

S. Sudan: Amnesty International accuses security forces of shooting and raping civilians

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October 3, 2012 (JUBA) - The campaign group, Amnesty International on Wednesday accused South Sudan army (SPLA) and Police forces of allegedly shooting and raping civilians, during the widespread disarmament exercise that was carried out in Jonglei state.

The alleged abuses, Amnesty said in a statement, took place during the Operation Restore Peace campaign, which was instigated by the government in March 2012 to recover guns and ammunitions among the population.

"Far from bringing security to the region, the SPLA and the police auxiliary forces have committed shocking human rights violations and the authorities are doing very little to stop the abuse," said Audrey Gaughran, Amnesty International's Africa Director.

"Authorities have accepted that individuals are guilty of these violations and claim that it is not illustrative of the behaviour of the SPLA as a whole, but this cannot be used to justify these violations or the failure to deal with them properly," she added.

The report, the campaign group said, was the outcome of findings from its team of researchers who reportedly visited and interviewed people in remote villages within Pibor County, located south-east of Jonglei.

Most of those interviewed, it notes, described "acts of torture and abuse committed against civilians, including children as young as 18 months old, in addition to having their property looted and crops destroyed."

Amnesty International, in its report, calls the South Sudanese authorities to carry out independent and impartial investigations into allegations of attacks against civilians by members of the armed forces and to monitor effectively the civilian disarmament process.

It also called upon the United Nations Mission in South Sudan to step up its efforts to protect civilians, including by deploying peacekeepers in areas where there is significant potential for violations by the SPLA.

Phillip Aguer, the official spokesperson of South Sudan army was unavailable for a comment on the Amnesty International report.

Last month, the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) released a similar report, pinning South Sudan's security forces of allegedly killing, raping and torturing civilian in Jonglei, a charge widely dismissed by army officials.

Lt. Kuol Deim Kuol, the SPLA officer responsible for the disarmament exercise in Jonglei dismissed the report as a "one sided" finding that "neglected the SPLA side of the story."

"These allegations labeled against the SPLA are not accurate. The allegations are not properly investigated", he told *Sudan Tribune* in an earlier interview.

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