



Blue Nile Center for Human Rights and Peace

More than 127,000 Sudanese Refugees are at Risk of Massacre in Camps in South Sudan Eruption of Violence in Maban, Upper Nile, Targets Humanitarian Aid Workers

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On 3 August, the security situation in Maban County in Upper Nile State, in South Sudan, has deteriorated. The capital city Bunj, has witnessed sporadic bouts of killing and shelling over the past three days. The violence threatened the lives of over 127,000 Sudanese refugees from Blue Nile, spread over four camps in Maban. In addition, thousands of humanitarian aid workers and civilians of South Sudan have faced the armed violence.

With great sadness and sorrow, the Blue Nile Center for Human Rights and Peace (BNCHRP) expresses its shock over the death of *Ustaz* Gabriel Yien Gach, a humanitarian local staff working for the Norwegian People's Aid (NPA) who was shot and killed on 4 August. At the BNCHRP we had worked closely with Gabriel, we knew him for his diligence, dedication and friendship, through his work and help for Sudanese refugees in Upper Nile. The killings which targeted Gabriel Yien Gach, during the last four days also targeted a number of humanitarian organizations staff, in addition to numbers of civilians from the Maban including big refugee communities. The direct eruption and vicious killings confirms the BNCHRP's information and analysis during the past four months, and it also shows that the humanitarian and security situation of over 127,000 Sudanese refugees- those who are registered in refugees camps of Doro, Yusuf Batel, Kaya and Gindrassa in Maban county- will continue to deteriorate as a result of the outbreak of the conflict in South Sudan since 15 December 2013. The eruption of violence last Sunday is manifestation is the state of high risks of killings and massacres that are faced by these thousands of refugees.

Despite the lack of reliable documented information as situation is escalating, available sources to the BNCHRP in the refugees camps, Bunj city and from humanitarian organizations, illustrates that about 12 civilian citizens were in Maban, including traders, women and children. The dead bodies of some of them were seen in the Bunj market. In addition, seven local humanitarian organization employees from Norwegian People's Aid (NPA), ACTED Relief, World Relief International and AAH were also targeted. Furthermore, information by various citizens mentioned that they have seen numbers of military personal bodes from various forces in Maban. In addition to the violence taking place over the past four days, tens of thousands of refugees from camps had to flee back to the displacement areas in Blue Nile despite the aerial bombardments. The BNCHRP also documented thousands of Southern Sudanese citizens who sought asylum and protection in the refugee camps, particularly in Doro camp. Indeed the number of refugees and IDPs in Doro camp which borders with Blue Nile state has doubled, from 48,000 to more than 100,000 people during the last week.

The tragedy of refugees from Blue Nile in Maban county is at its peak, herewith the possible life-threatening risk of massacres. The suffering of refugees has increased after and the evacuation of international aid workers from

the region and the blockage of the delivery of humanitarian aid to camps for several months after the outbreak of conflict in South Sudan. The humanitarian tragedy is now reached its maximum after the beginning of the collapse of security situation. The BNCHRP has noted that there are about five military actors in the area which has direct impact on the lives of the refugees. These forces include the two most obvious: The Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) the regular army of the Government of South Sudan and the opposition forces of the SPLMA- in Opposition. In Maban county also there are a number of active and inactive groups forces and militias. One local militia receives training and support from the Sudanese government. They recently become active and operate from Sudan in areas controlled by the Sudanese army in Blue Nile. In addition to the Sudanese opposition force, this is mainly represented by the Sudan People's Liberation Army-North (SPLA-N). The SPLA-N is active in the areas under the control of the SPLM North Blue Nile, and its main target is Sudanese governmental forces up toward the north.

The recent development in the deterioration of the humanitarian situation coupled with the growing insecurity of the Sudanese refugees, including risks of refugee camps following the attacks, can be understood in the context of widespread violence in Maban this week, and the boarder complex conflict in South Sudan. Despite various interests expressed by the various parties and militias to the conflict in South Sudan, these layers of conflicts should be left as South Sudanese internal matter without interfering in the interests and power relations of southern Sudanese actors. The BNCHRP main focus is how the recent outbreak of violence will greatly increase the vulnerability of the already suffered refugees. Therefore the Centre remains interested in the context and background that provoked and paved the way for this development. As highlighted above, the BNCHRP has worked closely over the last four months at monitoring the humanitarian, political and security developments in the Maban county in South Sudan and Blue Nile state in Sudan. Such monitoring provided a base for the analysis of what challenged refugees will face in the future, in particular after the escalation of violence. The BNCHRP monitoring and analysis of the context and background provide an interpretation of current violent attacks, as it also represent a serious alert to what might happen to the Sudanese refugees of Blue Nile. In this regard, among trends and observations that the BNCHRP has monitored are the following:

- (1) Assault and domestic violence at some refugee camps, e.g. Yusuf Batel, by the host communities in the months of February and March 2014, which led to killing of 21 persons from the two parties. This violence occurred in the background of SPLA and SPLAN- in Opposition fightings around the oil fields in the Upper Nile state that are closed to the refugee camps;
- (2) A number of isolated violent incidents in a number of refugee camps, which resulted in the killing of a number of traders during the months of March, April and May 2014;
- (3) Security tension and panic causing people to flee from the Bunj city during the month of April 2014 after strong rumors of attacks against the city by unknown militia. Some international humanitarian organizations gave local staff leave from work which aggravated tension among refugees and citizens;
- (4) Inaccurate statements, with political purpose through some radio stations that attempted to fabricate stories about relationships between Sudanese refugee issues and south Sudan conflicting actors;
- (5) Unknown military forces/ militia from South Sudan in last week of July 2014 attacked the village of Roum, which is located in Sudan, inside the SPLM / SPLA North controlled areas in Blue Nile; and
- (6) The continuation of the support provided by the Government of Sudan, and the deployment of southern militias in Maban area, including historic Islamic local associations, that to lead to destabilize the region in order to strategically dismantle the refugees camps.

The escalation of the security situation in Maban county of last week, including the waves of killing and shelling has had a wide impact on 127,000 Sudanese refugees. The BNCHRP believes that the life of refugee women, children and the elderly is at high risks; particularly in the absence of any United Nations Mission and/ or forces that can provide protection for Sudanese refugees in South Sudan, among their mandate of protecting South Sudanese civilians.

Finally, while the BNCHRP calls for peace and reconciliation in South Sudan, the Center also will strategically serve to increase and strengthen mechanisms for solidarity among the communities of Sudanese refugees and host communities in South Sudan. The deteriorating humanitarian crisis should not be at the expense of both South Sudanese and Sudanese refugee communities; the BNCHRP will equally support regional and international humanitarian assistance working at speeding and preventing any further grave violations and atrocities. In addition, the Centre will advocate for the establishment and deployment of adequate international and/or regional mechanism to prevent the deteriorating status of the Sudanese refugees in South Sudan; aim to enhance their safety and protection and provide them with all needed humanitarian assistance.

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