



# THE SUDD INSTITUTE

RESEARCH FOR A PEACEFUL, JUST AND PROSPEROUS SOUTH SUDAN

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## Weekly Review

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### Juba's Insecurity: A Challenge to State Authority and Credibility

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The recent increased insecurity, particularly the prevalence of violent criminal activity, in Juba is a serious issue that deserves national attention. This situation, which understandably has created a great deal of fear among the city's residents, poses a critical challenge to state authority and credibility. This is because the provision of security is a domain that primarily belongs to the government. Failure to ensure security to all its citizens in order to promote harmony, peace and stability poorly reflects on the government, and severely undermines its authority, and even legitimacy, in the eyes of the public.

On Wednesday November 5, 2012 the nation was rocked by the news of the cowardly and senseless murdering of a prominent South Sudanese political commentator and opinion writer, Isaiah Diing Abraham Chan Awuol, better known to his readership audience by his pen name as Isaiah Abraham, at his residence in Juba. Coming in the wake of this tragic news, this week's review seeks to highlight the problem of insecurity in South Sudan's capital city. The primary aim of the review is to help spark a national discourse about this increasing security concern, which requires informed, sustained collaboration between the government and public at large. This review explores the contours and magnitude of this acute insecurity crisis in Juba. Further, it suggests specific measures to be taken to stop the rise of crime in Juba.

After decades of marginalization and mistreatment by the successive northern-led regimes, the South Sudanese finally attained their hard-fought independence on July 9, 2011, an achievement that was made possible by the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) of 2005. Although more than seven years have passed since this peace accord was signed and over a year now since the attainment of independence, the journey towards establishing a vibrant and stable state understandably has not been easy. People are fully aware of the critical challenges that are responsible for this slow progress; including the severe lack of human resource capacity and the absence of strong institutions to deliver essential basic services. Despite the fact that the nation is faced with these enormous challenges, many South Sudanese rightly expect their government, at the very least, to deliver some key services, namely security, respect for human rights and dignity, freedom of expression and the press.

For those who live in Juba, it is not a secret that violent crime has been on the rise to an unacceptable level over the last few months. These violent activities could be broadly divided into three categories: organized crimes that target individuals for commercial reasons, organized political assassinations, and random killings. The town has seen strings of robberies at gunpoint mostly at people's residences, banks and other financial institutions where the victims are shot and their belongings taken. These actions are not exclusively done at night, as one might be forgiven to assume, but rather in broad day light. For instance, on December 12, 2012 a driver working for Mountain Bank was gunned down at the gate of the bank's premises.

These crimes are committed against South Sudanese and foreign nationals alike. But the most disturbing aspect of these criminal activities is the indifference of the state authorities, particularly those whose task it is to bring the culprits to justice and strengthen security. To be sure, during the aforementioned killing of the Mountain Bank driver, eyewitnesses reported that both the security guards and police officers present ran for their life instead of preventing the criminals from getting away.

Since there is no centralized, comprehensive database to consult on this matter, it is extremely difficult to know the exact crime rates in Juba. However, to illustrate the severity of violent crime in Juba, the following three incidents are telling. On the evening of January 14, 2012, the Country Director of African Medical and Research Foundation, Dr. Alemayehu Seifu, an Ethiopian national, was fatally gunned down just outside his residence in Malakia, Juba. Nobody seems to have been able to establish the motive behind this killing, but the fact that the assassins made off with the deceased's vehicle and other personal belongings, strongly suggests that money was the primary goal. It is not clear whether any arrest was made or any if there will be prosecution process in connection with Seifu's killing.

According to its Deputy Chairperson, the Eritrean Community in Juba has lost about 35 people in 2012 thus far, including three who were killed just in one night. The circumstances under which the 35 people were killed are not clear to us. Of course, this lack of clarity with respect to what the underlying reasons are for the loss of these lives is irrelevant. What is important to note is that the lives of the deceased were prematurely taken violently. To show their disappointment with the unjustified deaths of their own people, Juba based Eritreans demonstrated on December 1 demanding the government provide increased protection. According to Gurtong website, more than 5,000 Eritreans walked from Custom Market to Juba International Airport where they saw off the bodies of the three recently murdered people, who were flown back to their country for burial.

There have also been several politically driven or hate motivated assassinations or attempted assassinations in and around Juba. First, an SPLA Major General Malek Reuben has survived two assassination attempts on his life this year. Gen. Malek, however, lost two of his bodyguards, one in each incident. Both of the attacks took place at his house here in Juba where the prospective assassins allegedly came fully dressed in police uniform. They first attacked Malek's house in June, and then again on November 22. Although a reported total of nine suspects were arrested in connection with the first

encounter, seven were later released without charges. The fate of the other two, for better or worse, has successfully been kept out of the public limelight.

Second, on June 2, 2012, unknown gunmen killed the Commissioner of Police for Eastern Equatoria, Major General Malok Ring Kiir, some 20 kilometers away from Juba in Nesitu. Gen. Malok was returning to Torit after attending a workshop in Juba. Arrests were reportedly made in connection with this case. What happened in terms of uncovering what the motives were or who was behind this heinous crime remains unknown.

Finally, as mentioned earlier, the killing in cold blood last week of Major Isaiah Diing, a veteran of Sudan's second north-south civil war, has sent shock waves across the newly established nation and internationally. Since the news of the slaying broke, pressure has been mounting on the government from the public, civil society and human rights organizations, and the UN to find the culprits and bring them to justice.

The extent to which the government is truly committed to ensuring that justice is being served by hunting down the people responsible for this criminal act and trying them in a court of law remains to be seen. But the nation's top leadership seems to have received the message. In the wake of this dreadful event, the President of the Republic, Salva Kiir, is reported to have convened a meeting of his top security team on Thursday December 6, one day following the incident, to chart a way forward. On Friday December 7, during the Council of Ministers meeting, the issue was also discussed and the ministers of Interior, National Security, and Defense and Veteran Affairs were allegedly told to do some sort of self-investigation within their ministries.

While the perpetrators of this heinous and despicable crime are not yet known, public reaction strongly suggests that it is the work of some rogue elements within the security and intelligence establishment. In a sense, this incident highlights the escalating nature of violent crime, which seems to specifically target some identified individuals in the capital city. This barbaric and inexcusable action further confirms the terrifying and insecure environment that Juba's residents unfortunately have to deal with these days.

Nothing is known yet about the assassins of the late South Sudanese political commentator. Equally, the motive for his death is not conclusively confirmed, though there is a strong indication that this has to do with his public criticism of important national policy matters. According to some family members and friends, Isaiah told them about threatening phone calls that preceded his untimely death. The callers, these people maintain, identified themselves as calling from the national security establishment and insisted that Isaiah stop writing or "else they will stop him." This further suggests that Isaiah's killers are indeed, state security agents.

Further supporting the proposition that the killing of Mr. Isaiah was organized and executed by some security cell is the fact that nothing was taken from the house in which he was slain. Things that could have been taken were left intact. Although the keys to Isaiah's vehicle was reportedly on the table, along with a laptop computer and other items,

none of these attracted looting from the thugs behind the killing. In murder cases that are purely driven by need for money, looting usually follows the killing. Further, there are reports of threats having been issued by anonymous callers claiming to be agents of national security telling citizens known to be sympathetic to Isaiah's opinions to keep quiet on the matter or else they, too, could face the possibility of extermination.

Who is committing these murders in Juba? What is the government doing to ensure security in Juba, hunt down the culprits and bring them to justice? As it specifically relates to last week's callous murdering of Isaiah, people are genuinely horrified and outraged that this occurrence took place at the time when they seem to have finally realized their long held dream of having a free, democratic country. During the dark days of the arduous north-south conflict, many South Sudanese vehemently believed that they were fighting to create a state of their own – one in which they will be able to freely express themselves on any given important national matter without fear or intimidation.

What happened last week contradicts this notion, as there appear to have been some security and intelligence elements that are trying to silence those who are legitimately outraged with what they see as the system's complicity in the death of Isaiah and the inability to tackle head on this nagging insecurity situation. Granted that Isaiah's views were critical of the government, people justifiably see self-criticism as a necessary next-step to consolidate the gains made thus far and to help entrench democracy in the infant republic.

There is no public consensus on who the people behind this rampant insecurity really are. One view is that these criminal activities are the work of some organized gangs, speculating that these crime syndicates are perhaps made up of some national and foreign elements. The other view, which seems to be corroborated by some anecdotal evidence, is that elements of the police force were involved in the incident. This theory stems from the fact that some of the criminals were reportedly caught wearing police uniform.

Frankly speaking, there are a number of reasons as to why the Government of South Sudan needs to act quickly in order to improve the security situation in Juba, and necessarily throughout the country. For example, the bloody war that the South Sudanese waged for over two decades against the Khartoum based regimes was deeply rooted in the people's aspiring to have a state of their own that is free, fair and democratic. In practical terms, the dream of having a country with democratic principles as its essential pillars means that freedom of expression and the press are cultivated and respected. What transpired last week, where Isaiah was tragically eliminated in cold blood by some people who are suspected to be part of the system simply because he was expressing his opinion on critical national matters, seriously disregards both the letter and spirit of South Sudan's Transitional Constitution. The Constitution in no uncertain terms safeguards the freedom of expression and the press, respect for human life and dignity as well as the people's democratic right for self-government.

In addition, after its birth just a little over a year ago, South Sudan joined the community of nations as an integral member of several multilateral organizations. Being in this

privileged position, it goes without saying that South Sudan has to follow or abide by certain international norms and standards among which are respect for human rights, freedom of opinion and the media, and respect for sanctity of life. Given this reality, in addition to the South Sudanese state's solemn duty to protect the lives of its citizens and their property, the government needs to rein in the elements who are aimlessly taking innocent lives in order to keep its obligations to the international community.

Tasked with protecting the lives and property of the citizens and other residents in the country, the government of South Sudan should spare no efforts in making sure that this issue of insecurity does not get out of hand and should move to immediately curtail it. To do this, it is prudent for the government at the highest level to direct all the security-relevant authorities, particularly agencies such as the Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Defense and Veteran Affairs, and Ministry of National Security, to come up with an executable plan on how to keep Juba safe and secure. In pursuit of this goal of creating and fostering a peaceful and secure atmosphere, it is strongly recommended that the following measures are undertaken:

- The government should apprehend and try those behind the increased crime in Juba in order to reassert its authority and control.
- The police and their other security counterparts need to increase surveillance and patrol at night in all the neighborhoods.
- In order to make it difficult for those criminals who might want to commit crime in police uniform, the police should change its uniform and allow those on duty to dress only at their workstations.
- Communities may want to form neighborhood watch groups in instances where police presence is minimal or non-existent in order to provide collective community security.
- The government should ensure that those committing crimes are caught and dealt with in accordance with the law.
- The government should make sure that those from within its ranks who seem to be behind organizing violent criminal activities directed against politicians, journalists and other individuals are stopped.
- The government should consider transforming recruitment into the security forces through advanced screenings and trainings.
- The government should ensure existence of close collaboration between all the security and intelligence organs so that actionable intelligence is immediately collected, analyzed, and used to help provide security to the public.

In conclusion, the issue of insecurity in Juba is a problem that threatens the very foundation of the newly established republic, thus it requires the government to immediately undertake concrete steps designed to both ensure swift provision of security and prosecute those who unnecessarily and senselessly take innocent lives. As the guarantor of security and safety of the country, the onus is on the government to find and

bring to justice those who carry out these reprehensible acts. Equally, the government needs to work hard to see to it that lawlessness is abated.

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### **About Sudd Institute**

The Sudd Institute is an independent research organization that conducts and facilitates policy relevant research and training to inform public policy and practice, to create opportunities for discussion and debate, and to improve analytical capacity in South Sudan. The Sudd Institute's intention is to significantly improve the quality, impact, and accountability of local, national, and international policy- and decision-making in South Sudan in order to promote a more peaceful, just and prosperous society.

### **About the Author**

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