



A woman waits for food in Mingkaman, Lakes state, April 2014. Pablo Tosco/Oxfam.

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# FROM CRISIS TO CATASTROPHE

South Sudan's man-made crisis – and how the world must act now to prevent catastrophe in 2015

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**More than two million people are facing severe food insecurity in South Sudan. Famine has been narrowly avoided in 2014. As the dry season begins, the brutal conflict that provoked this disaster is about to get worse. Without an end to the fighting – and unless more aid can be delivered to those who need it – famine remains a serious threat in 2015. By committing to more vigorous diplomacy and swift action, the world has the chance to prevent that.**

# SUMMARY: DRIVEN TO HUNGER

South Sudan is facing the world's worst food crisis, driven by the conflict that erupted in December 2013. Unless there is an end to the fighting, this food crisis will continue. Without far stronger international pressure, the conflict is unlikely to be resolved. International diplomacy – as well as aid and the protection of civilians on the ground – is urgently needed.

The scale of current suffering in South Sudan is vast; the malnutrition situation has been officially branded as 'dire'.<sup>2</sup> 1.7 million people<sup>3</sup> – one in every seven – have already fled their homes, including over 450,000<sup>4</sup> who have sought safety in other countries. In some areas, one in three children is malnourished – a level usually seen only during famine.<sup>5</sup> In others, it is almost one in two, and half of those dying among displaced people are children under five.<sup>6</sup> By the end of September, experts reported that the food situation 'is much worse compared to a typical year at harvest time'.<sup>7</sup> In 2015, agencies predict that the situation will worsen significantly. The most recent forecast suggests that the number of severely hungry people will rise by 1 million between January and March 2015, and that by March, around half of the population in the most conflict-affected states of Unity, Upper Nile and Jonglei may be struggling to find enough food, or at risk of starvation.<sup>8</sup>

The disaster in South Sudan is the result of a political dispute between two leaders that has escalated into a conflict engulfing much of the world's newest nation. This conflict is rooted in the unresolved tensions of two decades of civil war in what was Sudan. It is exacerbated by the proliferation of arms and the lack of development in one of the poorest countries in the world. Men, women and children have been targeted because of their ethnicity and forced to flee, often several times. They have lost loved ones, their few belongings, and their livelihoods. South Sudan's high hopes after independence in 2011 are in tatters.

## 2014

However, 2014 could have been even worse. Many South Sudanese people have once again demonstrated their ability to survive in the most terrible circumstances. The international response – although it has been insufficient – has saved thousands of lives. The aid that has reached people has reversed trends towards famine in some areas.<sup>10</sup> The UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) has, for the first time, opened its compounds to over 100,000 civilians. By doing so it has saved hundreds of lives. The regional body, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), has led negotiations for peace, attempting to ensure an inclusive process. On three occasions it has convinced the warring parties to agree to end hostilities, but the violence on the ground continues.<sup>11</sup> Some donor governments have also been generous, with over 60 per cent of aid currently being funded by the US, the UK and the EU alone.<sup>12</sup>

*'Before the conflict ... life was good. We cultivated crops and kept cattle, and we had enough to eat... Today I have no cows and no land. I rely on humanitarian organizations. We will only go home when there is peace.'*

*Gabriel, displaced man from Bor, 39, Awerial, Lakes state<sup>1</sup>*

*'Nothing can take me back home, unless peace comes.'*

*Martha, displaced woman, UN camp, Juba<sup>9</sup>*

Despite this, vast suffering continues as the war disrupts trade routes and markets, particularly in Upper Nile, Unity and Jonglei states. Violence has left farmers unable to sow or harvest their crops, fishermen barred from rivers, and herders left destitute as their cattle have been stolen, slaughtered, or sold off at less than their usual value. The sheer number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) fleeing violence has placed previously poor but self-sufficient communities under strain as they share what little they have.

*'If there is no peace, then we will all die of hunger.'*

*Simon, displaced man, Ganyiel, Unity state<sup>13</sup>*

The violence has often been extreme. Some women have reportedly been 'raped to death'.<sup>14</sup> Both parties to the conflict have committed massacres targeting specific ethnic groups, as in Juba in December 2013 and Bentiu in April 2014.<sup>15</sup> UNICEF estimates that over 9,000 child soldiers have been recruited into armed forces and groups since the fighting broke out.<sup>16</sup> Many people, especially women, face danger when searching for food.

As 36 agencies working in South Sudan, we understand that the conflict and the food crisis are inextricably linked. For this reason, the solution needs to go beyond the provision of more aid (although this is urgently needed), but must ensure an end to violence and a sustainable peace as well. That is the urgent message of this paper – before the crisis gets worse in the coming months.

## 2015

The prospects for 2015 look grim. Both sides are fighting for military gains to influence political negotiations, and are willing to continue fighting for a long time to achieve these. Strategic towns in Unity, Upper Nile and Jonglei states have been taken and retaken, showing the tenacity of government and opposition forces alike. Reports are emerging that both sides have taken advantage of the rainy season – which lasts on average from April to October and closes nearly two-thirds of the country's roads and tracks to vehicles – to regroup and plan for renewed fighting. With the onset of the dry season from October onwards, fighting is likely to resume before next year's rainy season begins in April.

*'Sometimes I feel so weak I worry I will not have enough milk for the baby. Sometimes I'm so weak I feel like I'm going to collapse.'*

*Elisabeth, displaced woman, Awerial, Lakes state<sup>17</sup>*

Many communities have only survived 2014 by using up their resources – selling their assets, or relying on wild fruits and plants, and, as a last resort, killing their livestock. This will make 2015 much more difficult. Even if there is progress in the political negotiations between the conflict parties, this situation – alongside the disruption of markets and trade routes and the sheer number of displaced people in South Sudan – mean that people will struggle to rebuild their lives. Although today many people are scraping by, selling belongings and sharing what little they have, their resources are steadily running out. This leaves them less able to cope during the so-called 'lean season' (a period of routine scarcity between harvests, usually from May to August).

International aid has had a significant and measurable positive impact on people's lives.<sup>18</sup> Food distributions have often made the difference in people being able to eat even one meal a day, while clean water has prevented more serious outbreaks of disease. However, around \$400m

is still needed to support the current food security needs in South Sudan. Almost one-third of South Sudanese are in need of direct food aid, while almost two-thirds are in need of livelihoods support.<sup>19</sup> The UN World Food Programme estimates that \$78m is needed to deliver assistance each month of the rainy season.<sup>20</sup>

Immediate and sustained action is needed – to scale up aid commitments, and to pursue diplomatic solutions to the conflict. Most aid is being delivered to places which can be reached relatively easily, not necessarily to the places where the most vulnerable people are located. Displaced and vulnerable populations need to be able to receive aid in the places where they are sheltering, including in remote rural areas far from formal camps. Humanitarian agencies must continue to improve the quantity and quality of their aid, reaching these hard-to-access areas as well as doing more in UNMISS bases. The efficiency of aid could be improved through agencies coordinating more effectively with each other, and withdrawing from places with adequate coverage. Consistency in standards and joint commitments to working more closely together would also mean that aid agencies could reach more people with the same amount of resources.

UNMISS should also do more to implement its mandate to protect civilians, including beyond its bases. To do this, UNMISS could undertake long-range patrols, patrol on foot, and make better use of its civilian resources to identify threats to communities. While UNMISS can never be everywhere, it must prioritize actions that will protect people from violence and help them reach food in safety. More active patrolling to help women reach markets without being attacked or harassed is one such priority.

Altogether, the scale of South Sudan's crisis requires exceptional and expensive measures including airdrops and heavy logistics in the rainy season in particular, as well as far more support to help people build up their assets and support their markets to recover. All donor governments – not just a few – must rise to that challenge. Countries such as Belgium and Austria, which until now have given little, must stop leaving it to a handful of others to be generous. Several donors, such as Qatar, Turkey and Egypt, have made aid pledges for the first time. These countries should now honour their commitments.<sup>21</sup> All donors must support the neighbouring countries that are hosting South Sudan's refugees, while those countries should keep their borders open to accept refugees.

This crisis will not be ended with more aid alone. The world must protect South Sudan's people from violence, as well as from the threat of famine. Unless the violence ends, the threat of famine will never be far away. The international community should take a far stronger stance towards the leaders of South Sudan. The African Union (AU) should be more involved. The UN Security Council should impose an embargo on the arms and ammunition that are sustaining the conflict, and ensure that it is rigorously enforced. And every political negotiation should focus on the most important priorities: overcoming the obstacles that South Sudan's people face in reaching aid; ending the violence immediately; and searching for a sustainable political solution.

The following recommendations are set out to address all of these issues:

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### **To end the violence and support sustainable peace:**

**Parties to the conflict and all armed groups** should immediately:

- End violence and respect all agreements signed to date, including the Cessation of Hostilities and humanitarian agreements.
- Ensure that all their forces, at every level of command, stop attacks against civilians, their homes and livelihoods, and end the forced recruitment of children.
- Ensure that all forces guarantee protection of and respect for humanitarian staff, and the safe and unhindered access for humanitarian aid – including through guaranteeing safe passage in towns and rural areas and by removing all existing bureaucratic barriers.

The **Government of South Sudan** should also:

- Review the NGO Bill and guarantee the space for national civil society to hold the government to account, while ensuring that humanitarian aid is delivered on the basis of need.

**The UN Security Council** should:

- Agree a comprehensive arms and ammunition embargo on all parties in South Sudan, and establish a monitoring body and panel of experts to monitor and report on its effective implementation. The embargo should last until effective mechanisms can ensure that arms sent to South Sudan will not be used to commit or facilitate serious violations of international human rights and humanitarian law, including the recruitment of children into armed groups.
- Give UNMISS full political support, and ensure that it is adequately and appropriately resourced. This includes ensuring that the full 12,500 mandated troops are deployed, as well as police and civilian staff, to enable robust protection of civilians in and beyond UNMISS bases.

**UNMISS** should do all that it can to protect civilians more robustly by:

- Protecting displaced people in its bases, through a strong and consistent presence of civilian protection and human rights teams, as well as UN police across all UNMISS sites.
- Maintaining a presence and active patrolling in areas at high risk of conflict or with high concentrations of IDPs, and along access roads, to help ensure freedom of movement. This, in turn, will help increase access to livelihoods and markets for people living within and outside of UNMISS sites.

- Carrying out long-range patrols beyond towns, and boat patrols along rivers.
- Making sure contingency plans are in place to allow for a swift and appropriate response as more people are expected to arrive at its bases in the coming months.

**The international community, including governments of the region and the AU, should:**

- Apply coordinated, strong political pressure to parties to the conflict that fail to implement political, humanitarian and security agreements, particularly the Cessation of Hostilities.
- Fully resource the IGAD MVTs and ensure that they are able to move around freely without being attacked. MVT investigations should cover violations of international humanitarian law as well as violations of the Cessation of Hostilities. Reports should be published and used by IGAD to hold parties to the conflict accountable. When conducting investigations, teams should work closely with civil society organizations, should include people from all ethnic communities, and should ensure the safety of those who are consulted.

## **To avert famine and ensure that the most vulnerable people can reach aid:**

**UNMISS and humanitarian agencies should:**

- Ensure that there is a clear distinction between them; that humanitarian agencies take a strong lead in negotiating access; that guidelines on civilian/military coordination are adhered to; and that UNMISS refrains from making statements on humanitarian issues.

**The Government of South Sudan should:**

- Significantly increase the budgets of key ministries responsible for food security, health and nutrition, as well as water and sanitation, and prioritize long-term investment in the agriculture sector.

**The Governments of Ethiopia and Sudan should:**

- Facilitate the delivery of aid by humanitarian organizations across their borders into South Sudan, in order to ensure a continuous supply line to respond to growing needs and to improve the safety of humanitarian aid workers.

**International donors should:**

- Swiftly and fully fund the humanitarian appeals for South Sudan and the regional refugee response. Donors that pledged funds at the Oslo conference in May should immediately complete their disbursements. Donors should also maintain funding to long-term programmes wherever possible, including in the states not directly affected by the conflict. They should include planning to support livelihoods while the crisis continues (as well as part of the recovery once the crisis is over), alongside critical life-saving food assistance.

- Immediately fund initiatives that strengthen people’s capacity to deal with future shocks and the next hunger season. Food assistance, livelihood recovery and then recovery should be cash- and market-based wherever feasible to support economic recovery and support traders and people's capacity to address future shocks. Activities to support livelihoods should go beyond emergency livelihood kits, to include re-stocking and supporting basic services for animal health, and financing seed systems.

# NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Oxfam interview, Awerial, Lakes State, July 2014.
- <sup>2</sup> IPC (September 2014) 'Communication Summary', <http://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/ipc-south-sudan-communication-summary-september-2014>
- <sup>3</sup> OCHA (2014) 'South Sudan Crisis Situation Report No. 53' (as of 11 September 2014), <http://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/south-sudan-crisis-situation-report-no-53-11-september-2014>
- <sup>4</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>5</sup> IPC (July 2014) 'Technical Release: Republic of South Sudan', [http://www.fews.net/sites/default/files/documents/reports/IPC Update - July 2014\\_Final.pdf](http://www.fews.net/sites/default/files/documents/reports/IPC%20Update%20-%20July%202014%20Final.pdf)
- <sup>6</sup> Food Security and Nutrition Working Group (FSNWG) (2014) 'FSNWG Situation Outlook August 2014', [http://www.disasterriskreduction.net/fileadmin/user\\_upload/drought/docs/FSNWG August Presentation.pdf](http://www.disasterriskreduction.net/fileadmin/user_upload/drought/docs/FSNWG%20August%20Presentation.pdf)
- <sup>7</sup> IPC (September 2014) 'Communication Summary', op. cit.
- <sup>8</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>9</sup> Oxfam interview, UN House, Juba, July 2014.
- <sup>10</sup> IPC (July 2014) 'Technical Release: Republic of South Sudan', op. cit.; IPC (September 2014) 'Communication Summary', op. cit.
- <sup>11</sup> Both sides signed Cessation of Hostilities Agreements on 23 January, 9 May and 10 June 2014. Despite the announcement of yet another agreement being signed on 26 August, it was still not confirmed as of 18 September that both sides had committed.
- <sup>12</sup> Financial Tracking Service (FTS) (2014) 'South Sudan emergencies for 2014: Total Humanitarian Funding per Donor in 2014' (as of 18 of September 2014), [http://fts.unocha.org/reports/daily/ocha\\_R24c\\_C898\\_Y2014\\_asof\\_1409180416.pdf](http://fts.unocha.org/reports/daily/ocha_R24c_C898_Y2014_asof_1409180416.pdf); Financial Tracking Service (FTS) (2014) 'South Sudan Refugee Crisis 2014: Total Humanitarian Funding per Donor in 2014' (as of 18 of September 2014), [http://fts.unocha.org/reports/daily/ocha\\_R24\\_E16507\\_1409180416.pdf](http://fts.unocha.org/reports/daily/ocha_R24_E16507_1409180416.pdf)
- <sup>13</sup> Mercy Corps interview, Ganyiel, Unity, August 2014.
- <sup>14</sup> Cited in South Sudan Protection Cluster (2014) 'Protection Trends Analysis (May)', <http://southsudanprotectioncluster.org/2014/05/20/south-sudan-protection-cluster-protection-trends-analysis-may-2014>
- <sup>15</sup> UNMISS (2014) 'Conflict in South Sudan: A Human Rights Report', 8 May, <http://www.unmiss.unmissions.org/Portals/unmiss/Human%20Rights%20Reports/UNMISS%20Conflict%20in%20South%20Sudan%20-%20A%20Human%20Rights%20Report.pdf> and Reuters (2014) 'Hundreds of civilians killed in South Sudan ethnic massacre: UN', 21 April, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/04/21/us-southsudan-un-idUSBREA3K0UL20140421>
- <sup>16</sup> UNICEF (2014) 'With conflict raging in South Sudan, recruitment of children into armed groups is on the rise', 5 May, [http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/southsudan\\_73403.html](http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/southsudan_73403.html)
- <sup>17</sup> Oxfam interview, Mingkaman (Awerial), Lakes State, May 2014.
- <sup>18</sup> IPC (August 2014) 'Technical Release: Republic of South Sudan', <http://www.fews.net/east-africa/south-sudan/food-security-outlook-update/august-2014>
- <sup>19</sup> Unmet requirements of Food Security and Livelihoods Cluster. Financial Tracking Service, Table D: Requirements, Commitments/Contributions and Pledges per Cluster (as of 03-10-14). [http://fts.unocha.org/reports/daily/ocha\\_R32sum\\_A1024\\_\\_3\\_October\\_2014\\_\(10\\_22\).pdf](http://fts.unocha.org/reports/daily/ocha_R32sum_A1024__3_October_2014_(10_22).pdf)
- <sup>20</sup> WFP Scaling up air delivery of food aid, 22 July 2014.
- <sup>21</sup> Financial Tracking Service (FTS) (2014) 'South Sudan emergencies for 2014: Total Humanitarian Funding per Donor in 2014' (as of 03 of October 2014), [http://fts.unocha.org/reports/daily/ocha\\_R24\\_E16419\\_\\_1410031022.pdf](http://fts.unocha.org/reports/daily/ocha_R24_E16419__1410031022.pdf)

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