

PERCEPTIONS OF SECURITY

Among Internally Displaced
Persons in Juba, South Sudan

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STIMSON

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Introduction

This brief synthesizes voices of internally displaced persons seeking protection at United Nations peacekeeping operation bases in Juba, South Sudan. In early August 2014, the Stimson Center conducted seven focus groups with people living in two protection of civilians (POC) sites inside UN bases in Juba. The purpose of these focus groups was to understand better how people living in these sites perceived their security. A summary of the findings is presented in this report.

The analysis is a product of Engaging Community Voices in Protection Strategies, a three-year initiative of Stimson's Civilians in Conflict project. The initiative seeks to protect civilians under threat by ensuring that conflict-affected communities are safely and effectively engaged in external protection strategies. The Stimson Center is grateful to the focus group participants who volunteered their time to talk about extremely difficult subjects, as well as to the humanitarian agencies that facilitated the focus groups in the midst of this crisis.

After a political dispute broke out on December 15, 2013, in South Sudan between President Salva Kiir and his former Vice President, Riek Machar, the conflict took on an ethnic dimension and spread to include targeted violence against civilians on the basis of their tribal affiliation. Kiir's supporters largely belong to the Dinka tribe while Machar's supporters are mostly of the Nuer tribe. Parties on both sides of this conflict have committed abuses including killing, rape and the destruction of civilian property on a devastating scale, and both sides have targeted civilians in places of refuge such as churches and hospitals.¹

With no other way to protect themselves from this violence, people began to flee to UN peacekeeping operation bases. More than 96,800 people are currently living on these bases in POC sites, guarded by peacekeepers from the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS).²

In the capital city of Juba, approximately 8,700 people are sheltering inside a UN base called Tong Ping and around 23,800 are in POC sites inside or adjacent to the UN base called UN House.³ Because Juba is controlled by Kiir's government forces, the people living in the Juba POC sites are almost entirely members of the Nuer tribe who fear violence perpetrated by the government or by Dinka civilians. In areas of the country controlled by Machar's opposition forces, the reverse is true: inhabitants of those POC sites are mostly Dinka and fear violence perpetrated by Machar's forces or Nuer civilians.

The people who participated in this focus group study expressed a great deal of fear regarding their security. Several of them described horrific ordeals they had undergone to reach the POC sites, and many conveyed a deep fear of threats outside the sites – either the threat of external attacks on the sites, or threats they might face if they tried to leave the sites. The perceptions of these internally displaced persons (IDPs) suggest that it will likely be a long and difficult process to change security conditions in the country to the extent that they feel they can return home safely.



Why do perceptions matter?

Community perceptions of security are critically important for protection actors to understand. Communities living under threat often possess a wealth of information about how the violence is perpetrated that can help external protection actors understand how best to combat it. Moreover, as Alison Giffen states, “Perceptions influence judgment, decision-making and action. They inform an individual’s decision to flee from or submit to violence, to denounce a perpetrator despite risk of retaliation, or to take justice into their own hands. The perceptions of conflict-affected communities are among the most important factors that peacekeeping operations and other external protection actors should consider when planning and conducting interventions to protect civilians from deliberate violence.”²⁴

At the same time, the perceptions presented in this report should not be the only source to which protection actors refer as a way of understanding the security situation. Participants’ perceptions may be influenced by factors that include memory errors, trauma or misinformation. As with all research based on self-reported data, participants may provide inaccurate information. Nevertheless, the community perceptions gathered in these focus groups may provide protection actors working in the UN House and Tong Ping POC sites with a useful indication of how some of the IDPs living in these sites perceive their security, and could also be used to inform further research done with IDPs in POC sites, such as survey research.

Perceptions of security

Perceptions of threats within the POC sites

Participants identified the main threat within the POC sites as fighting between residents. These fights were described as rooted in alcohol abuse, congestion, and the trauma that people had experienced before arriving at the sites. One participant in UN House described the fights as sometimes spreading along family lines – for example, fighting starts between children, their mothers intervene and are dragged into the fight, and then men in the household are dragged in too. Another participant in Tong Ping said that humanitarian and UN procedures sometimes triggered conflict between IDPs. For example, a participant reported that IDPs are required to receive food distributions in groups of 10 and then subdivide the food within that group, which sometimes provokes conflict.

Participants in two focus groups, one in Tong Ping and one in UN House, said that violence between IDPs had occurred more frequently in the past but had lessened over time. The Tong Ping participant attributed this change to trauma that had become less raw as time passed, saying that there was now not much violence within the site. The UN House participant said that fighting in the first two or three weeks was due to the new tensions of living with people from different areas, and that those tensions had faded as people got to know each other.

Sexual violence within the sites was discussed very little. One participant at UN House mentioned rape being perpetrated by men who had abused alcohol, which in turn prompted fighting in retaliation, while another participant in a different focus group at UN House said that rape did not occur within the site.

METHODOLOGY

The focus groups were conducted with the assistance of humanitarian agencies at two POC sites referred to as UN House and Tong Ping. In UN House, participants included two focus groups of women, a focus group of young men, and a focus group of community leaders (all men). All focus group participants at UN House were living in the “POC 1” section of the site. In Tong Ping, participants included a focus group of humanitarian NGO staff (men and women) who were also IDPs living in the site, a focus group of women, and a focus group of community leaders (men and women).

All focus group participants were over the age of 18, and each group had approximately five to eight participants. All focus group participants belonged to the Nuer tribe. Participants mostly spoke in Nuer. One resident from each POC site was carefully identified to translate between Nuer and English for the benefit of the Stimson researchers.

Perceptions of threats originating outside the POC sites

Another major threat participants mentioned was the threat of SPLA (the South Sudanese armed forces) soldiers attacking the sites. Participants in all but one of the focus groups mentioned fear of such an attack, most of them citing the attack on the UN base in Bor as an example of the UN's inability to withstand an SPLA attack and IDPs being killed as a result.⁵

One participant in UN House said that peacekeepers had failed to protect people during the Bor attack because they had inadequate weapons from countries like India, Nepal and Bangladesh. In addition, participants in Tong Ping said that soldiers had attacked the base in the early days of the conflict and the UN had failed to respond.

One participant in Tong Ping claimed that Tong Ping was safer than UN House because of the presence of military barracks near POC 3 in UN House. For this reason, the participant opposed the relocation of IDPs from Tong Ping to POC 3, saying that this relocation was forced by UNMISS and not voluntary.

Perceptions of security outside the perimeter of POC sites

Participants in all focus groups described threats outside the perimeter of the POC sites, including killing, rape, abduction, theft, sexual harassment and beatings. For example, people mentioned the threat of being taken to a military barrack and raped, being raped or killed in or on the way to the market, being killed if they returned to the POC site after the gate had been closed, or being killed if they tried to reclaim their occupied homes.

“THERE’S LOTS OF THINGS THAT CAUSE FIGHTING. SOME PEOPLE ARE TRAUMATIZED. THEY LOST THEIR **LOVED ONES. THEIR MOTHERS. THEIR FATHERS.**”



The SPLA was overwhelmingly identified as the perpetrators of these threats. Two participants in one focus group in UN House expressed a belief that Ugandan troops also perpetrated threats outside the perimeter of the site. One participant in Tong Ping also said that other South Sudanese government agents, such as secret police, were involved in harassment outside the gates of the site. The same participant believed that some threats, such as the abduction of several women who were detained for two or three days, appeared to have been carried out in an organized rather than an opportunistic way.

Participants in all the focus groups described the threats as being directed against them on the basis of their tribe. Several said that they avoided speaking the Nuer language if they left the site, to avoid being identified and targeted. One participant said that men with traditional facial markings could be identified without speaking Nuer.

Participants in several focus groups also said that the threat to them was higher when violence between the Dinka and the Nuer had occurred in another part of the country. One participant in UN House said that if government forces had suffered a military loss in another part of the country, they retaliated against the IDPs by putting extra security forces on the road between the site and the market to arrest or kill men. A participant in UN House also said that when security clashes in other states occurred, UNMISS sometimes closed the site's gate during hours when it would normally remain open, even if there were IDPs outside trying to return.

Reasons for people to leave the POC sites

Many participants mentioned needing to leave the sites temporarily to buy food items such as meat or vegetables, either for their own consumption or to sell inside the sites to raise money. Two participants said they needed to go outside to access food for infants; one of these participants noted that humanitarians did not distribute enough food that was appropriate for babies. In addition to buying food items, participants said people leave the sites for the following reasons:

**“WE DON'T KNOW
IF HOSTILITIES WILL
RESUME—WHETHER
THEY WILL ATTACK
THE UN CAMP.”**



- To visit relatives in other areas of the site (POCs 1, 2 and 3 within UN House are not directly joined together, and people must exit each of these areas to visit the others)
- To go to school
- To withdraw money from banks
- To buy clothes
- To try to visit or reclaim their homes
- To use a grinding mill
- To access health services that are not provided at the site or that are insufficient
- To buy charcoal

Participants in two focus groups mentioned that youth often wandered out and could not be controlled, and one participant said that people went outside to drink alcohol because the UN did not permit them to bring alcohol into the site. One participant said that people within the POC sites were sometimes lured outside by false enticements, such as an announcement that salaries would be paid, and then killed or imprisoned.

Self-protection measures

Participants mentioned the following actions that they or others living in the POC sites have taken in order to protect themselves from the threats they faced.

Reporting

- Reporting incidents of violence to the camp leadership, UNMISS or NGOs (N.B.: participants in two focus groups raised concerns that women did not feel comfortable reporting sexual harassment or assault because of cultural barriers).
- Setting up and participating in community structures, such as the camp leadership, the community watch group and the youth association, to facilitate reporting to UNMISS and NGOs.

Avoidance

- Not leaving the POC site after reports of violence in other parts of the country, to avoid retaliatory attacks against Nuer people.
- Men with facial markings associated with the Nuer tribe not leaving the site.
- Women leaving the site instead of men in the belief that women are less likely to be killed.
- Minimizing the time spent outside the site.

Not using the Nuer language

- Avoiding talking, or speaking only in languages other than Nuer, outside the site.

Using connections or bribery

- Using connections within the government or bribery to secure release if detained by government forces.

In addition to these ongoing measures, participants in three focus groups at UN House also described measures taken to avoid threats in the initial days of the conflict before they were able to enter the POC

sites. Some described climbing over the fences of the UN bases to get into the site sooner. One participant said that some women had thrown their children over the fence to get them to safety more quickly, because of the large number of people waiting to get inside the base.

Possibility of returning home

When asked what would need to happen for them to feel safe to return to their homes, participants talked about different indicators of security. Many of them said they would not feel safe unless President Salva Kiir was no longer in power. Some participants mentioned the need for a peace agreement that led to a lasting peace. One participant suggested that if Nuer soldiers who had defected from the SPLA returned to Juba, that would serve as evidence of a secure environment. Another participant mentioned the ability to return to their homes without fear of being killed by the people who have now occupied those homes. One participant talked about the suspicions people in the sites felt about security outside and the need for a trusted source of information to tell them it was safe to leave, saying that the government had announced on television that there was peace but when people had tried leaving the sites, some had been killed. Finally, one participant talked about the need to reform the security forces so that they are more ethnically integrated.

Perceptions of UNMISS's mandate

Participants in all focus groups except one (in which the topic was not discussed) expressed a belief that UNMISS's mandate to protect was limited only to the perimeter of the sites. (In fact, UNMISS's mandate to protect civilians extends throughout the country.) Several participants said that UNMISS had explicitly stated that its mandate did not extend outside the sites. For example, one participant said that they had asked UNMISS to organize a truck to take women to the market and that UNMISS responded that its mandate was only inside the site. Another participant said that UNMISS had communicated this information to them in a workshop. One participant in Tong Ping described an incident in which a woman living in the site had been hit by a truck just outside the site and killed; when people in the site asked UNMISS personnel to collect the woman's body, they refused on the basis that it was outside the site.

One participant in Tong Ping, a member of the community leadership, said that after an attack in which shots were fired into the site, they asked UNMISS why it had failed to respond and mission personnel replied that they needed to wait for orders before responding. Another participant in the same focus group noted that since UNMISS had a Chapter VII mandate, it did not need to wait for orders before responding. A third participant in that group added that UNMISS personnel did not need to wait for orders in cases where they were acting in self-defense or in defense of the people they were protecting.

Trust in UNMISS as a protection actor

Some participants spoke positively about UNMISS's role as a protection actor within the POC sites or expressed gratitude toward the mission for sheltering them from violence. For example, one participant in Tong Ping said that people initially did not trust UNMISS to protect them because SPLA soldiers had been able to shoot into the site in January, but that people began to feel safer after UNMISS started doing patrols around the perimeter of the camp. However, as discussed in the section on "Perceptions of threats originating outside the POC sites," many participants remained afraid that UNMISS would not be able to protect them against a large-scale attack on the base, particularly after the attack on the UN base in Bor.

A few participants reported incidents in which attacks had happened near the site and UNMISS had failed to respond, and this particularly seemed to undermine trust in UNMISS. For example, partici-

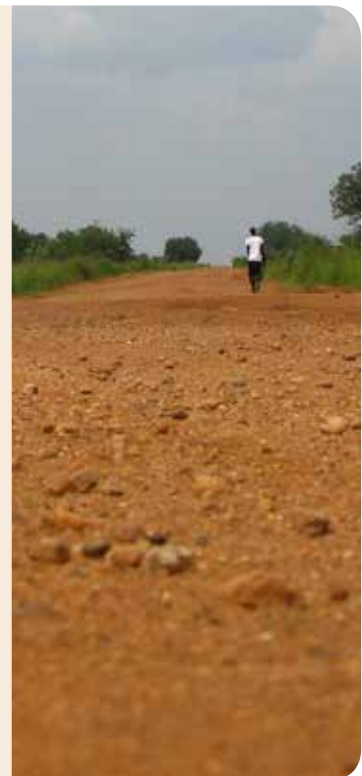
pants in two focus groups in UN House described an incident in May in which several people had gone outside the gate to drink alcohol and were killed by government forces in the presence of UN peacekeepers, who had not responded.

A few participants also questioned UNMISS's motivation to protect them. One participant in Tong Ping said that UNMISS's failure to respond to attacks on the site had initially made them question its impartiality. This participant said that it was the attack on Bor, in which UN peacekeepers were also harmed, that convinced them it was a weakness in UNMISS's mandate rather than support for the government's cause that had led UNMISS not to respond to the gunfire against Tong Ping. A participant in UN House speculated that UNMISS might have become frustrated with IDPs after some people committed infractions, such as stealing UNMISS's cement, and had become less committed to protecting them as a result.

UNMISS's relocation of some people from Tong Ping to UN House may also have created some mistrust toward UNMISS. One participant in the community leaders group in Tong Ping said that UNMISS had forced 11 or 12 families to relocate to UN House the week before the focus group took place, and this event had caused some people to question whether UNMISS had a hidden agenda or secretly supported the government.

With regard to UNMISS's role in maintaining safety within the sites, several participants in UN House favorably mentioned UNMISS's rules of conduct for people in the site and its detention cell. One participant said that these rules had helped to reduce rates of fighting in the community. In two focus groups, participants mentioned that two sets of rules govern the behavior of people in the site: UNMISS's rules and traditional cultural rules. One participant noted that these rules sometimes conflict – for example, if a man in the community engages in adultery, the chief might arrest him and report him to UNMISS for breaking a traditional law, but UNMISS might release him because he

“WHEN WE TRY TO GO FOR SHOPPING AND GRINDING **WE ARE RAPED & HARASSED** ON THE WAY. IT DOESN'T MATTER IF YOU ARE UNDERAGE.”



has not violated UNMISS rules.

A few participants expressed opinions about UNMISS contingents from particular countries. For example, a participant in Tong Ping said that some people trusted Rwandan peacekeepers more because they were witnessed spending the whole day patrolling on the main road. In contrast, a participant at UN House expressed skepticism toward peacekeepers from countries that they believed to be involved in some way in the current conflict, arguing that peacekeepers from certain countries in the region (including Rwanda) were not neutral and therefore could not be trusted to protect people in the site.

UNMISS engagement with communities

Some participants mentioned having had direct contact with UNMISS while others said that engagement happened through community structures such as the camp leadership. One participant, a woman, said that most women did not communicate directly with UNMISS, but that they could communicate with women in the community watch group, who could in turn pass their messages on to UNMISS. For example, the same participant said they could contact UNMISS via the community watch group to protect them during events such as food distributions, cultural days and registrations. One participant in the group of camp leaders in UN House said that they could go to UNMISS for help with problems that were too big for them to resolve on their own. A participant in UN House said that UNMISS personnel sometimes came to their houses to check if they were safe.

However, participants often described the mission as unresponsive to their requests. For example, one participant in Tong Ping described asking UNMISS to set up a detention cell to contain violent individuals and participants in UN House, asking UNMISS for trucks to escort women to the market on one occasion, and asking UNMISS to retrieve the body of a woman who was killed in a vehicular accident outside the gate of the site on another occasion; in all cases, participants said that UNMISS had responded that those activities fell outside the mission's mandate. A participant in UN House said

“IF THE REBELS TRY TO COME IN, WE WILL KNOW **WE ARE IN DANGER** EVEN THOUGH WE ARE IN UN PROTECTION.”



that UNMISS sometimes closed the gate to the POC site before everyone had returned to the site, and that personnel would refuse to open the gate to allow more people inside even in response to a direct request from the community. A participant in Tong Ping said that UNMISS patrols outside the site were limited to the main road, which was not where the majority of abuses occurred. When they asked UNMISS to extend its patrols to other areas, they were told that it could not do so.

One participant in Tong Ping said that initially when they reported abuses such as rapes or child abductions to UNMISS, the mission did not believe them. According to this participant, the situation changed only after UNMISS directly witnessed an assault on a man.

Requests for UNMISS

Participants made a range of requests to UNMISS during the focus group discussions, including:

Physical protection

- Provide buses or escorts for women traveling into town or to the market
- Increase the number of patrols or the hours of patrolling in the town and market
- Place troops along the road near the site
- Respond if SPLA soldiers fire upon the site
- Increase the number of UNMISS troops
- Improve the quality of UNMISS weapons
- Send troops from regions perceived as neutral such as Europe and the United States

Services

- Provide goods and services (e.g., food or banks) within the sites so people can avoid the risks involved in leaving the sites
- Provide or improve services to address the well-being of people living in the sites (e.g., education, employment, vocational training or registration of new arrivals)
- Provide a clear platform for IDPs to communicate their concerns to UNMISS, including concerns or opinions about the broader state of the country

Relocation

- Facilitate the relocation of IDPs to other countries such as Ethiopia, Kenya or Uganda
- Facilitate the relocation of IDPs to secure locations within South Sudan

Political intervention

- Declare which side it is on, the government's side or the opposition's
- Improve its relationship with the government while at the same time reporting to the international community on abuses perpetrated by the government
- Ensure that civil society groups who can represent the victims of violence are engaged in the peace process



Conclusion

Over the past nine months, UNMISS has worked hard to protect the people who have sought refuge at its bases, and its work may be far from over. The peacekeeping operation did not plan to shelter IDPs for such a long time or in such large numbers, but it must now prepare to protect them for months or years to come. As the food insecurity crisis in the country deepens, IDP numbers at the POC sites may swell even more. Meanwhile, an additional 1.3 million displaced persons⁶ outside the POC sites may also be in need of protection, and are much harder for peacekeepers and humanitarians to access.

With such daunting protection challenges ahead, the importance of engaging with the communities in need of protection becomes even greater. UNMISS's engagement with communities at the POC sites, as well as information from research with IDPs, can help to shed light on the security challenges that communities perceive and the potential ways that the peacekeeping operation can try to address them. By incorporating information about the communities' perceptions of their own security, UNMISS and other protection actors can try to shape their protection responses to more effectively address communities' needs and to be more effective at saving lives.

Endnotes

1. *South Sudan's New War: Abuses by Government and Opposition Forces* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2014), available at: <http://www.hrw.org/node/126087/section/3>.
2. OCHA South Sudan, "South Sudan Crisis Situation Report No. 54 (as of 18 September 2014)," 18 September 2014, available at: http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/South_Sudan_Crisis_Situation_Report_54_.pdf.
3. United Nations Mission in South Sudan, "Update: UNMISS 'Protection of Civilians' (POC) Sites," 27 August 2014, available at: <http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/14-08-Update%2038.pdf>.
4. Alison Giffen, *Community Perceptions as a Priority in Protection and Peacekeeping* (Washington, DC: Stimson Center, 2013), available at: <http://www.stimson.org/images/uploads/CIC-IssueBriefNo2.pdf>.
5. On April 17, 2014, a large group of youths attacked the UN base in Bor, armed with weapons including guns and rocket-propelled grenades, before finally being repelled by UN peacekeepers. At least 58 people seeking shelter at the base were killed and over 100 injured in the attack.
6. OCHA South Sudan, "South Sudan Crisis Situation Report No. 54 (as of 18 September 2014)," 18 September 2014, available at: http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/South_Sudan_Crisis_Situation_Report_54_.pdf.

About the Stimson Center

The Stimson Center is a nonprofit and nonpartisan think tank that finds pragmatic solutions to global security challenges. In 2014 Stimson celebrates 25 years of pragmatic research and policy analysis to:

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Civilians in Conflict, a project of Stimson's Future of Peace Operations Program, envisions a world in which the international community, nation-states and local communities effectively eliminate violence against civilians in conflict-affected societies. As a contribution to this ambitious vision, the project works to expand and improve international efforts to develop effective prevention and response mechanisms. The Civilians in Conflict project looks at a number of areas that continue to perplex policy-makers and practitioners including: engaging communities in protection strategies; using force to protect civilians; working with humanitarian actors; building civilian capacity; combining political, other civilian and military resources to protect effectively; and tailoring strategies to protect civilians to specific contexts. For more information on Civilians in Conflict, visit www.stimson.org/research-pages/civilians-in-conflict.

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PERCEPTIONS OF SECURITY

Among Internally Displaced
Persons in Juba, South Sudan

Aditi Gorur

In August 2014, a Stimson Center research team traveled to Juba, the capital city of South Sudan, to understand better the challenges that protection actors face as they seek to safeguard civilians affected by the extreme violence that has characterized the civil war there. Over 1.4 million people have been displaced by the violence and over 96,800 are taking shelter from the conflict inside UN bases in Juba and across South Sudan.

As part of their research, the Stimson team conducted seven focus groups of internally displaced people inside UN bases in Juba to record their perceptions of security. Perceptions of security are critically important for protection actors to understand. Communities living under threat often possess a wealth of information about how the violence is perpetrated that can help external protection actors understand how best to combat it. Moreover, perceptions influence what steps people will take to protect themselves from violence and whether they will cooperate with protection actors.

This publication provides an overview of the findings resulting from the seven focus groups. Protection actors could benefit from conducting similar research of conflict-affected communities across South Sudan to inform strategies to protect civilians from physical violence in a crisis that will likely continue for months, if not years, to come.

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