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U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations  
Testimony on Independent South Sudan: A Failure of Leadership  
Thursday, December 10, 2015, 10:00 a.m.**

**Introduction**

Chairman Corker, Ranking Member Cardin, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to discuss the situation in South Sudan, and for your continued support.

Today, I would like to provide an update of the situation on the ground, share how we are making a difference and saving lives, and highlight how we have adapted our programs to help the people of South Sudan achieve a lasting peace.

**Situational update**

Two years of conflict in South Sudan has created a devastating humanitarian crisis. The peace agreement signed in August provides the best chance for a return to peace and development. Its implementation is urgently needed. The people of South Sudan are suffering and the humanitarian situation is only getting worse. Response teams cannot reach people who need aid the most, especially in the Greater Upper Nile Region, due to local clashes and authorities denying access.

Civilians have borne the brunt of the violence since the conflict erupted in December 2013. Warring parties have failed to protect civilians. Warring parties have reportedly killed and brutalized unarmed civilians, perpetuating cycles of retribution and exacting reprehensible cruelty. The African Union Commission of Inquiry and human rights organizations have documented flagrant atrocities. Several United Nations (UN) reports recount allegations that warring parties gang-raped and burned women and children alive in their homes; castrated, raped, and killed children; and forcibly recruited as many as 16,000 children. These allegations demand a full and impartial accounting as implementation of the peace agreement moves forward.

More than 2.3 million South Sudanese have fled their homes in search of safety and protection, since December 2013. Almost one third – nearly 655,000 people – fled to Ethiopia, Sudan, Uganda, and Kenya. Combined with refugees who had fled before the crisis, a total of 770,000 South Sudanese refugees are now unable to return home. These countries generously support South Sudanese refugees in the midst of other stresses, including the El Niño-related drought in Ethiopia.

Two thirds of those displaced by this conflict – 1.7 million people – remain internally displaced in South Sudan, mostly in remote areas. Others have sought refuge in protection of civilians sites that were established on the bases of the UN Mission in the Republic of South Sudan (UNMISS). Two weeks after the crisis began, 60,000 people were sheltered there. Two years

later, approximately 185,000 people remain in overcrowded protection of civilians sites on six UNMISS bases. The Bentiu and Malakal sites more than doubled their population this year. We applaud UNMISS for receiving and protecting civilians on its bases. This unprecedented act saved lives. The untenable situation at these sites underscores the urgency of all parties to stop fighting, create stable and secure conditions, and resume essential services so that civilians can return home safely. As of now, displaced persons remain fearful of returning home. The U.S. Government will support informed, voluntary returns or relocation only when it becomes feasible and safe to do so.

Up to 2.4 million people in South Sudan—or 20 percent of the population—face life-threatening hunger this month. This figure is 60 percent higher than last December. It will increase to 2.6 million and higher in early 2016 as the limited harvest runs out. In fact, today, South Sudan is one of the most food-insecure countries in the world. People have resorted to eating water lilies and grass to survive in remote areas. A quarter of a million children suffer from severe acute malnutrition. The situation could become worse without immediate and consistent access for aid groups.

The warring parties have set back development gains. According to UNICEF, 57 percent of government health facilities have been destroyed or are not operational in the Greater Upper Nile Region (Unity, Upper Nile, and Jonglei states). More than 800 schools have been destroyed during the conflict. Over 400,000 children have lost access to schools, bringing the total number of children out of school to 1.8 million.

The economy is in a state of near collapse. Food, safe drinking water, and other basic goods are less available and less affordable due to rising inflation and currency depreciation. Across the country, food prices are up to 150 percent above average. The cost of fuel is also up, which makes delivery of assistance more expensive.

### *Access challenges*

Our teams and partners are doing everything possible to reach those in need with assistance. The operating environment remains challenging and risky. Humanitarian workers face daily security, logistical, and bureaucratic impediments, especially in the Greater Upper Nile Region.

Warring parties continue to target humanitarian staff. Since the conflict began, at least 40 humanitarian workers have lost their lives. In October of this year alone, the UN documented more than 78 incidents nationwide in which warring parties looted supplies, robbed offices, assaulted aid workers, or interfered with aid operations. In June, the government expelled the UN's top humanitarian official. This incident brought attention to the challenges all of our partners are facing, but it is important to note that most of the aid workers under attack are South Sudanese. More than 90 percent of aid workers in non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are South Sudanese who risk their own lives to help fellow citizens.

Warring parties complicate aid delivery in what is already a tough place to operate. South Sudan has very little infrastructure, and rain makes large parts of the country inaccessible by road for months at a time. Bad roads are made worse by criminals who harass aid trucks. Thus, our

partners often rely on river barges to deliver aid. When government and opposition forces ramped up fighting in April and May, the barges were caught in the crossfire, disrupting their passage to Unity, Upper Nile, and Jonglei states. In July, the government closed off the Nile River entirely. To reach people around Malakal, the largest city in that area, our partners resorted to air operations, which are five times more expensive than delivery by barge.

Our partners also face bureaucratic impediments. The government has repeatedly refused requests from impartial humanitarian organizations to airlift food or other critical relief aid to people in need. Aid workers must spend precious time that should be used reaching people, haggling with military and political leaders from all sides over access. South Sudanese authorities have denied visas for aid workers, denied delivery of cash or equipment to opposition-held areas, and charged exorbitant fees for the registration of NGOs.

These restrictions are unacceptable under any circumstances, but they are especially taxing at a time when our humanitarian dollars and operations are stretched thin by an unprecedented number of protracted crises around the world.

### **U.S. response**

Notwithstanding immense challenges, the United States is leading the effort to help the people of South Sudan through these tough times. The U.S. government is the largest donor to the response for the South Sudan humanitarian crisis. We have provided more than \$1.3 billion in emergency assistance for conflict-affected people in South Sudan and South Sudanese refugees in the region since the start of the crisis. We also work closely with other donors to speak with one voice and coordinate our responses to needs, including being sensitive to conflict dynamics and ensuring our activities do not inadvertently intensify or trigger additional tensions.

In late October, I saw firsthand how we are making a difference. Several UN, donor, and Department of State colleagues and I flew by helicopter from government-controlled Malakal to opposition-controlled Wau Shilluk, a remote area across the river in the Greater Upper Nile Region. We saw our partners, including the UN World Food Programme (WFP), World Vision, and others, providing assistance in an area that they could not reach earlier. As we met community groups, it was humbling to be with such incredibly resilient people. As we met aid workers and watched three large air deliveries of food, it was inspiring to see their resolve to do whatever it takes to save lives. It is also disappointing that we must resort to such complex measures to help those in need.

We are working as effectively and efficiently as possible by leveraging the expertise of our partners. Drawing on experiences from around the world, they are using creative tactics to reach people who would otherwise be cut off from aid. For example, one USAID partner reached remote displaced populations in Upper Nile State by navigating river tributaries and using tractors to cross swampy terrain. WFP has expanded road routes to adapt and reroute when violence or other obstacles get in the way. WFP has found new places to land in support of air operations. WFP also works with the governments of Sudan, Ethiopia, Kenya, and Uganda to bring aid across each of their borders to maximize efficiency. UNICEF and partners have reached over 880,000 people – a quarter of whom are children under age five – by deploying

mobile teams to quickly deliver aid in hard-to-reach areas. Food for the Hungry has used canoes and an extensive community network to distribute seeds to communities in need.

Our partners are improving the everyday lives of people in South Sudan. We reach approximately 1.3 million people per month with food, clean water, health care, and trauma support. For two consecutive years, U.S. government assistance has helped avert famine and supported communities that would otherwise be at greater risk. We have encouraged and supported Ethiopia, Kenya, Sudan, and Uganda in keeping their borders open to receive and host South Sudanese refugees. Yet, with 2.4 million people facing severe hunger each month, and humanitarian appeals significantly underfunded, more needs to be done.

### **Adapting our response to support peace**

We are doing all we can, but we are deeply disappointed that the government is not acting in the best interest of its people. It is clear that we must match our steadfast goodwill toward the people of South Sudan with demands for accountability by the government and all parties. They must stop harassing aid workers and NGOs, grant full, unhindered humanitarian access, and take credible steps towards peace.

USAID has shifted its long-term assistance from helping to build the institutions of the new South Sudanese state to more directly meeting the needs of the South Sudanese people. We have withdrawn all technical advisors we previously provided to government ministries, with the exception of the Ministry of Health, where our advisors are needed to support life-saving programs and avoid the spread of disease. We have expanded support to protect and empower women, educate children, safeguard civil society, and support independent media.

### *Supporting women*

We are protecting civilians at risk of violence, especially women and children who have suffered unspeakable brutality at the hands of armed actors. For instance, at the protection of civilians site in Malakal, USAID provided lighting around the site's perimeter to increase safety and visibility for women and girls who can be at risk of sexual violence after dark. We also support seven partners across South Sudan to reduce the risk of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and provide survivors with safe spaces and clinical and trauma care. They have reached 950,000 people with information on GBV prevention and response in 2015. We also integrate GBV prevention in all programs. For example, in water, sanitation, and hygiene programs, we empower women to inform decisions that will make it safer for women to access water facilities.

We are also providing women with opportunities to make a living and keep their families healthy. Our assistance has helped women like Nyakuoth, a widow with five children whose husband was killed when fighting broke out in her village this past May. Nyakuoth and her children lived in the bush for three months, eating wild leaves to survive. Thanks to our medical care and therapeutic foods, she was able to revive her malnourished children. We also provided her with seeds that she is saving for a peaceful harvest. "I pray for peace to return," she told our partner, "so that we can go back home and plant crops to feed [my] children."

### *Educating children*

If South Sudan is to have a peaceful future, we must create opportunities for the next generation. In partnership with UNICEF, USAID is providing emergency education services to internally displaced children, including those in protection of civilians sites and opposition-held areas. The program has established 629 temporary learning spaces across six states (Lakes, Unity, Jonglei, Upper Nile, Central Equatoria, and Eastern Equatoria). We have enrolled nearly 130,000 children and adolescents, including recently demobilized child soldiers. USAID partners have also helped to reunite nearly 2,400 children with their families.

We have also helped equip a new cadre of female educators. Fourteen women scholars returned to South Sudan over the summer after earning Master's degrees in Education in Emergencies at Indiana University. An ethnically diverse group selected from across South Sudan, they are now equipped to teach tolerance and understanding among South Sudan's diverse communities.

### *Supporting civil society and independent media*

South Sudanese civil society and media play a pivotal watchdog role, but they face an increasingly difficult operating environment that includes legal impediments, security threats, and hostile statements from the government. We are working to prevent the closing space for civil society organizations by ramping up support to improve their operational security and advocacy skills. We are especially concerned about a bill under consideration in South Sudan's National Legislative Assembly that could negatively impact civil society and our humanitarian partners. We have engaged the government to revise elements of the bill, but encourage the Assembly to allow for greater consultation and feedback from civil society on this legislation. We are also deeply concerned about a new National Security law that gives sweeping powers to the National Security Service to arrest and detain activists and journalists.

To advance the formal peace process, we are supporting civil society groups and independent media channels so that they can inform the South Sudanese public about the peace agreement and its implementation. We support community consultations where partners distribute copies of the agreement, translate it into local languages, and discuss how it might impact these communities. We also support independent radio, the primary means of reaching people in South Sudan; the radio stations we assist reach millions of listeners.

### **Conclusion**

The U.S. government remains committed to saving the lives and aspirations of the people of South Sudan. However, no amount of assistance will end the suffering; only peace will. We remain concerned that ongoing clashes continue to make it challenging, or even impossible, for people to receive desperately needed aid or to resume their lives in some of the hardest hit areas. Both sides must show a credible and unequivocal commitment to implement all elements of the August peace agreement without delay.

All warring parties are required by international humanitarian principles to ensure impartial humanitarian access to people in need across conflict lines throughout all of South Sudan.

Through concerted diplomacy, we must continue to push to ensure all parties respect this most basic principle. We greatly appreciate the work of our Department of State colleagues both here in Washington and in the field to urge respect for these principles. All humanitarian staff – from top UN officials to truck drivers delivering lifesaving food – must be free to carry out their work free from violence or retribution. Harassing those who are saving lives in South Sudan ultimately punishes the vulnerable and traumatized people who need them most.

Working hand-in-hand with the people of South Sudan to save lives in difficult circumstances has created strong bonds among aid workers. While in Juba recently, I saw the extent to which members of the humanitarian community look out for each other. A USAID colleague came to a high-level meeting with a backpack full of high protein bars and supplies – a care package bought at her own expense – for NGO partners who had staff preparing to travel through swamps and difficult terrain to deliver aid. Their solidarity runs deep.

The commitment of our partners and the resilience of the South Sudanese inspire us. Our commitment to the people of South Sudan makes a difference, saving lives and setting a path to the future. The people of South Sudan deserve to live in communities free from harm. It is with these men and women in mind that we remain steadfast in advancing USAID's mission to partner to end extreme poverty and promote resilient, democratic societies while advancing our security and prosperity.