

# South Sudan

## And the making of a new nation

*South Sudan is crumbling back to its dark past where war and famine ruled. Political squabbling between the two main leaders has triggered another conflict that has divided the nation along ethnic lines.*

*OLGA YOLDI writes.*

**S**outh Sudan, the world's youngest country, celebrated its third birthday last July, as it faced famine and imminent catastrophe. The hope and optimism that had marked its independence from Sudan in 2011 has been lost and the dream of a better life has evaporated.

The fighting was triggered last December when president Salva Kiir and the vice-president Riek Machar of the ruling party, the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM), fell out. What started as a political dispute, where Kiir accused Machar of an attempted coup, soon turned into a bloody civil war between the Dinka-speaking tribes and the Nuer tribes.

Since then battles between government troops, mutinous soldiers and ragtag militia forces have been raging in the capital and have spread to seven of South Sudan's 10 regions.

This was not something that was anticipated, following decades of war between the SPLM and the government of Sudan that left two million dead and 4.4 million internally displaced and destroyed South Sudan's economy and social fabric.

The Sudanese government's divide-and-rule approach throughout decades of war meant that South Sudan's major ethnic groups spent decades fighting one another.

These tensions were not resolved with independence and have now emerged with full force.

It is now estimated that at least 10,000 people have been killed and 710,600 have fled their homes in search of safety, including 171,000 children.

The UN has authorised a significant increase in peace keeping troops and it is hosting peace negotiations in the Ethiopian capital of Addis Ababa. But so far these initiatives have failed to stop the violence. "In a land where unchecked weaponry is ubiquitous, youth unemployment overwhelming, military discipline fractured, this crisis has the potential to tear the fledgling nation apart," writes Rebecca Hamilton from the Pulitzer Centre on Crisis Reporting.

Hamilton attributes the crisis to leadership problems, "the SPLM chaired by Kiir has had to grapple with a curse common to successful liberation causes, dictatorial leadership strategies that helped the SPLM appear united in its fight for independence are ill-suited to democratic governance," she writes. "The result is that South Sudan is a multi-party state in name only, with all meaningful positions of power held by members of the SPLM."

Expectations that life would improve after independence have not been realised. The government

A handout picture released by the United Nations-African Union Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) on June 11, 2014 shows a child walking with her mother to their shelter in a new settlement in Zam Zam camp for Internally Displaced People (IDP), North Darfur. Thousands of people, mostly women, children and the elderly, have sought refuge in the Zam Zam IDP camp, following an armed militia attack on their villages more than three months ago. AFP PHOTO/UNAMID/ALBERT GONZALEZ FARRAN

has failed to provide nation building, basic services, infrastructure, education, economic development and jobs. So the South Sudanese people are now economically worse off than they were before 2011 and feel let down by their politicians.

But internationally this is a largely forgotten crisis, overshadowed by wars in other parts of the world, such as Syria, Gaza, Iraq and Ukraine, and aid agencies have said they find it difficult to raise the funds that are desperately needed for South Sudan despite the deepening crisis and imminent famine.

**T**he region has been deeply troubled since 1956 when Sudan gained its independence from Britain. It became Africa's largest nation and perhaps one of the most ethnically diverse and complex. The south is tropical, resource rich and populated by black Africans, mostly of Christian and animist faith, while the north is primarily Muslim of mixed African and Arab blood. Aware of these complexities the British administered the two areas separately, but when they left they lumped them both together.

The new regime in Khartoum, its capital, discriminated against the south and decades of civil war followed. Sudan was locked in a conflict over ethnic and religious identity, and the south's resources: water, land and oil. This was a war waged by men wandering across the wastes of Africa, armed with spears and Kalashnikovs fighting for survival and a fundamentalist government who insisted on extending their power over a rebellious south. The conflict looked like it would never end and turned South Sudan into a disaster area.

In 1989, General Omar Hassan Ahmad al-Bashir seized power in a military coup and carried out a vicious fight against the south. Following independence from Sudan, he has continued to claim the south's resources and meddle in the independent state.

South Sudan is now a wasteland and the newly-elected government faces many challenges. Nation building will take years since it has one of the world's weakest and most underdeveloped economies, with little or no infrastructure (only 35 miles of paved roads).

The country is the size of France, with an estimated population of 8.3 million and more than half of the population living under the poverty line. It has an infant mortality rate of 10 percent and the world's highest incidence of maternal death. According to reports, most citizens live on less than \$1 a day and seven out of 10 are illiterate. The economy is heavily dependent on agriculture and oil is the main source of government revenue.

It has however great economic potential due to its natural resources. It contains deposits of iron ore, copper, chromium ore, zinc, tungsten, mica, silver and gold as well as hydropower. It also has much fertile land and the largest population of pastoralists in the world, according to the World Bank.

Oil production however is expected to reduce steadily in future years and to become negligible by 2035. Since 1999, agricultural production has declined. According to the FAO, only 4.5 percent of the available land is under cultivation. South Sudan relies on food imports from neighbouring countries, which raises the cost and contributes to food shortages.

Prior to independence, South Sudan produced 85 percent of Sudanese oil output. But after independence, the oil revenues, according to the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, were to be divided equally between Sudan and South Sudan for the duration of the Agreement period.

Since South Sudan depends on the infrastructure of Sudan (pipelines and refineries and port facilities) the Agreement stated that the government in Khartoum would receive a 50 percent share of the oil revenues. According to the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning, the South Sudanese government has received more than \$8 billion since the signing of the Agreement.

The potential for economic development has been deeply thwarted by corruption. Last July, Kiir sent a letter to government officials in which he calculated that \$4 billion in public funds had been misappropriated. "We fought for freedom, justice and equality," he wrote. "Yet once we got power we forgot what we fought for and began to enrich ourselves at the expense of our people."

The pipelines that carry oil north to the Red Sea for export all run through Sudan, the Sudanese government in Khartoum demanded an exorbitant transfer fee of \$36 for each barrel the south wished to pump through its territory, South Sudan offered a dollar –close to the standard international rate –and al-Bashir retaliated by seizing nearly \$1 billion worth of oil.

When South Sudan announced it was cutting off the supply, Khartoum sent war planes to bomb oil fields across the border. For some time South Sudan kept the oil supply shut off, depriving both countries of most of their revenue. Al-Bashir who had been paying subsidies to the Sudanese population, had to stop the subsidies and in June street protests arose in the capital Khartoum.

South Sudan had to implement austerity measures so all development was put on hold and poverty grew. The World Bank warned the shutdown would cause a collapse in the economy; in the end it did survive but

the government had to use some of its reserves and seek loans to cover costs.

According to press reports, China, the largest investor in South Sudan, has offered an external line of credit for several years while an alternative pipeline to the Kenyan coast is laid and an export deal is worked out with the Kenyan government.

Since independence, al-Bashir has been fighting the South Sudanese border states of Blue Nile and South Kordofan, which have been subjected to ground assaults and bombardments by Sudanese government airplanes. The Sudan People's Liberation Army or (SPLA–North) is fighting the battles with little support from the South Sudanese government.

The economic co-dependency of north and south Sudan continues to be fraught with as many problems as before independence, as Carol Berger, a Canadian anthropologist who has worked in Sudan told the New Yorker, "These two nations are locked in a deadly embrace. They had their divorce but they have to continue sharing a bed."

There is no doubt that al-Bashir wants an unstable south. According to the Small Arms Survey research report, he has been selling guns to the South Sudanese government and Sudanese intelligence has air-dropped arms to non-state armed groups, Machar's rebels. "By arming both sides, Sudan continues their policy of destabilisation of the South," says Jonah Leff, director of operations at Conflict Armament Research, an organisation that tracks weapons in conflict zones, according to VICE News.

Not only Sudan, but China has also been selling guns to the South Sudanese government, which according to VICE News spent more than \$1 billion in arms and weapons systems. "A striking figure, given that decades of war had already left South Sudan flooded with weapons."

The Small Arms Survey project has called for a UN Security Council arms embargo which would restrict all countries from transferring arms to South Sudan.

The UN Security Council has warned warring leaders that they will face sanctions and other consequences if the violence does not come to an end. "We will not tolerate violation of the cessation of hostilities and people who spoil the peace agreement," UN chief Samantha Power told reporters. "We have delivered the message here, we will deliver it to Riek Machar," she said.

So far talks have delivered little of substance. According to press reports, the rebel faction loyal to Machar has been criticised for delaying the peace talks and for numerous violations of the ceasefire agreement signed in January. They say they are unhappy that the deal brokered by regional body IGAG allows President Kiir to continue in power throughout the proposed two-and-a-half year transitional period.

A cease fire is desperately needed before a humanitarian catastrophe engulfs the whole country.

An estimated 500,000 people have sought refuge in neighbouring countries while one million are internally displaced, living out in the open in increasingly worsening conditions as the rainy season begins. Cholera outbreaks have been confirmed in Juba and two states.

According to Unicef, if the war continues four million face food insecurity and even famine. The UN has said that the food crisis is the worst in the world, with aid workers warning of famine within the next few weeks.

Unfortunately it is the civilians who are suffering and will continue to suffer. The fighting is damaging all aspects of life. It is creating a new generation of fighters, orphans and refugees. South Sudanese have demonstrated their capacity for survival and the ability to rise above their politicians' failures but have never experienced having a government protecting their interests and most young people have known

nothing but war.

Building a new South Sudan will not be easy. As for the international community, if their objective is to prevent a similar crisis in the future, those with influence over South Sudan need to convince the leaders to engage in the task of ethnic reconciliation, reform the entire structure of governance, create a space for a viable multi-party democracy, inclusive of most ethnic groups and most importantly focus their attention in developing the economy. But nothing constructive can happen while the fighting goes on.

The government should perhaps have listened to the former SPLA rebel leader, John Garang who died in 2005 and dreamed of a democratic Sudan, "Let's build a multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multicultural society... Let's transform the military power into political power... Let's take the towns to the people, bring representation, develop services in the rural areas where people live". The oil revenue should have achieved that. **R**

**"Yet once we got power we forgot what we fought for and began to enrich ourselves at the expense of our people."**

*Salva Kiir*