



Since South Sudan gained its independence in July 2011, the country has seen [cycles](#) of inter-communal violence and revenge attacks linked to competition for authority at both national as well as state levels.

The country, which gained its independence after seceding from Sudan two years ago, has been embroiled in conflict that has increasingly been marked by ethnically targeted violence. More than a thousand people have died and at least 122,000 displaced since the fighting began two week ago, with some 63,000 having taken refuge in UN bases in the country.

On 15 December, fighting broke out in Juba, South Sudan's state capital, between factions of the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) allied to President Salva Kiir and those loyal to former Vice-President Riek Machar. The fighting has reportedly spread to Jonglei, Lakes, Unity, Upper Nile and Warrap states. Hundreds of people have been killed, some targeted on the basis of ethnicity. An estimated 62,000 others have been displaced by the violence, of whom 45,000 have sought shelter in United Nations compounds in Juba, Bor and Bentiu.

The United Nations peacekeeping mission in South Sudan, [UNMISS](#), yesterday voiced concern about reports of large numbers of armed youths now moving towards the Jonglei state capital of Bor and called on all those with influence to convince them to immediately halt their advance and avoid a further escalation of the current crisis.

“South Sudan does not need another escalation of the crisis involving armed youth, pitching communities against communities. This can end in a vicious cycle of violence,” said the Secretary-General's Special Representative and [head of UNMISS](#), Hilde F. Johnson. The envoy has been in contact with a number of political and community leaders, calling for their engagement.

“UNMISS calls on all parties who can exercise influence over the armed youths to convince them to immediately halt their advance,” the Mission stated. “To avoid further bloodshed, these youths should return to their towns, villages and cattle camps to avert a further escalation of the crisis in South Sudan.”

The Special Advisers to the Secretary-General on the [Prevention of Genocide, Adama Dieng](#), and on the [Responsibility to Protect, Jennifer Welsh](#)

, have expressed deep concern at the spread of violence in South Sudan and at the targeting of civilians and have urged all parties to exercise restraint and comply with international humanitarian and human rights law. In particular, they called on those with command responsibility to send clear messages to prevent attacks against individuals or groups based on ethnicity or tribal affiliation.

“Attacks of this kind,” Dieng and Welsh warned, “can be the precursors to more widespread crimes.” In addition, the Special Advisers urge President Salva Kiir and former Vice-President Riek Machar to engage in peace talks, call an immediate end to the violence and promote reconciliation between communities.