

Yauyau forewarned of Jonglei attack and making advances claim rebels

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August 27, 2012 (BOR) – A member of David Yauyau's militia which took part in an attack on Jonglei on 22 August said on Monday that the group called upon civilians to evacuate the area prior to the attack.

John Rew told *Sudan Tribune*, "we called on our civilians to cooperate with us and peacefully leave their villages and towns." He also claimed "our forces are advancing toward Pibor. It is just a matter of hours and you will hear new developments."

Speaking to *Sudan Tribune* from Pibor, the commissioner of Pibor county, Joshua Konyi Irer said South Sudan army (SPLA) troops clashed with the militia on 22 August and that the number of casualties "is not yet confirmed."

Jonglei State Governor Kuol Manyang Juuk and SPLA spokesperson Philip Aguer said rebels have killed at least 24 soldiers, and that 17 are missing.

Rew claimed the rebels have "captured three trucks carrying supplies and two pickup vehicles full with ammunitions."

Pibor County Commissioner, Joshua Konyi, told *Sudan Tribune* on Monday that the rebels had been repulsed.

Manyang said he suspected the civilians were from the ethnic Murle ethnic group from Pibor. He also claimed that recently Yauyau has been on a recruitment drive in the area.

Yauyau took up arms against the authorities following the 2010 general elections in which he lost the seat of the commissioner to the incumbent commissioner, Joshua Konyi. In 2011 he then signed a peace deal but again took up arms against the government in April 2012.

Yauyau is a member of the Murle ethnic group. There has been scant information from the Murle Diaspora and the Murle in South Sudan on their perspective of the conflict in Jonglei state, unlike the vocal Luo-Nuer who claim that the Murle have been driven to abducting their children as they are suffering from an infertility endemic; a view shared by the country's president, Salva Kiir.

According to the UN Environmental Program the Murle were in Ethiopia until the 19th century. Some remained there until the 1990s while others were driven west by local Nilotes. They established a homeland in Pibor county, Jonglei state in the 1930s, since which, environmental pressures have impinged upon their pastoralist lifestyle.

Little evidence can be found to support the infertility claim. However, the motivation to rationalise the denigration of one of South Sudan's pariah ethnic groups, in order to legitimise the attribution of blame, is self-evident.

Governor Manyang dismissed suggestions that the rebels had attacked in revenge for alleged abuses in Pibor by SPLA troops, which has been carrying out disarmament in Jonglei following ethnic violence; as reported by the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS).

"It is not revenge, it is a rebellion," said Manyang.

Hilde F. Johnson, the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for South Sudan on Monday strongly condemned the attack, calling upon those involved to continue with the Jonglei peace process. She also acknowledged that UNMISS had provided support to the SPLA by evacuating its wounded after the conflict.

"The majority of the victims are women, and in some cases children," UNMISS said in a statement, calling for "immediate action to safeguard recent gains in the peace process".

Over 600 people were massacred in Pibor after an 8,000-strong militia force went on the rampage in late December, according to UNMISS, although local officials reported the figure to have been even higher.

Human Rights Watch on Thursday said it had reports of "soldiers shooting at civilians, and ill-treating them by beatings, tying them up with rope, and submerging their heads in water to extract information about the location of weapons".

Manyang said that stories of "atrocities" in Pibor were overblown.

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