even more urgent since the arrears of the government in Khartoum currently prevent lending by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

THE THREE AREAS

On visits to Blue Nile State and Abyei, RI found that lack of clarity about their future political affiliation is hampering reintegration and recovery activities. Ironically, donors are forthcoming with funds, but implementation of projects is way behind schedule and will continue to lag because the Government of Sudan is imposing obstacles to transportation of goods and visas for personnel. Donors should be pursuing this issue with the central authorities, and encouraging the GoSS to raise objections to those restrictions.

The lack of peace dividends in the Three Areas has far-reaching implications that could threaten the success of the CPA. In the Abyei area, displaced people expressed their unwillingness to return now given the lack of security. Many of them had returned to Abyei in early 2008 and then were forcibly displaced twice because of fighting in May and December. One displaced woman told RI, "We feel insecure, there are no police around and [north-south] border demarcation has not been resolved yet. Fighting can resume at any time." Return should not be encouraged at this time and the relief agencies that responded to last year's crises should continue to provide services in areas of displacement until people feel safe to return.

Melanie Teff, Andrea Lari, and members of Refugees International's Board of Directors assessed the humanitarian situation in south Sudan in February 2009.