



### KEY FINDINGS

- ❖ The Commission’s investigations document persistent armed conflict, violence and human rights violations – characterized by killings, sexual violence & abductions.
- ❖ Subnational conflict is often stoked by national political and military elites, or enabled by the State’s passivity in building rule of law institutions needed to stop violence.
- ❖ Impunity fuels violence: in April 2023, the Commission named government officials responsible for serious crimes, including the crime against humanity of sexual violence. All remain in office, none are held accountable, and many have continued perpetrating rights violations.
- ❖ Close to one third of South Sudanese are internally displaced or refugees, and fear returning home. Food insecurity is at crisis levels for over half the population.
- ❖ The media and civil society face entrenched repression, including pervasive censorship, arbitrary bureaucratic restrictions, and the threat of violence – the National Security Services target them at home, abroad & online.
- ❖ Elections are planned in December 2024, to conclude the political transition of the 2018 Revitalized Peace Agreement – it was to address the drivers of conflict and rights violations, but key measures are unimplemented, including for security & transitional justice institutions.
- ❖ If conflict drivers remain unaddressed, there is a grave risk of violence and violations on an even greater scale.

Read the full report: [HERE](#)

### Investigative Activities:

Prepared by the United Nations Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan, the report describes the current human rights situation in South Sudan.

Findings are based on independent investigations between January and December 2023, including:

- Over 350 witness interviews, and meetings;
- Engagements with South Sudanese authorities;
- Expert opensource, forensics and legal analysis;
- Collection of confidential records and documents;
- Eight investigative missions within South Sudan;
- Additional missions, including to the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda.

### About the Commission:

The Commission is an independent body, mandated by the United Nations Human Rights Council to investigate and report on the human rights situation in South Sudan. Its three expert Commissioners are supported by a Secretariat based in Juba, South Sudan. The Commissioners presented their latest report to the Council in Geneva on 1 March 2024.

The Commission employs international best practices of fact-finding, and a ‘reasonable grounds to believe’ standard of proof. Detailed information is omitted when required to protect sources from potential harm. The collected evidence and information is preserved in secure and confidential archives.

### LOCATIONS OF INVESTIGATIONS IN 2023



## KEY REPORT THEMES

Based on the Commission's investigations, the report examines: political, security and legal developments; subnational conflict; sexual and gender-based violence; abductions of women and children; rights of children; South Sudanese refugees and displaced persons; accountability and transitional justice; political economy; and civic and political space.

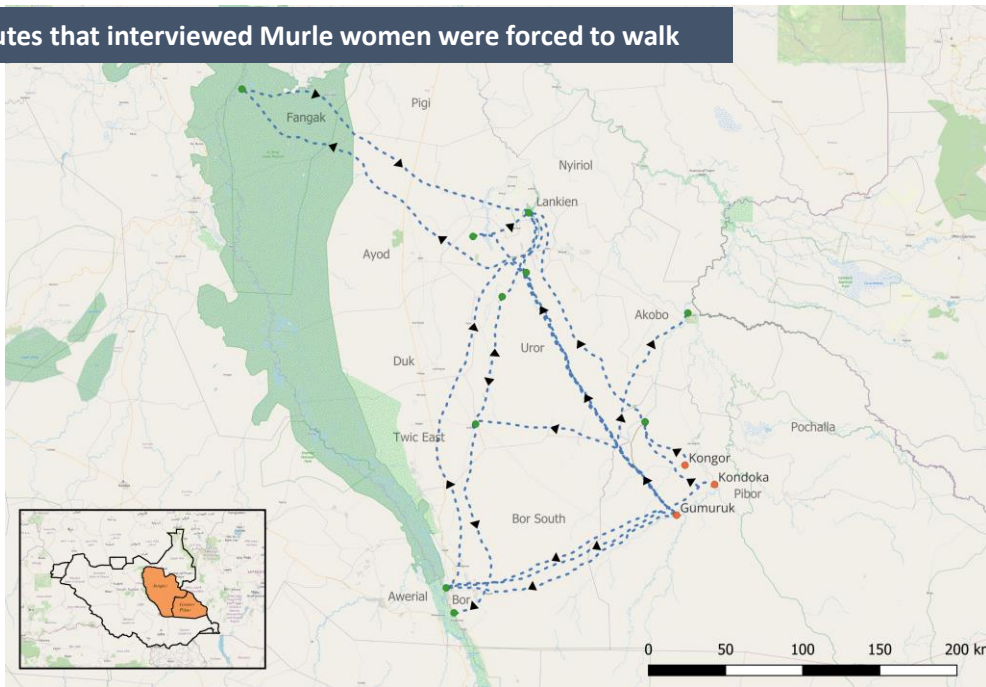
## ILLUSTRATIVE STUDY: ABDUCTIONS OF WOMEN AND CHILDREN

Soon after Christmas 2022, militias from throughout Jonglei executed attacks in Pibor, systematically killing men and older boys, stealing cattle, and destroying homes. Grasses and bushes were set ablaze, forcing civilians from hiding places, for the men to be shot and for the women, girls, young boys, and babies to be abducted. Hundreds of women and children were marched-off at gunpoint.

Scores were killed trying to escape. Many mothers and children were separated by abductors, who trafficked them to locations throughout Jonglei State. Captive women were subjected to beatings and sexual violence. Today, many of these women and children remain missing, or held hostage by captors who demand ransom payments for their release.

The scale and severity of abductions is worsening. These are inherently gendered: women, girls and young boys were taken, men and older boys were killed, and women above childbearing age killed or left behind. Local officials say they are powerless to stop the violence, but they have sat by for years without investing in prevention, while available resources and revenues are diverted to corruption. Instead, in 2023 authorities negotiated and paid ransoms to perpetrators in exchange for releasing abductees. Families were encouraged to pay ransoms. Women and children's lives are being bought and sold. The State's intervention amounts to criminal collusion, and risks incentivizing further abductions.

### Routes that interviewed Murle women were forced to walk



Abductees were **forced to walk up to 400 KM**, often barefoot.

**Children were separated** from parents, and abductees taken captive in homes.

Women and children were **bought & sold** in the Jonglei State capital.



Murle women told the Commission they were taken to a market area in the Jonglei State capital, Bor, where they witnessed abductors being paid ransoms in exchange for their release.



Government authorities confirmed their involvement in "negotiations" for releasing abductees, but denied that money had been exchanged.



Many women and children remain missing or held hostage. Nobody has been punished for past or recent abductions. They continue unabated.

*"For trying to refuse sex, I was beaten constantly with a stick made for whipping cows."*

*"The abductor's family treated me as a slave."*

*"We feel treated like cattle and property."*



*I think about my children all the time. I don't know if they are safe. Please, I request help to bring my daughter and son back to me."*

## KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

### TO THE GOVERNMENT OF SOUTH SUDAN



#### Address impunity

- Immediately dismiss or suspend public officials responsible for serious crimes, including those named by the Commission. Initiate investigations & prosecutions.
- Allocate sufficient resources for functional and effective rule of law and justice institutions, particularly courts, and ensure their independence and impartiality.
- Establish the three transitional justice institutions under the Revitalized Peace Agreement, including the Hybrid Court to be established with the African Union.
- Commit to ensuring no blanket amnesties for crimes under international law.
- End illegal renditions, and investigate the removal of four men to Equatorial Guinea in 2019, and the rendition of Morris Mabior from Kenya in 2023.



#### Prioritize the rights of women and children

- Guarantee and protect the substantive equality of women and girls in society.
- Prioritize the prevention of crimes against women and children, including by holding the perpetrators of sexual and gender-based crimes accountable.
- Allocate sufficient resources to the Ministry of Gender, Child and Social Welfare to implement the State's commitments to address sexual and gender-based violence.
- Implement unfulfilled commitments in the Revitalized Agreement to increase the representation of women in decision-making positions, at all levels.
- End the recruitment and use of children in armed forces and groups, and resource activities of the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Commission.
- Take immediate and lawful measures to release abducted women and children.



#### Respect and protect civil and political rights

- Open democratic space to enable meaningful participation in political processes.
- End attacks and arbitrary restrictions on media, civil society, and political activities.
- Amend the National Security Services Act in line with the State's obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.
- Require the National Security Services to immediately end all forms of arbitrary censorship, cyberattacks, and extra-territorial operations including renditions.
- Establish the independent Press Complaints Council.



#### Implement critical aspect of the Peace Agreement to address conflict and the accompanying human rights violations

- Guarantee democratic space to enable credible elections with legitimate outcomes, including security arrangements for safe participation, and establish effective administrative and judicial mechanisms for peacefully resolving electoral disputes.
- Accelerate and ensure the deployments, resourcing and payment of the necessary unified forces, while moving forces away from civilians, except for their protection.
- Establish and resource the Special Reconstruction Fund to support safe and voluntary returns of IDPs and refugees; fund humanitarian activities, coordinating with the UN.
- Strengthen economic management and provide resources to core governance functions including socio-economic rights services; address corruption and revenue diversion; ensure budget processes are participatory, transparent and accountable.
- Establish and operationalize the Truth Commission, Reparations Authority, as well as the Hybrid Court; ensure that members are selected through a transparent process, are appropriately qualified, and are not implicated in human rights violations
- Ensure funding and human rights protections for gender-equitable participation in the constitution-making process; and ensure the Permanent Constitution embeds rule of law principles and human rights protections.

### TO UNITED NATIONS MEMBER STATES, THE AFRICAN UNION, AND INTERNATIONAL PARTNERS

- To the African Union and the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development: unlock the stalemate with the Government of the Republic of South Sudan on establishing the Hybrid Court for South Sudan, and develop early warning systems to address heightened risks of violence before, during and after electoral processes.
- To United Nations Member States: assist the Government to take measures to end violence, especially conflict-related sexual violence; encourage authorities to ensure civic space; decrease facilitating violations, including extraordinary renditions.
- To the United Nations system in South Sudan: provide opportune protection and humanitarian assistance to civilians, and continue critical support including for rule of law and justice institutions in South Sudan.