

## **Activity 3.1 Case Scenario: South Sudan**

### **Background**

Decades of civil war within Sudan between the north and south finally ended in 2005. The Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) signed on 9 January 2005 between the Government of Sudan and Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) ended Africa's longest running civil war. The CPA also called for a referendum to take place to determine the status of southern Sudan. The result was an overwhelming majority, 98.83% of participants, voting for independence. On 9 July 2011, the Republic of South Sudan became the newest country in the world.

However, independence did not bring an end to problems in southern Sudan. Conflicts between rival ethnic groups within South Sudan over cattle, land and grazing rights also escalated. During the civil war these groups were united in the common battle for independence. Now ethnic-based militias kill and conduct cattle raids in the Warrap, Unity and Jonglei States.

In July 2011, the United Nations Mission in the Republic of South Sudan (UNMISS) was established to consolidate peace and security, and help support the development of South Sudan.

### **Ethnic Conflict between Lou Nuer and Murle in Jonglei State, 2011-2012**

The troubled state of Jonglei has a long history of ethnic tensions, cattle raiding, kidnappings and sometimes violent competition for scarce resources. Conflicts such as these "cattle vendettas," as well as other clashes between rival groups, are common in South Sudan but have serious consequences on the civilian population and pose greater security risks to the displaced people.

For example, fighting between the rival Lou Nuer and Murle groups is common. The Murle and Lou Nuer are both agro-pastoralist groups that depend largely on subsistence farming and cattle-herding. Historically, ethnic clashes and cattle raids are a result of the demand for high bridal dowries.

In the past, such clashes were conducted with spears. Easy access to weapons led to a change. Following independence, ethnically based militias are now armed with assault rifles and vehicles. Women and children are targeted for killings and abduction as a tactic in these conflicts.

During the start-up phase of UNMISS, Murle militias raided the cattle from the Lou Nuer in August 2011. They also caused injury to men and women, and kidnapped children from the neighbouring areas.

This triggered retaliatory action from the Lou Nuer. After having organized the self-proclaimed Nuer White Army made up of Lou Nuer, youths began to threaten revenge attacks against the Murle. They warned UNMISS to leave the area, and even threatened to fight both UNMISS and the South Sudanese army if necessary, as they fought the Murle.

Efforts of negotiations to stop the fighting failed. In December 2011, without paying any heed to the international call to stop fighting, the Lou Nuer launched swift attacks on to Murle in different areas, killing approximately 600 people. The attacks were led by the Nuer White Army, a group of as many as 6,000 to 8,000 armed youths from the Lou Nuer ethnic group. The intention was to reclaim stolen cattle and the 180 kidnapped children that the Murle had allegedly taken from their communities.

The armed youth were largely from ethnic Lou Nuer villages in central Jonglei State, and attacked ethnic Murle villages in the eastern part of the state,

including Murle civilians living in the remote areas of Pibor county. The attackers burned and looted homes; killed and injured people using machetes, sticks, knives, and guns; abducted women and children; seized hundreds of thousands of cattle; and forced tens of thousands of people to flee their homes to hide in the bush. A witness who was at the scene several days after the attack stated that he saw the dead bodies of civilians, including women who appeared to have been raped with blunt objects.

Murle then carried out retaliatory attacks in January and February 2012. During the period of 2011-2012 attacks and counter-attacks by Murle and Lou Nuer continued. Deaths included Murle, as well as Bor Dinka and Lou Nuer in revenge attacks by Murle during the same period.

The UN claims that about 350,000 people were displaced as a result of this kind of violence in 2011. At the beginning of 2012, South Sudan declared Jonglei State a disaster zone after as many as 100,000 people were forced to flee from fighting between the groups.

Many people from both Murle and Nuer communities were treated for machete and gunshot wounds at clinics in Pibor, Juba, and Malakal. International aid groups struggled to provide assistance to more than 140,000 people affected by the fighting.