

13 April 2012

Highlights:

- Further cross-border air strikes by Sudan and the military takeover of the Heglig oil field by South Sudanese forces raised fears of a return to unrestrained hostilities.
- South Sudanese citizenship officers stationed in Khartoum prepared to issue emergency travel documents for returnees.
- Nutrition partners report high levels of malnutrition in Jonglei State in the wake of the inter-communal fighting from December to March.

I. Situation overview

South Sudan edged closer to all-out war with Sudan and a potential worst-case scenario in humanitarian terms over the past week, as fighting escalated sharply in border areas following the collapse of negotiations in Addis Ababa. The 8 April deadline for South Sudanese to regularize their legal status in Sudan passed with no guarantees from Khartoum about their future rights. At the same time, refugees continue to flow from conflict zones in Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile states in Sudan to refugee sites in South Sudan.

In a clear escalation of hostilities, South Sudanese troops clashed with Sudanese forces in the Heglig area before taking control of the oil field on 10 April. Bombardments by Sudanese forces continued throughout the week, targeting locations in Unity State – including Abiemnom, Pariang and Bentiu town – and Warrap State's Twic County. Four civilians and a soldier were reportedly killed in a 14 April air raid on Bentiu town, but no wider humanitarian impacts have yet been reported. Belligerent rhetoric in the capitals also stepped up during the reporting period. Statements condemning the escalation in tensions by the AU and UN over the week failed to bring parties back to the negotiating table.



A returnee baby undergoes medical screening at a transit site. Photo: IOM

The humanitarian community is working to assist close to 110,000 refugees in Upper Nile and Unity states who have fled fighting inside Sudan, along with the estimated 110,000 people displaced from Abyei last May and about 140,000 people affected by inter-communal fighting in Jonglei State. The potential return of some 500,000 South Sudanese in Sudan is another major priority for humanitarian partners, given the possibility that people may depart quickly and with few resources to sustain themselves or secure transportation to their places of origin inside South Sudan. Humanitarian partners also remain concerned about how long South Sudan can keep its own oil exports via Sudan suspended without severe domestic economic consequences.

II. Humanitarian challenges: needs and response

Unity State escapes impact of fighting to north

No displacement or other population movements were reported in Unity State as fighting continued to the north. Most casualties admitted to hospitals in Bentiu were military. An inter-agency verification mission set out on 13 April to verify people in Pariang and Panyang displaced by earlier bombing. A UN transport plane brought WHO medical supplies from Juba to Bentiu hospital on 13 April, with another plane load of supplies expected the following day. Humanitarian agencies stayed on alert for a potential mass exodus of returnees from Sudan

The situation in Renk, a major transit point in the state for returnees arriving from Sudan, was calm but unpredictable, with reports of Sudan Armed Forces build-ups along the closed border. The humanitarian team in Renk expected some spontaneous returnees in the coming week, as South Sudanese were being permitted to leave Sudan, although not to go back. On 8 April, 164 individuals in six buses arrived made a spontaneous return movement, arriving in Renk and settling at the Mina transit site.

Refugees receive food amid Unity security fears

Rapid deterioration of the security situation in Unity State caused growing concern for the humanitarian community. In Yida refugee camp, the population is reported to have increased to 20,362 as of the 9 April, an increase of 4,340 unverified individuals since UNHCR registration was completed in Yida on 26 February. Depending on the security situation, registration staff are being sent to the site to verify and register new arrivals. The increase is apparently due to the lack of food in Southern Kordofan. Partners in Yida are in discussions regarding the need to preposition assistance items, such as food and non-food items, to last through the rainy season. Further preparation includes plans for medical evacuations, as roads will become impassable in the weeks ahead.

The total camp population in Pariang as of 6 April was 1,865, with the registered refugees numbering 1,542. This is lower than the number reported last week (1,909) because of the movement of some students between camps. Food distribution took place in Pariang on 7 April, with a total of 1,773 beneficiaries receiving food. One hundred male students did not receive food, as they were not present at the time of distribution. Longhouses built in Pariang to be used as classrooms have been completed, and the construction of the first block of student accommodation is underway. There is still an urgent need to identify a water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) partner for the site with the capacity to construct permanent latrines that will withstand the wet season.

In Nyeel, food distribution took place on 6 April, with refugees receiving a one-month ration of maize, lentils, salt and oil. Problems have arisen over access to a grinding mill for the maize; partners are making arrangements for a technician to assist in the installation of a new mill that can grind maize, and to train the community to use and maintain it properly.

Adult education in Nyeel has started, with 150 students enrolled, while efforts continue to procure text books for adult classes. Thirty-four construction workers have been deployed to Nyeel and have commenced building a permanent school structure with four classrooms, as well as latrines and office space.

Refugee registration moves forward in Upper Nile State

On 19 April, the UN refugee agency, UNHCR, will carry out a Level 2 registration at the Doro and Jammam refugee sites. The purpose is to gain a better understanding of the make-up of camp populations, ascertain the current number of refugees at each site, and identify specific needs within the refugee communities.

Humanitarian partners continue to work together to improve the availability of water for the Jammam camp. Organizations are sending deep drilling rigs to the Maban area, while nearby boreholes are also being rehabilitated in order to increase the amount of water that can be trucked to Jammam. Partners are also exploring the possibility of moving part of the camp population to a different site, close to the Nile, to release the pressure on the water sources around Jammam.

Food distribution has commenced at both sites in the Maban area. At Doro, food distribution to 54,285 individuals was completed on 12 April. Food distribution at Jammam started the same day and is expected to finish on 15 April. In preparation for the heavy rains expected in the coming weeks, contractors are being identified to assist with improving the Doro-Jammam road and internal roads within the camps, as well as leveling and cutting trenches for drainage.

LRA-affected start returning home

There have been no reports of new conflict-related incidents or displacement caused by the Lord's Resistance Army in South Sudan since 17 June 2011. Humanitarian partners remain vigilant in the case of a resurgence of LRA violence. However, based on assessment and verification reports, about 13,000 people displaced by the LRA returned to their places of origin in Yambio, Nzara, Ezo, Mundri and Maridi counties, Western Equatoria, from November 2011 to February 2012, reflecting the improved security situation. An estimated 57,000 LRA-affected people are still displaced and require humanitarian assistance in the state. There are over 15,000 refugees in Western Equatoria, most having fled from the Democratic Republic of Congo several years ago.

Jonglei State calm during disarmament, yet acute malnutrition lingers

Jonglei State, the scene of fierce inter-communal fighting in recent months, was relatively calm as the government-led campaign for civilian disarmament continued into a fifth week. Disarmament – carried out by South Sudan's security forces – has started in all counties in Jonglei State apart from Pigi County, where remnants of rebel militia groups are thought to be. Cattle rustling and other security incidents have declined amid the heavy military presence, although overall weapons collection from civilians has fallen short of expectations.

On 3 April in Pibor town, SPLA soldiers entered government offices, including those of the wildlife service and police (the other two forces also providing troops for the disarmament campaign), seizing 16 weapons from the Pibor police station. The same morning, a team of about seven SPLA entered two different international NGO compounds to conduct disarmament. But the local coordinator for the government's Relief and Rehabilitation Commission intervened, and the soldiers left the compound without incident.

In Jonglei and elsewhere, repositioning of relief items continues ahead of the rainy season, when humanitarian operations will become considerably more costly and difficult to carry out. Brief but intense rains in the last few days suggest the wet period is starting. Food supplies have been repositioned in Pibor, the epicentre of recent inter-communal fighting in Jonglei. Food security monitoring has shown alarming levels of acute malnutrition in the state. Health partners continue to provide vaccinations and therapeutic feeding for severely malnourished children. Screening for malnutrition is difficult because of the inadequate staff numbers, the state's large size and access difficulties in some areas. Even Akobo County, the only county in Jonglei with adequate nutrition programming, has serious problems of acute malnutrition, partners say. The Ministry of Gender and Social Welfare and humanitarian partners, meanwhile, have completed a draft document on procedures for prevention and response to gender-based violence in Jonglei State.

III. Returns to South Sudan**Returnees to receive emergency travel documents**

The Embassy of South Sudan in Khartoum is issuing emergency travel documents to South Sudanese nationals with a view to subsequently issuing national certificates and passports. In the meantime, the emergency documents are expected to be recognized at air or land ports for one-time-only travel back to South Sudan. Twelve citizenship officials from South Sudan's Ministry of Interior arrived in Khartoum on 7 April, following training by international humanitarian partners on the processing of documents. Yet even if the political atmosphere improves, these officials will face an enormous caseload.

An estimated 500,000 South Sudanese need to legalize their status in Sudan, where they are no longer citizens. Those wishing to stay must register at Sudanese immigration offices and obtain resident visas as foreigners. Obtaining the prerequisite South Sudanese documentation, however, has been nearly impossible in Sudan. Hundreds of South Sudanese were reportedly stranded at Sudanese airports earlier in the week, denied permission to board flights without passports.

Barge movements continue, avoiding Unity State

South Sudanese onward barge and boat movements via Bentiu have been suspended due to the deteriorating security situation in Unity State. In Renk, Upper Nile, however, preparations for the next barge movement were reportedly proceeding well, with IOM prioritizing people with small amounts of luggage. The estimated 2000 returnees, mainly returnees bound for Greater Bahr el Ghazal via Juba, were expected to leave Renk by 16 April.

Manifesting and loading of barges also continued in Kosti, Sudan, with a returnee barge movement due to take place before the end of April.

Concerns persist about how to accommodate even more arrivals in Renk's overcrowded returnee camps. While humanitarian partners expressed misgivings about the proximity of a newly built site to South Sudanese army housing, the local authorities insist there is no better option. Tensions have arisen between stranded returnees and local residents around three older returnee sites: Abayok, Agany and Mina. National security officials said soldiers had been instructed on their behaviour towards returnees and that any incident should be reported immediately. An international protection officer has been deployed to Renk to deal with such issues. Humanitarian partners agree that new returnees ought to be moved on promptly, before heavy rainfall impedes their transport, and before they become attached to living in Renk.

Returnee Overview by State*											
State:	Upper Nile	Unity	Warrap	Northern Bahr el Ghazal	Western Bahr el Ghazal	Lakes	Jonglei	Western Equatoria	Central Equatoria	Eastern Equatoria	Total
New Arrivals 04-10 April	49	0	27	168	87	0	59	0	0	0	390
Previous Total	60,483	88,016	33,852	71,375	24,395	17,474	21,138	2,297	43,174	11,761	373,965
Updated Total	60,532	88,016	33,879	71,543	24,482	17,474	21,197	2,297	43,174	11,761	374,355
Type of Returnee											
Government Assisted	25,322	32,462	17,244	24,470	10,388	15,703	16,090	1,575	27,063	9,940	18,0257
Spontaneous	20,060	55,554	7,378	45,682	14,094	1,501	5,077	673	16,111	1,821	16,7951
Unspecified	15,150	0	9,257	1,391	0	270	30	49	0	0	26,147

* Since 30 October 2010. Contains only verified IOM data unless otherwise noted. Figures are as of 10 April 2012.

Partners were looking into moving new arrivals onward by road as soon as possible to Malakal, where another new site is being cleared and could open shortly. On 9 April, IOM teams working with the Relief and Rehabilitation Commission began verification of returnee numbers at Renk's four transit sites. At Mina, 989 returnees from the old caseload were re-verified, while 1,138 were newly verified. The field exercise, expected to last about nine days, aims to gather up-to-date information about the stranded population, include age and gender breakdown, vulnerabilities, final destination and intentions to accept onward transportation assistance. A tracking and monitoring system is being established for new arrivals, including spontaneous returns.

Food partners have completed distribution of a 15-day ration to 1,462 returnees at the new returnee transit site. More food is being pre-positioned in Renk.

IV. Humanitarian planning and coordination

Agencies and NGOs increase preparedness

South Sudan's Humanitarian Country Team on 5 April discussed the implications of rising tensions with Sudan, as the governments of the two countries failed to finalize recent agreements facilitated by the African Union. At the request of the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator, the Sudan and South Sudan HCTs are reviewing their respective contingency plans. Particular attention is being given to the effects of conflict in Unity State and returns in Upper Nile.

Coordination efforts in Renk continue, with South Sudan's Relief and Rehabilitation Commission chairing a weekly partners meeting and deploying additional staff. The IOM and other international partners are also reinforcing their teams in Renk for returnee response.

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