

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	130
Land:	Sydsudan
Kilde:	UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office
Titel:	Annual report on human rights situation in 2015 - South Sudan
Udgivet:	21. april 2016
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	6. september 2016

Human Rights and Democracy Report 2015 - South Sudan

Publisher	United Kingdom: Foreign and Commonwealth Office
Publication Date	21 April 2016
Cite as	United Kingdom: Foreign and Commonwealth Office, <i>Human Rights and Democracy Report 2015 - South Sudan</i> , 21 April 2016, available at: http://www.refworld.org/docid/57234ee9c.html [accessed 6 September 2016]
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The human rights situation in South Sudan deteriorated further during 2015. Both government and opposition forces continued to breach previous commitments to end hostilities, and widespread fighting resumed in April and May. While a peace agreement was signed in August, serious human rights violations and abuses, and breaches of international humanitarian law continued to be recorded, the majority of which were reportedly committed by government-backed forces. Sexual violence remained a significant concern and was reported in areas previously unaffected by conflict in the south. Gang rapes coupled with beatings and abductions of women were reportedly perpetrated by government-backed forces. Despite international pressure, there was little or no follow-up on long-awaited government investigations into human rights violations and abuses. The rights of the child continued to be violated with reports indicating the use of child soldiers by both sides.

The African Union Commission of Inquiry (AU-COI) report was published in October and found that there were reasonable grounds to believe that crimes against humanity and war crimes had been committed by all sides. A mission by the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights undertook a comprehensive assessment of the situation and reported sexual violence had taken place throughout 2015. Civil and political space was severely restricted. The 2014 Security Bill gave the National Security Services enhanced powers to arrest and detain. Arrests, beatings and assaults on journalists and the closure of newspapers were reported throughout the year.

The UK's key human rights objectives in 2015 centred on conflict prevention, preventing sexual violence, and protecting political space. We took action in all these areas during the year. We played a significant and sustained role in helping to secure the peace agreement and continued to lobby both sides to advance implementation. With our Troika partners (the United States and Norway) we encouraged publication of the AU-COI report and have been active in calling for follow-up. South Sudan remained a priority country for the UK's Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative (PSVI). We provided support at the grassroots level, as well as pressing the government to fulfil the commitments it had made in the 2014 Joint UN Communiqué on the Prevention of Conflict-Related Sexual Violence. Internationally, we successfully pressed for a strong resolution on South Sudan at the UN Human Rights Council (HRC). The Prime Minister also announced the UK would send up to 300 troops to South Sudan to support the UN peacekeeping mission.

Our priorities in 2016 will be to ensure the peace agreement is implemented, starting with the formation of the Transitional Government of National Unity. We will continue to press for action on human rights, support human rights organisations, and take a lead on PSVI. We will encourage the AU to establish the Hybrid Court for South Sudan so that perpetrators of abuses can be held to account. At the HRC we will press for a UN Special Rapporteur to be appointed.