

The Role of the International Community in South Sudan



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As shown by cases such as the Rwandan Genocide, the international community's reaction to African civil wars has often been too weak, too little and/or too late. However, since the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in 2005, the presence of international actors in pursuit of peace in South Sudan has been recorded as overwhelming. Even so, the question remains whether the international community will learn from past mistakes in their efforts toward achieving peace and eventually rebuilding South Sudan.

In 2013, president Salva Kiir accused the former and first vice-president, Riek Machar, of inciting a coup in an attempt to unseat him. This marked the beginning of South Sudan's civil war. This rapidly developed into an ethnic conflict that has engulfed the country. The current instability has been a result of a combination of state failure and high corruption. This corruption is attributed to the failed transformation of the South Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM), from being a liberation movement into an accountable ruling party. Unfortunately, the war has not been the only misfortune that the country has had to deal with; it also experiences environmental issues such as famine. These environmental factors have exacerbated food insecurity as well as displacement, leaving South Sudan in a perpetual state of conflict.

According to UN estimates, the state of civil unrest and persistent violence in South Sudan has led to at least 50,000 civilian deaths, as of 2016.¹ In addition, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs reports that “nearly 7.5 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance and protection across the country as a result of armed conflict, inter-communal violence, economic crisis, disease outbreaks and climatic shocks”². According to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, the number of displaced South Sudanese citizens is almost one in every four.³ There is a possibility of over 1 million total refugees in 2017 alone.

In the light of developments unfolding in Juba and in other parts of the country, it is clear that South Sudan is not well equipped to deal with the impacts of this war.⁴ Therefore, the international community’s footprint in the country has not only been welcomed, it has been much needed. The International community are often seen as a third force and envisaged to be a buffer between government forces and those of the opposition. This can be seen, for instance, with the continuous request of external actors in crisis-management expressed by the South Sudan Peace and Reconciliation Commission - a government-sanctioned committee that oversees peace-building within the country.

The international presence has been actualised in a number of ways: the efforts around peace and security which have a focus on areas such as mediation and peacekeeping; various humanitarian missions that cater for the war, famine and displacement; and lastly, Monetary aid donations in form of Official Development Assistance (ODA) from various organisations and countries. The most prominent external actors have included the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) under the auspice of the African Union (AU). IGAD assumed the role of the peacemaker from the beginning, establishing envoys to mediate talks in Addis Ababa. The resulting agreement, however, did not hold in spite of IGAD deploying teams to monitor compliance.

Individual countries within IGAD have also played a significant role in the unfolding crisis. For instance, the June 22nd – June 23rd 2017 Solidarity Summit on Refugees, co-hosted by Uganda and the United Nations, noted that the burden of refugees in Uganda has risen from 500,000 to more than 1.25 million. Ethiopia and Kenya have played a vital role and shown their commitment to peace-building in the country and the region by hosting some refugees from South Sudan. This conflict has made East Africa the fastest growing refugee host in the world and further illustrates that the effects of the civil war in South Sudan are also bared by the neighbouring countries. As a member of the IGAD, Uganda’s military intervention has also had a negative effect on IGAD efforts by putting IGAD nations partiality under question.

The United Nations (UN) is also considered an instrumental organisation as it has deployed the United Nations mission in South Sudan (UNMISS). UNMISS is involved in the monitoring of human rights abuses and violations, the creation of a conducive environment for humanitarian work as well as providing support in the implementation of the Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict and Peace-building. UN efforts have also been complemented by the Troika Group, consisting of nations such as Norway, the USA and UK. These countries have all been instrumental international players in peacekeeping and peace-building initiatives by holding various peace talks since 2013. The United Nations, together with the United States, has also employed hard power in dealing with war perpetrators in South Sudan. This is seen in their strategy of targeted sanctions. In addition to the Troika group, China and the European Union have been key players by sending delegates and funding the peace process.

¹ *World News*. U.N. official says at least 50,000 dead in South Sudan warInternet source: <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-southsudan-unrest-un-idUSKCN0W503Q>. Accessed 20 June 2017.

² ReliefWeb. UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. 2017. South Sudan Humanitarian Needs Overview. Report on humanitarian needs overview. https://docs.unocha.org/sites/dms/SouthSudan/2017_SouthSudan/South_Sudan_2017_Humanitarian_Needs_Overview.pdf. Accessed 20 June 2017.

³ United Nations Refugee agency. 2017. More than one million children have fled escalating violence in South Sudan. Internet source: <http://www.unhcr.org/news/press/2017/5/590c7cb64/million-children-fled-escalating-violence-south-sudan.html>. Accessed on 23rd June 2017.

⁴ <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2017/may/08/juba-spotlight-turmoil-world-youngest-capital-south-sudan>

The different external stakeholders, as seen above, have been and are continuously engaged in efforts of peace-building in South Sudan. These endeavours have mainly been concerned with state-building and national building issues. A case in hand is the United Nations Peace-building Plan that sets its priorities on national ownership. As such, internal issues continue to receive less attention while local involvement is often overlooked. This leads to challenges that often go hand in hand with exclusionary measures of top-down high level engagement peace operations. This has been a reality that has often impacted the international community's peace intervention.

In summation, given the current trajectory of the unresolved conflict, as well as political context in South Sudan, the International community will still be a key stakeholder and partner in the efforts to reach a peaceful resolution in the country. Their efforts are continuously calling the South Sudanese leaders to find peaceful resolutions to all their disputes. Their efforts have, however, failed to exert enough pressure on the leaders in order for them to abide by the various agreements signed over the recent years. The fear that South Sudan faces is the possibility of being forgotten by the international community. This may be due to the growing fatigue and frustration of the international community, especially if the situation in South Sudan does not improve. This is a reality that South Sudan and neighbouring nations should actively try to counter, given the much needed effort offered by the international community. On the other hand, the international community holds the responsibility of employing intervention methods that will ensure sustainability, so as to give South Sudanese leaders and civilians a fighting chance towards realisation of a peaceful future.

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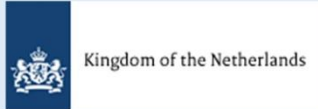
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