

# South Sudan Refugee Crisis

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## Introduction

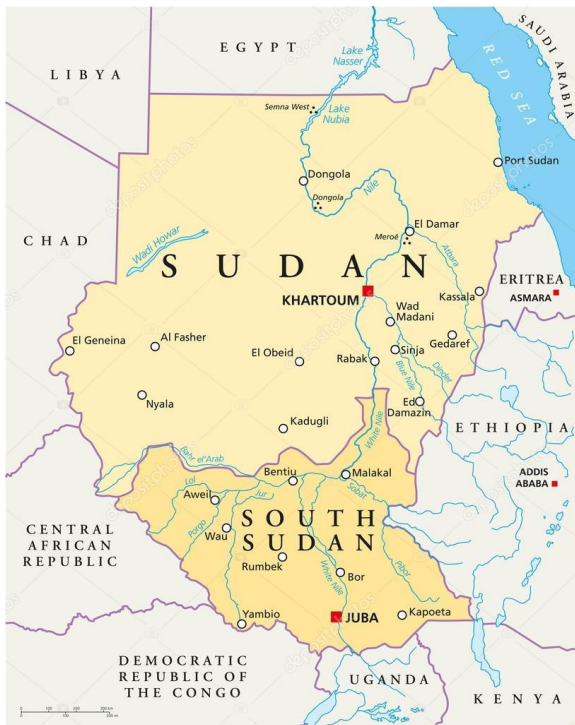
South Sudan is among the poorest and least-developed countries in the world, ranked 169<sup>th</sup> out of 188 in the Human Development Index.<sup>1</sup> It is located in Northeast Africa and its capital is Juba. It is bordered by Sudan on the North; Ethiopia on the East; DRC, Kenya and Uganda on the South; and Central African Republic on the West.<sup>2</sup> The country is made up of 10 states, housing over 13 million

people spread among 60 different major ethnic groups.

It is one of the most diverse countries in Africa.<sup>3</sup> The largest ethnic groups include Dinka (40%), Nuer (20%), Zande (8-10%), Bari and Shilluk.<sup>2</sup> They are mostly Africans who practice Christianity and follow traditional African religions. Christians account for about 60% of the population, followed by animists, and a small minority of Muslims. In regards to language, both English and Arabic were official languages under the 2005 interim constitution, but in 2011, English became the official language.

## Brief History

South Sudan's complicated history has played a role in many of the modern war conflicts, and has made it difficult for the country to move forward in many aspects of its society. At the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century, Sudan was under British-Egyptian rule.<sup>4</sup> The North and the South had different reactions to the British colonization. The North accepted it and allowed the British to import its culture and



modernize the country. The South, however, rejected it, leading to a contrast in development between the North and the South.

On January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1956, Sudan gained its independence from Britain. Unfortunately, the differences in religion, culture, and even racial composition between the North and South made it difficult for the two to unify after independence. The North was mostly composed of white Muslims, while the South was made up of Blacks that practice Christianity and traditional religions.<sup>5</sup> The North tried to impose a Sharia law gradually throughout the country. It eventually led to a civil war (*The First Sudanese Civil War*) from 1956 to 1972 that ended with the signing of the Addis Ababa Agreement.<sup>6</sup> This document included the establishment of an autonomous South Sudan with Juba as its capital.

About 10 years later in 1983, the Sudanese government cancelled the autonomy arrangements and re-tried to impose the same Islamic law.<sup>3</sup> John Garang formed the Sudan People's Liberation Army in the South to resist the government and fight for a more unified and secular country. That led to one of the longest civil wars in World History, lasting for 22 years and resulting in more than 2.5 million deaths

and close to 5.5 million people displaced.<sup>2</sup> It ended in 2005 when the Comprehensive Peace Agreement was signed. The Agreement provided South Sudan with semiautonomous status, free from Islamic Law, and gave it the ability to vote for independence in six years.

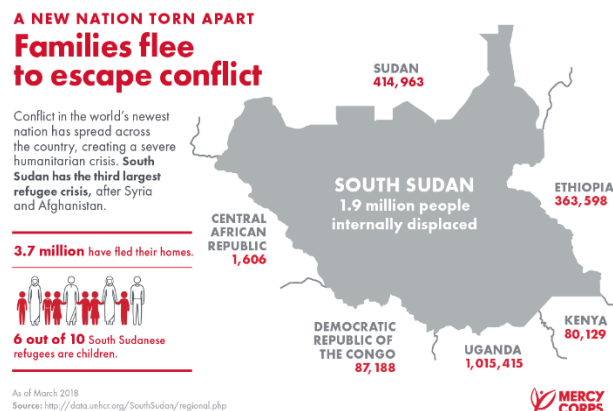
In 2011, a weeklong vote on independence was held from January 9<sup>th</sup> to January 15<sup>th</sup>, resulting in 98.8% voting for South Sudan secession and independence<sup>7</sup>. On July 9, 2011, Sudan declared independence. It became the 54<sup>th</sup> country in Africa, and the 193<sup>rd</sup> in the World<sup>8</sup>. Unfortunately, peaceful times did not last for very long. In late 2012, there was a rumor about planned coup. In 2013, President Salva Kirr accused his Vice-President Riek Machar of planning this coup, and sacked its entire Cabinet.<sup>2</sup> This dispute between the two politicians was complicated by the fact they were from two different ethnic groups. President Salva Kirr is a member of Dinka tribe (largest ethnic group) while Vice President Riek Machar is a member of the Nuer tribe (2<sup>nd</sup> largest). In December 2013, fights erupted in the streets of Juba,<sup>9</sup> and that has led to one of the biggest humanitarian crises in modern history.

## Refugee Crisis

This internal conflict has had a major impact on South Sudan, and has led to the country becoming home to the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest refugee crisis, behind Afghanistan and Syria.<sup>10</sup> As of July 2018, there were about 2.5 million South Sudanese refugees, with the number expected to rise to 3 million by the end of year if the war continues.<sup>11</sup> Additionally, another 1.9 million South Sudanese are internally displaced. Looking at the refugee population, over 60% are children (< 18 years old). It has been estimated that over 7 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance.<sup>12</sup> These refugees are fleeing to all six neighboring countries: Uganda (~ 45%), Sudan (~ 30%), Ethiopia (~18%), Kenya (~5%), DRC (~4%), and Central African Republic (~1%).<sup>11</sup>

Most of the refugees live in Camps. In Ethiopia, over half of the 450,000 refugees were spread among five camps in Gambella,<sup>11</sup> which runs along the Eastern border of South Sudan. In Kenya, over 40,000 refugees (close to half) have settled into a camp in Kakuma.<sup>13</sup> The largest camp for South Sudan Refugees, Bidi Bidi, is found in Northwest Uganda. The Bidi Bidi Refugee Camp is the largest

refugee camp in the world, housing over 270,000 refugees.<sup>14</sup>



### Life in Bidi Bidi

Though Bidi Bidi Camp (see photo below)<sup>20</sup> has helped many South Sudanese escape violence from their home countries, the living conditions are less than adequate.<sup>15</sup> Food distributions are insufficient and sometimes delayed, causing some refugees to sell non-food items to pay for food. Water supply is neither adequate nor sustainable. They rely on water trucking to provide over 20% of water, and boreholes are regularly out of service. The shortage of water has led to low latrine coverage, which in turn has contributed to poor sanitation and increased incidence of infections.

The water shortage has also had an impact on housing. Large families are not provided with adequate housing, and tend to need shelters. In Bidi

Bidi, shelters are usually made with bricks using a process that requires large amount of water. Unfortunately, due to water shortage, its use has been prioritized for consumption, making it unavailable to make shelters. Fewer shelters means overcrowding, and thus allows for easy spread of infections. To further complicate things, over 60% (about 35,000) households did not have latrines, further putting them at risk for multiple infections.



## **Famine**

South Sudan has been struggling with food insecurity for decades, and this conflict has made things even worse. About 80% of its population is found in rural areas because those settlements tend to be more favorable in terms of water supply.<sup>2</sup> Most South Sudanese are dependent on agricultural activities for employment and food. Due to the

conflict and displacement, farmers have not been able to access the land to plant crops or graze cattle. When they are able to make goods, they have trouble reaching the market due to poor road conditions, and fighting.<sup>16</sup> Additionally, the government and opposition groups have blocked food supplies in certain areas, and have been looting markets and private homes for food. This has led to multiple traders running out of markets because they are worried about possible attacks.<sup>17</sup> Due to shortage of food supply at the market, prices have soared. For example, the retail price of sorghum earlier this year was 600% higher than in 2015. This has led to one of the biggest food insecurity crises in the world.

It is estimated that more than 60% of the population, about seven million people, are at risk of going hungry by June 2018.<sup>17</sup> About a third of those seven million are facing emergency levels of food insecurity. In early 2017, close to 100,000 South Sudanese were on the verge of starvation.<sup>16</sup> A famine was declared and many international organizations were able to step in and reverse it. Reports indicate that famine will likely be declared again this year due to worsening of conflicts,

continued soaring of food prices, and inconsistent humanitarian funding.

## **Health**

This conflict has also had a tremendous impact on the population's health. Prior to the conflict, South Sudan was already struggling in this area. The life expectancy is 56 years for men, and 58 years for women.<sup>3</sup> Reports estimate that more than 80% of the population have inadequate or no health services.<sup>12</sup> There were over 150 disease outbreaks in 2017, with many due to displacement and destruction of water and sanitation facilities. Over 5.6 million people do not have access to safe water, and many have fled into swampland where they are vulnerable to disease outbreaks.

Communicable and water diseases are spreading at an alarming rate. Multiple disease outbreaks, including measles, meningitis, and Rift Valley fever, have been reported throughout the country in 2018.<sup>17</sup> The country suffered a cholera outbreak between June 2016 and February 2018. There were an estimated 20,000 cases, leading to 436 deaths. Malaria is one of the leading causes of sickness and death in South Sudan, especially among children. More than 300,000 cases were recorded in

2016.<sup>18</sup> These numbers are further complicated by the fact that the country is not equipped to handle such burdens. The country has very few medical facilities, and due to the conflict, only 20% of those facilities are fully operational.<sup>17</sup> Additionally, these facilities are underequipped and lack adequate staffing, with only 1 doctor for every 100,000 people.<sup>19</sup>

## **Conclusion**

South Sudan's civil war has quickly led to one of the biggest humanitarian crises in modern history. This has been very devastating to a country that was already struggling even prior to the war. A few issues have made it very difficult, if not impossible, to resolve this crisis. Firstly, the country has been plagued by its history. Since Sudan declared its independence in 1956, the region has always had internal conflicts, even during the "peaceful" times. The lack of trust in government has played a major role, especially with having such a history of government trying to impose unjust laws onto its citizens. Different ethnic groups are often worried about one group, such as the Dinka (largest and President's), not allowing others to have a voice in the direction of the country. Secondly, the country

is plagued by food insecurity, poverty, inflation and lack of infrastructures or facilities. This would make it difficult for the country to recover, even if the civil war were to end. Lastly, the country has not been very receptive to outside help. Armed groups have not been allowing humanitarian agencies to help those in need.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, some areas have been inaccessible due to fighting. South Sudan recently topped the list for most violent countries in the world for foreign aid workers. Since 2013, over 100 aid workers have been killed. Since December 2017, 23 aid workers have been abducted. This has led to multiple international organizations interrupting their work in South Sudan for safety issues, leading to worsening of the crisis.

Though the situation looks dire, there are some signs that the end could be in sight. In August 2015, a cease-fire peace agreement was signed by both parties to end the war. Unfortunately, the agreement was violated, and the war continued.<sup>2</sup> As of June 2018, there are some ongoing conversations between the two sides regarding the end of the war, but only time will tell if South Sudan will ever become home again for the South Sudanese refugees.

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