



## CONTEXT

Pre-existing fractures between the Azande and Balanda communities in Western Equatoria state (WES) have largely been politicized, exacerbated, and exploited. This divide, caused by multiple factors, including tension between the Avungara ruling clan of the Azande and the Balanda over leadership roles in political offices and traditional authority structures in Tambura, constituted a fertile ground for the escalation of violence.

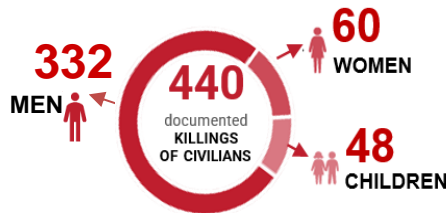
In the period leading up to the outbreak of conflict in Tambura County in June 2021, intermittent reports of ethnically motivated violence targeting of civilians in Source Yubu surfaced between February and May 2021. This resulted in, among other forms of violations, killings and displacement of civilian populations, in particular of individuals identified as Balanda and/or associated with the SPLA-IO forces in and near Source Yubu. In the same period, the incursion of armed militia and elements of Maj Gen Nando-led SSPDF triggered a strong military response from the SPLM/A-IO, setting the scene for the conflict in Tambura County, during which hundreds of civilians were killed.

It is noteworthy to mention that violence has continued unabated in the region. Between June and September 2021, UNMISS HRD's investigation documented the plight of civilians in the county of Tambura, Western Equatoria state where increased violence and attacks saw over 440 people killed, 18 injured, 74 civilians abducted, 64 subjected to sexual violence, including seven men and four girls, and over 80,000 were forcibly displaced from their homes. In addition, at least 1,007 houses were burned.

HRD has previously reported on violations and abuses against civilians in Tambura between April and August 2018, in which it documented human rights violations arising from conflict between conventional parties, immediately prior to the signing of R-ARCSS in September 2018. The current brief captures an outbreak of conflict in the same region that has taken place against the backdrop of complex developments since late 2018. It identifies the main actors who may bear the greatest responsibility for the direct perpetration of violations committed against civilians in Western Equatoria during the period under consideration.

## VIOLATIONS AND ABUSES OF INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS LAW

### KILLING



Witnesses accounts indicate that most of the victims were killed with machetes and knives, characterized by extreme brutality

**Modus operandi:** Rival armed elements moving in small groups carried out widescale killing of civilians. In some instances, individuals and whole families were targeted and killed on presumption of belonging to a specific community, irrespective of gender or age.

### ABDUCTION



women and girls were subjected to sexual violence

men and boys were abducted mainly for forced recruitment and to carry looted items

The relatively high numbers of abducted and victims of the sexual violence are indicative of the gendered dimension of the conflict in Western Equatoria and in South Sudan more generally.

### CONFLICT RELATED SEXUAL VIOLENCE (CRSV)

UNMISS HRD DOCUMENTED **64** RAPE AND OTHER FORMS OF CRSV | **19** victims were raped and killed

A girl as young as 12 was gang-raped to death

*"I am a teacher by profession. I was displaced from Mabenge on 17 June following an attack on the area. I was a witness of the attacks of that day. The attackers came through Akpa. They were about 49 of them and fully armed with AK 47 and PKM [machine guns]. They looted property from the houses of community members and destroyed houses. They destroyed Mabenge Primary School after looting it. The armed men attacked the home of a 12-year-old girl and shot her grandfather dead. The armed men then shot and injured the 12-year-old girl and a few of them gang raped the girl to death. I saw the incident with my eyes and it was a horrible scene."*



## LOOTING AND DESTRUCTION OF CIVILIAN PROPERTY

AT LEAST **29 VILLAGES ATTACKED** | **1,007 HOUSES BURNED** | countless were looted

Attacks by warring parties resulted in the widespread looting and destruction of civilian property. In some instances, attackers moved along the road and burnt down houses in village after village.

## DISPLACEMENT

ACCORDING TO HUMANITARIANS **80,000 CIVILIANS WERE DISPLACED**

As internally displaced civilians risked their lives to eventually return to their houses and villages for food and other critical items, reports of arrests, abductions, and killings surfaced wide

## ALLEGED PERPETRATORS



*Maj Gen Nando-led SSPDF and affiliated militia groups*



*Individuals linked to SPLA-IO and Angelo Davido*

As a result of its investigation, UNMISS HRD found evidence of the SPLM/A-IO involvement in the conflict, as well as militarization of youth from both Azande and Balanda groups. Likewise, HRD identified three high ranking military officers belonging to SSPDF and its affiliated militia groups to be similarly responsible for serious human rights violations cited in this report. The fluid nature of these groups, which may have been used as proxy armed elements, makes attribution to conventional parties difficult considering that several smaller pockets of community-based militias and/or civil defence groups on both sides were also involved in the conflict. However, the names of certain individuals such as **Angelo Davido** and **James Nando** and their direct involvement as main protagonists alongside or as part of conventional parties to the conflict were severally mentioned and documented.

Investigations **indicate political and traditional elites fueled the conflict**, including through incitement to violence and providing support.

## UNMISS AND OHCHR RESPONSE

**Political engagement:** Sustained and coordinated advocacy through political engagements at the Juba level ensured the commitment and oversight of the top-level government officials to address the violence. During his visit to South Sudan in September 2021, the USG for Peacekeeping Operations, Jean-Pierre Lacroix, raised concerns over the situation in Tambura in his meetings with the President, the First Vice President, the Minister of Defense the Speaker of the R-TNLA, the Presidential Adviser on Security Affairs, the Reconstituted Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission R-JMEC Chair, and other international and regional bodies. Similarly, UNMISS SRSG Haysom raised the issue in follow-up engagements with the First Vice President, the Presidential Adviser on Security Affairs, the EU Heads of Missions, the AU, the IGAD, and the R-JMEC. This multi-level political engagements-maintained focus and pressure by putting the onus of the responsibility on the parties to the peace agreement to take immediate steps to mitigate tensions by relocating their forces to training and cantonment sites.

To further highlight the gravity of the situation on the ground and urge peaceful solutions, UNMISS SRSG led a high-level delegation to Tambura comprising representatives of IGAD, R-JMEC, Ambassadors and diplomats from Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Norway, Sudan, and Uganda, and the Deputy SRSG, acting Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator and UNDP Resident Representative in South Sudan. The delegation held meetings with the State Governor in Yambio and visited Tambura, where they meet key stakeholders, including the JDB team, the County Commissioner, the Paramount Chief, and community representatives. Subsequently, a joint statement was issued stressing that unless the Revitalized Transitional Government of National Unity (RTGoNU) took urgent action to end the fighting, there was an imminent risk that further escalation would endanger vulnerable populations, exacerbate the dire humanitarian situation and threaten the implementation of the Revitalized Agreement.

**Deployment of UNMISS peacekeepers:** As part of its 'Whole-of-Mission integrated approach to the Protection of Civilians and in response to the violence, UNMISS rapidly deployed peacekeepers to the affected areas, intensified patrols and established a Temporary Operating Base in Tambura to deter further violence and de-escalate the conflict. As of 5 October 2021, 21 rotations were carried out to provide security and enhance protection of civilians in Tambura and Short Duration Patrols to places most affected in Nagero, Ezo, and Tambura Counties. UNMISS facilitated the movement of humanitarian teams into Tambura and its environs, to conduct humanitarian assessments in the various IDP sites and to support the delivery of emergency humanitarian relief items to the affected civilian populations.

**Support local peace initiatives:** UNMISS Civil Affairs Division in partnership with NGOs and local interfaith institutions facilitated various grassroots community peace consultations aimed at appeasing tensions between communities and deescalating the conflict.

**Mandate related activities:** In line with its mandate, to ensure the protection of civilians, UNMISS investigated and documented human rights violations, including grave violations of children's rights, CRSV, and breaches of humanitarian law, supported initiatives to foster peace, reconciliation, and deter violence. In this context, UNMISS Human Rights Division activated its rapid response and surge capacity to conduct in-depth investigations for over three months. Further, UNMISS Communication and Public Information Office developed a targeted communication strategy that enable UNMISS to reach communities affected by conflict and isolated from access to reliable sources of information and news, to amplify messages of peace and reconciliation, counter hate speech and dispel rumors that fueled the violence.

