

Murle Militia Attacks Unarmed Civilians in Akobo West on February 8th 2013

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Office of the Commissioner

Akobo County, Jonglei State

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Friday February 8th, 2013 has become another sad day for all Akobo, Lou Nuer and Jonglei State at large. Yesterday a normal yearly community migration to cattle camps at river Sobat was violently interrupted and attacked by a huge heavily armed mixed of ununiformed and uniformed group believed to be criminals from Murle tribe or Yau Yau group at the point of Mantor between Thakuach and Jier localities, more than 100 KM North West of Akobo Town and about 40 KM North East of Walgak Payam, unarmed Akobo civilians escorting their cattle were murdered in cold blood and abducting unspecified number of children and along with thousands of cattle. The survivors have narrated use of heavy weaponry including RPGs by the assailants and use of spears and machetes by some, thus overwhelming an SPLA force accompanying the people. The attack resulted in the death of 103 people today. The number has been buried at a remote location near Buong Payam. Amongst the dead were Fourteen (14) SPLA soldiers including an officer. The recovered wounded are 14 people, 6 civilians and 8 soldiers while more children and women are still missing according the county officers at the scene. The county is still searching for possible life towards Nyadiing River, so far no body has reported to Ulang in Upper Nile and that exacerbates fears on the fate of the hundreds of families missing.

Despite the Jonglei Peace that was signed in May 2012, Akobo community in particular suffered almost a dozen continued fatal attacks on its populations with the latest attacks on Wanding on Christmas night where three girls were abducted and latest attacks on Kuachar and Kier in January and February, where a child was abducted and wounding two women. It should be recalled that Akobo County population lost a majority of its cattle in Royierii attack and loosing hundreds of individuals on March 9th 2012 coinciding with disarmament of all Akobo youth. Akobo youth are integrated into the community and since that time there was no any single reported attack from Akobo youth to any other community. Akobo authorities and community have continuously rejected the self-proclaimed prophet "Dak Kueth who was chased away from Akobo subsequently loosing any support.

The SPLA soldiers on the ground are commended on their role in attempting to provide security to civilians and in several occasions returned cattle from criminals and with only few misses.

The challenges for our army are in logistics and mechanisms to track criminals, possibly attributed to lack of accessible roads. It is incomprehensive that we fail to send in any single air surveillance even during such massive attacks as Romyieri attacks of March 2012 and Jier of yesterday that claimed hundreds. How do we rate the importance of life? Be it from Sudan Government attacks in Upper Nile or a rebel group from Pibor.

There is no single road passable road through Lou land to aid the pursuit of criminals or even provide the needed food for the hungry populations. The costs for silence in Juba are enormous for inaction and consequences cannot be reemphasized.

I have called for flights to travel to Walgak (Akobo West) three weeks ago just to arrange the movement for more possible SPLA force, but the bureaucracy failed me from our only capable UNMISS partners in Juba, despite the importance emphasized by Bor office. I apologize if the issue was beyond control for unforeseen or known reasons. The importance of transparency in coordination and prioritization could have mitigated such incidents in the future and save lives.

I undoubtedly give thanks to our UN partners on the ground in Akobo for their steadfast cooperation and support in joining hands with the locals.

The County authority responded by provision of food to the police during the search and rescue and by also providing fuel to evacuate the wounded since yesterday. More needs to be done in terms of recovering and return of all the cattle and people abducted immediately without fail.

This is at least a commitment from County Authority and I would further call for State and Central Authorities to move with

urgency to save lives in any possible action that would yield results.

I call on Humanitarian intervention in Walgak immediately and work should start on accessing Walgak by Road by constructing Pathai bridge to avert catastrophe.

I ask our area MPs should talk on our behalf as they have the authority in liaison with county and speak with one responsible voice to our party and government. I call on our diaspora to hold hands together and to highlight these issues of civilian protection and human rights and to start documenting suspected foul plays and sources agitating for continual violence and induced silence from the media and impunity enjoyed by attackers, especially the Yau Yau rebels and their supporters in the halls of power. I call for unity in Juba to end this once and for all, which will translate into peace and harmony amongst the remaining civilian population of Jonglei.

Regards,

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