KEY FACTS
Source: UN, USAID, Worldometer

2011
South Sudan becomes world’s newest nation

12.8 million
estimated population

7 million
in need of humanitarian assistance and protection

1.9 million
internally displaced

5.1 million
in need of food assistance

70% of women
in Juba IDP camps have been subjected to sexual assault

KEY ISSUES

- The civil war in South Sudan, which first broke out in December 2013, is still raging. Mass atrocities, mass displacement, corruption, widespread food insecurity, and inflation all plague the young nation.

- The 2015 Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (ARCISS) has never been implemented, effectively rendering it a failed attempt to resolve the conflict.

- New peace talks aimed at revitalizing the 2015 agreement began in December 2017, but a cessation of hostilities agreement has already been violated, dashing hopes of success.

- Violence, displacement, and inflation have limited farming, food production, and purchasing power resulting in severe food insecurity.

- Sexual violence has been widespread. A UN human rights expert stated that a “mindboggling” amount of rape has occurred.
After decades of civil war with northern Sudan, South Sudan became the world’s newest nation on July 9, 2011. Since then, the fledgling country struggled with corruption, poor governance, tensions with Sudan, intrastate conflict, and fractures within the ruling Sudan People’s Liberation Movement (SPLM).

Two short years after independence, the country was plunged into a brutal civil war in December 2013. The initial cause of this conflict was political tension between the President of South Sudan, Salva Kiir, and his Vice President, Riek Machar. Political disagreements led Kiir to sack his entire cabinet, including Machar, in July 2013, creating a rift between key members of the ruling party. The conflict quickly took on an ethnic dimension, pitting ethnic Dinkas loyal to President Salva Kiir, who is Dinka, against ethnic Nuers loyal to former First Vice President Riek Machar, who is Nuer.

Targeted attacks against Nuer inside of the capital city of Juba led Nuer from outside the capital to join with Machar and create the SPLM In-Opposition (SPLM-IO), an armed group that waged war against the government. Mass atrocities (war crimes and crimes against humanity)—including disturbing acts of sexual violence, recruitment of child soldiers, and targeted attacks on civilian populations—ensued across the country, and continue today.

Since 2013, the conflict has grown from a clash between the SPLM and SPLM-IO to include various other armed and political factions that are vying for political and economic power. Some of these groups arose due to frustrations with the status quo; others emerged in response to threats (both perceived and actual) against their communities. The increasing number of factions will make any future attempts at peace negotiations much more difficult.

Multiple attempts by the international community to broker a peace deal have failed. The peace agreement brokered in 2015 was intended to resolve the conflict and create a government of national unity, but the agreement was never implemented. The High Level Revitalization Forum, led by the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), the body that brokered the 2015 peace agreement, began new peace talks with the warring factions in December 2017. However, days after signing a cessation of hostilities agreement the government and the opposition accused each other of violating the agreement, denting confidence in upcoming talks in February.

 Violence from all sides has caused the deaths of at least 50,000 people, with some estimates as high as 300,000. Millions have been forcibly displaced from their homes. Widespread food insecurity has impacted the majority of the country, with millions of people reliant on food aid to survive. The government has been accused of using food as a weapon of war as it blocks desperately needed humanitarian aid from getting to starving populations, and continues to purchase weapons instead of providing aid. There is zero accountability, and without serious pressure put on South Sudan’s leaders, this conflict will continue.

WHAT CAN BE DONE

Despite international focus on the displacement and food insecurity in South Sudan, the only way to resolve the humanitarian crisis is to end the conflict. South Sudan needs a durable peace, reconciliation, and an accountable government that provides for its people.

The United Nations, African Union, and United States must apply pressure on the key actors behind mass atrocities and opposed to peace. An arms embargo and international sanctions must be applied. The U.S. must incentivize support from regional nations (Uganda, Kenya, Ethiopia, and Sudan), who have the most influence in South Sudan, to end the conflict, and apply pressure on South Sudan’s warring factions to end the fighting.