



Prevention and Response to Gender-Based Violence in South Sudan Urgently Required: Guidance for Donors at the Oslo Pledging Conference

Gender-based violence (GBV) – including rape, sexual assault, harassment, domestic violence, forced marriage, and survival sex – was a persistent problem in South Sudan prior to the current conflict. There is no doubt that with the current state of mass displacement, ubiquitous armed actors, the complete lack of rule of law, the situation has only deteriorated. Indeed, a recent UNMISS Human Rights report explains that all parties to the conflict have committed acts of sexual violence against women of different ethnic groups. **UNFPA estimates that 24,500 South Sudanese women and girls are at risk of sexual violence.** More than five months into the emergency response in South Sudan, women’s and girls’ basic needs have not been met, including access to lifesaving GBV prevention and response services in areas where civilians have been displaced.

The Protection Cluster is currently only 12% funded, underscoring the resource constraints that impede humanitarian response. In addition to limited funding, the heaviest concentration of humanitarian actors operates inside the UN bases, where only 10% of the displaced population resides. There are few humanitarian actors operating outside of the UN bases due to access limitations, high start up costs, a lack of infrastructure, and security threats. This leaves the majority of displaced populations without access to lifesaving services.

Recommendation: Donors must support scaling up humanitarian programming and use their influence to ensure that gender considerations inform the planning and design of all humanitarian interventions.

The international community has very few statistics to express the violence inflicted on South Sudanese women and girls because survivors of GBV experience stigma, shame, and they fear being ostracized by their families and communities. Concern about retaliation by their abusers also serves to keep women and girls silent. Women generally will only report incidents of GBV if there is a safe place for them to seek specialized medical care, psychosocial support, basic dignity kits, socioeconomic interventions, and other treatment. **But in today’s South Sudan, these specialized GBV services are virtually nonexistent in conflict areas.** Very few humanitarian agencies operating in South Sudan provide access to the lifesaving care that survivors need. In the few places where there are services in place, survivors’ needs far outweigh aid organizations’ capacity to respond. This means that GBV survivors are suffering in silence and ongoing danger, living alongside their perpetrators without any access to safe spaces. There is no proper detainment for perpetrators, who carry out attacks against women and girls with impunity. Some women in Juba report that they spend the night in churches, fearing that armed soldiers or patrols will rape them in their homes.

Recommendation: Donors must provide urgent funding to protection actors to scale up comprehensive GBV services, including medical and psychosocial support, inside and outside of the UN bases. In particular, donors should consider supporting national NGOs that are willing and able to enter conflict areas where international actors cannot travel.

Outside the UN bases, the dangers for displaced women and girls are the most severe. Women and girls face assault when they venture outside of the UN bases for livelihood activities and firewood collection. While they are reluctant to leave

the compounds and fear that they will be sexually assaulted by the armed actors outside, they take the risk because they understand that men would be killed if they leave, whereas women would “only” face sexual violence.

Recommendation: Donors should provide additional funding to GBV and protection actors to set up safety patrols to accompany women on trips outside of the UN bases for firewood collection or livelihood activities consistent with the *Inter-Agency Standing Committee Guidance on Safe Access to Firewood and Alternative Energy in Humanitarian Settings*.

Even inside the UN bases, South Sudanese women and girls are not safe, due to poor conditions there. As a result of the rapid influx of IDPs into the bases, overcrowding is a major issue and humanitarians have faced significant challenges in constructing basic facilities. For example, there is poor lighting, no physical separation of men’s and women’s latrines, and a lack of locking system on latrine doors. This has led to women and men using common facilities, exposing women and girls to harassment and violence. Girls have also noticed that men have cut small holes in the plastic sheeting around the women’s showers. Humanitarians are supposed to observe minimum safety procedures, but by all accounts, they have overlooked these critical measures that would ensure a modicum of safety, privacy, and dignity.

Recommendation: Donors should ensure that the humanitarian programs they fund, across all sectors, are designed and implemented according to the *Inter-Agency Standing Committee Guidelines on Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Settings*.