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**TO:** Amb Maj Gen (Rtd) Charles Tai Gituai CBS, Interim Chairperson  
R-JMEC

**FROM:** The Chairperson, CTSAMVM

**DATE:** 28<sup>th</sup> February 2023

**SUBJECT: CTSAMVM REPORT 2023/05– VIOLENCE IN GREATER PIBOR  
ADMINISTRATIVE AREA**

Excellency,

Please find attached a report on the security situation in Greater Pibor Administrative Area

Please accept the assurances of my highest consideration.

Lieutenant General Asrat Denero Amad

**Chairperson**

**Ceasefire and Transitional Security Arrangements Monitoring and Verification  
Mechanism**



## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

CTSAMVM were requested by RJMEC and other stakeholders to investigate violence reported to have occurred in December in Greater Pibor Administrative Area between 24-28 December 2022.

CTSAMVM conducted a full investigation of the fighting and has confirmed that there were large scale attacks on villages near Gumuruk and Likuangole between 24-28 December 2022. The attacks were carried out by Lou-Nuer armed youth and other Nuer groups from Jonglei state. There is no evidence of any party to the R-ARCSS involvement in the incidents.

The fighting resulted in widespread loss of life, displacement, abduction of civilians, destruction of homes and humanitarian facilities, SGBV, looting and cattle theft.

There is evidence that state security mechanisms in GPAA were forewarned of the violence, but the events indicate a failure to protect civilians. Early warning systems need to be put in place to prevent any future incidents.



## **VIOLENCE IN GREATER PIBOR ADMINISTRATIVE AREA (GPAA)**

### **Introduction**

1. Background: Insecurity and violence in Greater Pibor has been of concern since December 2022. On 28 December 2022 in a joint statement UNMISS, AUMISS, IGAD, the Troika, EU and R-JMEC called for an immediate cessation of violence and requested CTSAMVM to investigate the violence. CTSAMVM conducted an investigation to establish the facts of the violence in the area of Gumuruk and Likuangole in the GPAA and to determine whether the violence was relevant to the R-ARCSS.
2. Allegations: Specific allegations communicated to CTSAMVM and covered in this report are:
  - a. That Greater Pibor Murle communities at Gumuruk and Likuangole were attacked by armed youth between 22 December 2022 and 04 Jan 2023.
  - b. That the violence caused fatalities and injuries to civilians.
  - c. That women and children were abducted.
  - d. That civilian buildings were destroyed, and that displacement occurred.
3. Context. Jonglei State and GPAA have a long and extensive history of inter-communal violence which pre-dates the current tensions in South Sudan which the R-ARCSS addresses. The situation in both States was relatively stable for over a year until December 2022. CTSAMVM has previously investigated occurrence of inter-communal violence but to date has not found there to have been any involvement of forces or affiliates to R-ARCSS Party Signatories.

4. Aim: The aim of this report is to present the findings of CTSAMVM investigations into the recent violence and to make recommendations to improve the security situation.

5. Methodology:

a. Long Duration Patrol (LDP) 10-16 January 2023: In order to investigate the allegations and the general situation, CTSAMVM deployed a team to Pibor which visited Gumuruk and Likuangle.

b. National Monitor participation: National Monitors were involved throughout and were present at all interviews.

c. Interviews were conducted with the following:

i. Civil Administration: The Chief Administrative officer GPAA, Director of Local Government, Mayor of Pibor, County Commissioner Gumuruk, Executive Director Gumuruk County, Executive Director and Police Commissioner of Maiwut County; the Turu Payam Administrator.

ii. SSPDF/SSNPS: Deputy Director of Police Gumuruk County, Commanding Officer SSPDF Gumuruk barracks, Deputy Commissioner of Police GPAA.

iii. Humanitarian Agencies/INGOs: Medical staff Pibor Hospital, UNMISS, ICRC.

iv. Victims: Civilian casualties of fighting, abducted civilians.



- d. Standard of Proof: The standard of proof used by CTSAMVM to determine whether there is sufficient evidence to verify that a Party is not in compliance with the provisions of the Agreements is “reasonable grounds to believe that the incident that is the subject of the investigation occurred.” This is in accordance with accepted practice for monitoring mechanisms and human-rights- and humanitarian- entities and signifies that sufficient facts and evidence have been collected to conclude that an event has occurred.

## Findings

6. There were large scale attacks on villages near Gumuruk and at Likuangole between 24-28 December 2022. CTSAMVM was informed by SSPDF, SSNPS and GPAA government officials that the perpetrators were Lou-Nuer armed youth groups. Casualties interviewed in Pibor hospital stated that the attackers were Lou Nuer youth. The numbers of attackers could not be verified however the SSPDF Commander of Gumurk barracks observed that the attackers were heavily armed. Multiple sources stated that the attackers were well armed with plentiful ammunition. Some were observed to be wearing military uniform but the type and pattern was not identified.
7. The impact of the violence in GPAA has fallen mainly on unarmed civilians. It is very likely that there has been widespread loss of lives. GPAA authorities provided CTSAMVM with detailed numbers of the people killed, wounded and abducted in Gumuruk area. The information was compiled with input from 14 villages which were affected. No detailed figures were available for the effects of the violence in Likuangole. The numbers of those killed was reported to be 638 but this could not be verified by CTSAMVM. CTSAMVM observed bodies said to be victims of the violence which had yet to be buried but the number and identities could not be verified.
8. In addition to those killed, there were extensive civilian casualties. In Gumuruk there were reported to have been 282 wounded, this cannot be verified by CTSAMVM. At Pibor hospital, interviews were conducted with three survivors of



the attack on Likuangle. All received gunshot wounds between 24-26 December. There were other casualties from the violence receiving treatment in Pibor hospital from both Gumuruk and Likuangle area. The scale of the violence overwhelmed local medical facilities and ICRC rendered assistance by evacuating 17 patients to Juba and were processing a further 7 at the time of the CTSAMVM visit. The overall number of casualties was reported to be 282 from Gumuruk and a smaller unspecified number from Likuangle. The reported number could not be verified by CTSAMVM but there were certainly extensive numbers wounded in the attacks.

9. SSPDF Commander who controls detachments of SSPDF soldiers at Gumuruk and Likuangle reported that 5 soldiers were killed and 7 wounded at Gumuruk on 26 December. He also reported that 11 soldiers were killed and 12 wounded at Likuangle on 27 December. The SSNPS Deputy Commissioner for GPAA reported that 2 SSNPS were killed and 8 wounded in the attacks at Gumuruk.
10. In addition to the killing and wounding there has been large scale abduction of civilians. Contradictory accounts of the numbers abducted were presented to CTSAMVM some of which may have been exaggerated. The State Minister of Culture and Sports (GPAA) stated that 68 people were abducted in ages ranging from a 7-month-old baby to 17 years. It is reported that between 24-28 December the abductees were taken to Bor. It is reported that an abducted female was sold to potential buyers in Bor town. The Minister stated that the abductees were freed from Bor following interventions from State authorities and humanitarian agencies.
11. On 13 January 2023 the abductees were reported to have been moved to Pibor by air. CTSAMVM were able to see a group of those who had been returned but were not able to interview them. In any case the group of children were observed to be distressed and interviews conducted by CTSAMVM would have risked causing further distress. It was reported that some of the girls testified to GPAA officials that some mothers who tried to protect their children or escape were killed on the move to Bor. It was further reported that there have been incidents of SGBV and torture, but no numbers have been confirmed. The Minister informed CTSAMVM that the children will be accommodated in Pibor until they have received psychosocial support following which they will be returned to their families.



12. There has been extensive displacement of civilians from the afflicted areas. CTSAMVM were told by the Mayor of Pibor that over 42,000 people had been displaced from the villages around Gumuruk and Likuangle. This figure cannot be verified by CTSAMVM however WFP, OCHA and other humanitarian agencies have confirmed that additional support and logistic materiel have been provided to the afflicted areas the violence to alleviate the situation. The displacement occurred because of the attacks and the deliberate destruction of homes by the attacking forces. It is reported that NGO and humanitarian properties were destroyed or damaged including health facilities, but the exact number could not be verified.
13. There are reports that large numbers of cattle were seized by the attackers. A figure of 86000 was provided to CTSAMVM but this is not verified.
14. The SSPDF Commander in Pibor informed CTSAMVM before the attacks took place information was shared between SSPDF and the GPAA leadership concerning the mobilisation of Lou-Nuer armed groups. The SSPDF reported that the Lou-Nuer were mobilised from the whole of Jonglei State including armed youth from near the Ethiopian border. The exact origins of the armed youth involved in the attacks cannot be verified. Unfortunately, the information was considered unverified and the subsequent attacks took the State security mechanisms by surprise. There were reports in November (CTSAMVM DMR 23 Nov 2022) of the abduction of Lou-Nuer children by Murle youth. It cannot be confirmed whether this was a trigger to the subsequent attacks but it is likely to have been a contributing factor.
15. CTSAMVM were informed that the GPAA Minister of Local Government has been tasked to conduct an independent investigation to assess and verify the multiple human rights abuses which took place during the attacks.
16. CTSAMVM found no evidence that Parties signatory to the R-ARCSS were involved in the attacks which took place between 24-28 December 2022 at Gumuruk and Likuangle.

## **Assessment**



17. The violence which took place at Gumuruk and Likuangole between 24-28 December 2022 was Inter- Communal and not a consequence of violations of the R-ARCSS.
18. The attacks which took place at Gumuruk and Likuangole were targeted and extremely violent. While exact numbers of those killed and displaced cannot be confirmed it is certain that there has been large scale loss of life and many casualties. The destruction of homes and humanitarian facilities will have a long-lasting impact on the communities afflicted.
19. There is a long history of inter-communal violence in Jonglei. There are traditional patterns of violence between Murle, Lou-Nuer and other groups which are cattle related. Abduction of women and children are common practise. It is possible that the attacks on Murle communities in Gumuruk and Likuangole were a form of revenge for raids conducted by Murle groups in November 2022, there are many precedents for such events. These factors have created a tense security atmosphere made worse by the prevalence of weapons and plentiful ammunition.
20. Large numbers of armed youth were mobilised from a large area throughout Jonglei. The attacks demonstrated that the youth were heavily armed and had plentiful ammunition. This indicates evidence of planning and preparation, those responsible for the violence will continue to present a threat to peace and security until brought to account.
21. The fact that the SSPDF and GPAA leadership had a degree of warning of the attack but were not prepared for the consequences is of concern. Timely deployment of security forces might have reduced the scale of violence or possibly deterred any fighting. However, the fact that the armed youth attacked SSPDF and SSNPS positions and inflicted significant casualties indicates that they were prepared for combat.
22. The intent of the GPAA authorities to investigate the human rights abuses is welcome as is the intent to return abducted children to their families.



23. Given the level of violence of the attacks and the large-scale theft of cattle there is a high risk of further retaliatory raids and attacks by Murle armed groups. Prompt action is required by the National Government and GPAA authorities to prevent escalation and more loss of lives and property.

#### **Observations and recommendations**

24. It is recommended that the Jonglei State and GPAA early warning mechanisms for preventing inter-communal violence are improved.
25. It is recommended that Jonglei and GPAA are made priorities for the deployment of additional security forces, if possible, from the NUF.
26. It is recommended that GPAA authorities are assisted by the National Government in investigating the human rights abuses and that those who planned the attacks are identified and brought to account.