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Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

Written statement* submitted by Society for Threatened Peoples, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.


[13 August 2020]

* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.

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Violence in South Sudan

Society for Threatened Peoples is deeply concerned about the lack of civilian protection and security sector reform in South Sudan. At least 127 people (among them 82 civilians) were killed in separate incidents in August 2020 in Warrap State's Tonj East County. The South Sudan army has launched a disarmament campaign in the state to reduce intercommunal clashes. But the South Sudan People's Defence Forces (SSPDF) are facing strong criticism of the local population because they are perceived as biased and dominated by soldiers ethnic Dinka origin. Ethnic minorities and the civilian population are complaining a lack of protection by the official security forces. Others had cautioned that the top-down approach in the disarmament campaign of the authorities was likely to fuel violence. Furthermore, they criticized the lack of a plan to prevent clashes between armed youths and soldiers in the disarmament campaign.

The violence had started after a young man was detained following a quarrel with soldiers. When he tried to escape, he was shot in his back. An incident which caused attacks by young friends and relatives and led to further violent conflict. More than 90 civilians and soldiers had been wounded in the assaults. Shops and a market in nearby town of Romich were looted and burned. In May and June 2020, hundreds of people were killed in intercommunal violence in the State of Jonglei.

Since its declaration as a new sovereign state in 2011, South Sudan only has experienced a short time of peace. Conflict erupted once again in 2013, causing a civil war, which has resulted in widespread rape, extrajudicial executions, torture, starvation and brutal death. It is estimated that around 400,000 people have been killed since the conflict started. According to United Nations (UN) human rights experts, war crimes and crimes against humanity have been committed, but impunity prevails.

The violent incidents in Warrap State in August 2020 are documenting the necessity of a design and implementation of a broad security sector reform in South Sudan. The revitalized peace agreement of September 2018 included the call on the South Sudan Government to develop a strategy of a security sector reform and to present a concrete schedule for its implementation. Among others was planned to remove the Director-General of the Internal security Bureau, Akol Koor Kuc, because he has been accused of massive human rights violations by UN experts in 2019. A human rights defender has claimed that Kuc intended to kill him on order of South Sudan President Salva Kiir.

Security experts close to President Salva Kiir have announced in August 2020 that the President has decided to suspend all plans for a security sector reform due to tensions in the army. Without a reliable security sector reform there will be no bipartisan army and reliable protection of the civilian population.

Society for Threatened Peoples International calls on the UN Human Rights Council to the Government of South Sudan:

- to present and implement a security sector reform and to create a bipartisan army. Ethnic minority people should be equally represented on all levels of the security forces,
- to end impunity for war crimes and crimes against humanity,
- to ensure a better protection of the civilian population in conflict.