



# Ending the Conflict in South Sudan: The Way Forward

Policy brief - May 2017

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## Introduction

In April 2017, I was part of a delegation of South Sudanese experts, activists and a religious leader that travelled to Addis Ababa to meet with policymakers at the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), African Union (AU), United Nations (UN), Ethiopian government and other African and Western governmental organizations. While in Addis, the delegation delivered an urgent message: The situation in South Sudan has reached a tipping point; if the international community does not act now, South Sudan will enter an age of anarchy. To address the crisis and restore stability, **the AU, IGAD and UN must work together to bring the Government of South Sudan, the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-in-Opposition (SPLM-IO) and other armed opposition groups together in a political process that focuses exclusively on two priority issues: establishing security and reaching consensus on a transitional leadership**, as the current government's mandate expires in 2018 and free and fair elections are not possible in the current environment.

**"If the international community does not act now, South Sudan will enter an age of anarchy."**

## What is happening in South Sudan?

**South Sudan will be depopulated by 50 percent from pre-conflict population levels by the end of 2017 due to starvation and displacement**

South Sudan is gripped by civil war, and a confluence of political, economic and constitutional crises. Seven-and-a-half million people are in urgent need of humanitarian assistance, and the UN has declared a famine, with at least 100,000 people at risk of starvation.<sup>1</sup> Those who have means to leave the country are doing so in droves. Uganda's Bidi Bidi refugee camp became the world's

<sup>1</sup> Final report of the Panel of Experts in accordance with paragraph 12 (d) of resolution 2290 (2016), S/2017/326, 13 April 2017.

largest in April this year due to massive displacement caused by government offensives.<sup>2</sup> **Absent a fundamental shift in conflict dynamics, South Sudan will be depopulated by 50 percent from pre-conflict population levels by the end of 2017 due to starvation and displacement.**<sup>3</sup>

### *The Political Crisis*

**Over the past three years, the war in South Sudan has degenerated into a complicated patchwork of conflicts involving dozens of armed groups and an overlap of politically-motivated and inter-communal conflicts.** Fighting between government and opposition forces in Juba in July 2016 caused the violence to spread throughout much of the Greater Equatoria region, prompting concerns of potential genocide and ethnic cleansing. To consolidate peace and improve the image of the government, President Salva Kiir initiated a national dialogue process by presidential decree in December 2016, but the initiative faces widespread criticism for a lack of independence and inclusivity and has been suspended twice this year.<sup>4</sup>

Meanwhile, fractures continue to divide both the government and armed opposition. On the 9 May 2017, after weeks of rising tension in President Kiir's inner circle, the president relieved his chief of staff, Gen. Paul Malong Awan, who is seen as a hardliner and a driving force of the conflict since it began in 2013. Malong's removal follows several high-profile defections, including Gen. Thomas Cirillo, the former deputy head of logistics in the army, and Col. Khaled Ono Loki, the head of military justice. On the side of the armed opposition, despite a joint statement by six opposition groups in April 2017, the opposition has not rallied behind a single leader and lacks the resources it would need to mount a significant military challenge to the government.<sup>5</sup>

### *The Economic Crisis*

**The conflict has destroyed South Sudan's economy, which is now experiencing the highest rate of inflation in the world.**<sup>6</sup> The price of food and other essential goods has skyrocketed while salaries of government employees have remained the same. Today in South Sudan, a soldier makes on average about 700 South Sudanese pounds per month, which is the equivalent \$3-4 US dollars. The government

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<sup>2</sup> Julian Hatter, Uganda at breaking point as Bidi Bidi becomes world's largest refugee camp, The Guardian (3 Apr. 2017), available at <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2017/apr/03/uganda-at-breaking-point-bidi-bidi-becomes-worlds-largest-refugee-camp-south-sudan>.

<sup>3</sup> Kate Almquist-Knopf, Salvaging South Sudan's Sovereignty (and Ending Its Civil War), The Internationalist (24 Apr. 2017), available at <http://blogs.cfr.org/patrick/2017/04/24/salvaging-south-sudans-sovereignty-and-ending-its-civil-war/>.

<sup>4</sup> Waakhe Simon Wudu, South Sudan Suspends National Dialogue Steering Committee, Voice of America (8 May 2017), available at <https://www.voanews.com/a/south-sudan-suspends-national-dialogue-steering-committee/3843235.html>.

<sup>5</sup> Press release from the Political Opposition Forces, 30 Apr 2017, available at <https://blogs.prio.org/MonitoringSouthSudan/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Statement-of-the-Opposition-Groups-on-National-Dialogue.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> To Fight Hyperinflation, South Sudan decides to tax aid workers, The Economist (18 Mar. 2017), available at <http://www.economist.com/news/middle-east-and-africa/21718822-famine-war-and-incompetence-worlds-newest-country-fight-hyperinflation>; Okech Francis, MTN cuts jobs, scratchcards to survive South Sudan crisis as inflation hits 266%, highest official rate in the world, Mail & Guardian-Africa (9 Jun 2016), available at <http://mgafrica.com/article/2016-06-09-mtn-cuts-jobs-scratchcards-to-survive-south-sudan-crisis-as-inflation-hits-266-highest-official-rate-in-world>.

has also gotten into the practice of selling oil in advance, further weakening its ability to respond to economic shocks. In fact, the government has sold its oil supplies through the end of July 2017 and has already spent the money that it earned, meaning that it will be virtually without revenue until August 2017. This will make for a combustible economic situation over the coming months.

### *The Constitutional Crisis*

According to the Agreement on the Resolution of the Crisis in South Sudan (ARCSS), the mandate of the Transitional Government of National Unity (TGONU) should end following elections in August 2018. However, elections in the current environment are not possible due to widespread insecurity and displacement. **To avert a constitutional crisis, the government and armed opposition groups must come together to agree on a transitional leadership that can work to stabilize the country and prepare for elections once certain minimum conditions can be met.** Such a political consensus on leadership can only be achieved through a fully inclusive political process.

### How has the region responded?

The AU typically delegates matters of peace and security to specific regional economic communities (RECs). Hence, the resolution of South Sudan's conflict was delegated to the East and Horn of Africa REC, IGAD, which has played the role of lead mediator since the early days of the conflict. Despite the leverage that the four frontline countries of Ethiopia, Kenya, Sudan and Uganda have over South Sudan, they have been unable or unwilling to use this leverage effectively to force the warring parties to adhere to the terms of the ARCSS. Given their ability to either incentivize or dis-incentivize violence, it is important that the four frontline states be involved in any effort to resolve the conflict. However, **the situation has reached a level where it poses a fundamental threat to peace and security on the continent more broadly, and it is time for the AU and UN to assume joint responsibility for ending the war.**

### RECOMMENDATIONS

**To end the violence and set South Sudan back on a path towards peace and stability, we recommend that the AU, IGAD and UN:**

- Bring the government, SPLM-IO and other armed opposition groups to the negotiating table in a **fully inclusive political process that focuses exclusively on two priority issues: security arrangements and leadership**. Model the process on a two-track design in which political and military elite engage in direct negotiations, with a formally recognized consultative role for non-armed and non-political groups such as civil society, faith groups, think tanks and academics.
- The mandate of the government that emerges from this political process should be modeled on **the 2015 Agreement on the Resolution of the Crisis in South Sudan (ARCSS)**<sup>7</sup>. All chapters of the ARCSS should remain binding on the signatories to the August 2015 and any additional groups that participate in the new political process, except for Chapter I ("Transitional Government of National Unity of the Republic of South Sudan") and Chapter II ("Permanent Ceasefire and Transitional Security Arrangements and Chapter III relating to governance arrangements").

- Convene an **international conference** in which the leaderships of the government and armed opposition meet with regional heads of state and formally commit to the renewed political process. Representatives of key constituencies in South Sudan, including civil society, faith groups, academia, women, youth and traditional authorities should be invited to participate in the discussions.
- **Conduct a rapid assessment of armed groups across South Sudan to better understand their composition and grievances.** Using this information, negotiate ceasefires among the opposing forces in key locations as precursors to a permanent national ceasefire. Ensure that ceasefires go beyond commitments in writing to include other confidence building measures, such as partial disarmament or demobilization of forces (recognizing that full disarmament or demobilization might not be a reasonable request in the current security environment).
- **Encourage greater coordination among AU, IGAD and UN appointees on South Sudan:** Alpha Konaré, AU High Representative for South Sudan, Festus Mogae, Chairman of the Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission (JMEC) and Nicholas Haysom, UN Special Envoy for Sudan and South Sudan. Ensure that they have the political support and human resources necessary to carry out their task.
- **Frame the mandate of the Regional Protection Force (RPF) to cover the provision of security to support the political process in addition to civilian protection.** By providing security in Juba, the RPF could help to build confidence among the armed opposition to engage in dialogue within South Sudan.

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<sup>7</sup> Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan, available at [https://unmiss.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/final\\_proposed\\_compromise\\_agreement\\_for\\_south\\_sudan\\_conflict.pdf](https://unmiss.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/final_proposed_compromise_agreement_for_south_sudan_conflict.pdf).