



Genocide Watch Country Report: South Sudan

August 2021

In July 2011, South Sudan officially gained independence from Sudan. A referendum in January 2011 indicated 98% of South Sudanese supported [secession](#). The new state was led by President Salva Kiir, former rebel leader and an ethnic Dinka, and Vice President Riek Machar, an ethnic Nuer.

Many hoped independence would end the violence in the south. For decades, government-backed Arab militias had aggressively targeted Christian and Indigenous groups. From 1983 to 2005, intense fighting between the Sudanese Armed Forces and southern rebel groups resulted in [two million deaths](#). The conflict ended with the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement ([CPA](#)), which outlined the 2011 referendum and subsequent independence for South Sudan.

The 2011 referendum was also meant to settle the status of the oil-rich Abyei area at the Sudan-South Sudan border. However, weeks before the scheduled vote, Sudanese Armed Forces invaded Abyei and [100,000](#) Ngok Dinka fled south. No formal referendum for Abyei has taken place. The region remains marred by [conflict](#) between Misseriya and Ngok Dinka.

Independence did not end the violence in South Sudan. President Kiir and Vice President Machar's power struggle and manipulation of ethnic grievances devolved into [civil war](#) in December 2013. Kiir's government forces and Dinka militias violently clashed with Nuer forces loyal to Machar. [All forces](#) and groups torture, rape, and kill civilians along ethnic lines and regularly abduct or recruit children. Over [400,000](#) civilians have been killed in the conflict.

Peace agreements in 2015 and 2018 [collapsed](#) into renewed violence. Kiir and Machar signed a power-sharing agreement in February 2020, but implementation of the deal has faltered. Security sector reform, which includes [unification](#) of Kiir and Machar's forces into a national army and demobilization of smaller militias, has not progressed. More than 80% of [civilian casualties](#) in 2021 are attributable to ethnic militias. Though the peace deal stipulated the creation of a [Hybrid Court](#), one has not been established.

A violent attempt to oust Machar from his SPLM/A-IO party in August 2021 jeopardizes the already fragile peace process. [Clashes](#) between Machar's allies and opponents have killed dozens of soldiers.

Ten years after independence, the country has little to celebrate. [8.3 million](#) people are dependent on humanitarian support; [4.5 million](#) children are malnourished. Over [2,300 civilians](#) were killed in 2020. Today, [1.6 million](#) South Sudanese are internally displaced, and 2.2 million are refugees in neighboring countries. Increased intercommunal [violence](#) and attacks on civilians in Unity, Warrap, Lakes, Jonglei, and the Greater Pibor Administrative Area threaten the prospect of peace.

Due to the slow implementation of the 2020 peace agreement and the ongoing, ethnic-based targeting of civilians, Genocide Watch considers South Sudan to be at **Stage 9: Extermination**.

Genocide Watch recommends:

- The South Sudan People's Defense Force and opposition forces be integrated into a single national army. Ethnic militias should be disarmed and demobilized.
- Church and Indigenous leaders engage in dialogue to encourage inter-ethnic unity.
- The African Union establish the Hybrid Court for South Sudan to try suspected war criminals.
- U.N./A.U. forces support a free and fair election for a new transitional government.