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Sudan: Organized violence escalating in the south

JUBA, 1 October 2009 (IRIN) - A month before the recent attack in Jonglei State that left scores dead, Daniel Dau had moved his family from Duk to Twich East County, about 100km away, believing they would be safer there.

But he was wrong. On 20 September, Duk Padiet village in Twich was attacked and at least 167 people killed, according to Jonglei State statistics.

The dead included Dau's uncle. "[He was] the only surviving member of his family," said David Dau, Daniel's son and head of the Agency for Independent Media, a media development organization in Southern Sudan.

Fifty-four civilians died, along with 28 policemen, prisons officials and wildlife conservation staff. A military counter-offensive killed 85 attackers. Another 50 people were ferried to Juba for treatment.

"There were no cattle to be raided," Kuol Manyang Juuk, Jonglei State governor told IRIN, adding that although some raiders stole plastic chairs from the village, many more went without taking a thing.

"It was an attack against government," he added.

Locals claim the attackers were Lou Nuer targeting the Dinka Hol in Duk Padiet. Jonglei officials say they numbered about 1,000. Some wore military uniforms, according to Kuol, and others civilian clothes.

"The worst thing is there [were] killings of children, women and elderly people," the head of the Sudan Council of Churches, the Rev. Ramadan Chan Liol said.

The incident showed that communal violence was escalating in Southern Sudan, [Ecumenical News International](#) (ENI) quoted him as saying.

According to the UN, the rate of violent deaths in the south now surpasses that in Darfur. Lise Grande, UN Deputy Resident Coordinator in Southern Sudan, recently said more than 2,000 people had died and 250,000 been displaced by inter-ethnic violence across the region.

Who was responsible?

"There is a general lack of faith in the government of Southern Sudan's efficiency and capacity to combat illegal activity," Dau told IRIN. "Some enemies of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement [CPA] may be exploiting [this]. The future of Sudan as a united country is uncertain; some people don't want to see it happen."

A key Northern Sudanese official threw the ball back into the Southern court.

"Despite all the positive developments in the peace process, the [Khartoum] government notes with profound concern the recent armed tribal conflicts in Southern Sudan," said Ghazi Salahuddin, presidential adviser and head of the Sudanese delegation to the recent UN General Assembly.

"These conflicts threaten not only the stability of the Sudan and the South but also the stability of the whole region."

Politics, not cattle

"Some of the more recent attacks have... had little or nothing to do with cattle rustling, a traditional cause of violence between neighbouring tribes and ethnic groups in the region," the UN Mission in Sudan said in a 23 September statement.

"This will become a source of mounting concern as the country heads towards the April 2010 national election and the referenda in southern Sudan and the Abyei region scheduled for 2011."

Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) forces rushed to Jonglei after the attack, bringing relative calm to the area, but locals remain apprehensive.

"The situation is normal, under control," Kuol told IRIN. "[But] it is still tense because those people can come and attack again. It is a very big area, and you don't know which area they are going to hit next."

Blaming the north

Southern church leaders believe some Khartoum leaders are arming militias to destabilize their homeland, according to ENI.

Officials in Khartoum strongly deny such claims. Osman al-Agbash, spokesman for the Sudan Armed Forces, has called such allegations "baseless".

Salahuddin urged Southern authorities to ensure security. "In accordance with the CPA, the responsibility for the maintenance of peace in the south of the Sudan belongs to the government of Southern Sudan," he told the UN.

"Therefore, it is everybody's duty to urge and encourage the government of Southern Sudan to discharge its duty for the sake of its citizens' security and prosperity."

In Juba, a Lou-Nuer meeting blamed its community members for the attack on the Dinka in Duk Padiet, but noted that both the GoSS and the Jonglei state governments could have done more to stop the incident.

Arms flows

Analysts fear that continuing violence will have a devastating effect on the 2010 elections and 2011 referendum.

Giorgio Musso of the University of Genova [argues](#) that relations between the north and south have become strained and elections are more likely to threaten peace than to bring long-awaited democratization.

The referendum could also "cause the separation of the country, with lasting consequences for the Horn of Africa and the entire continent.

"The GoSS is unable to protect the population because it is spending the largest amount of its budget [on] heavy armaments," he noted in a paper, "led by the idea that weapons are the only effective guarantee for Southern Sudan self-determination [and] that an armed confrontation with Khartoum is likely."

Between 30 and 40 percent of the Southern budget since 2006 has been spent on SPLA affairs - roughly equivalent to its spending on education, health and infrastructure combined, according to the [Geneva-based Small Arms Survey](#).

"While much of the international community's attention remains focused on Darfur, the CPA continues to falter, and organized armed violence in Southern Sudan continues to escalate," it wrote in a paper, *Skirting the Law*.

The current focus on the "enemy" in the north and on increasing military capacities to counter it has diverted Southern political and economic resources from improving governance and managing internal security threats.

"With ongoing violence in Southern Sudan and Darfur, and mounting tensions between the Northern and Southern governments," said Eric Berman, Small Arms Survey managing director, "persistent arms flows should be a cause for great concern in the international community."

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