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Headquarters Ceasefire & Transitional Security Arrangements Monitoring and Verification Mechanism

20 January 2025

Ref: CM/2025/01/2025

TO: Lt. Gen. Rabi Mujung Emmanuel (ITGoNU)

Maj. Gen. Dr. Chuol Ruey Kompuok (SPLM/A-IO)

Maj. Gen. Jany Kaway Yoakhor (SSOA)

Maj. Gen. Bior Leek Kuareng (Former Detainees)

FROM: The Chairperson,
CTSAMVM

DATE: 20 January 2025

SUBJECT: CTSAMVM REPORT 2025/01 – ARMED EXCHANGES INVOLVING SSPDF AND ARMED CIVILIANS IN NASIR TOWN.

Please, find attached a report on the armed exchanges between SSPDF forces and armed civilians at Nasir Town during the period 16 – 17 October 2024.

Please accept the assurances of my highest consideration.

Respectfully,

Major General Yitayal Gelaw Bitew
Chairperson, CTSAMVM



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**CTSAMVM REPORT 2025/01 - CLASHES INVOLVING SSPDF AND ARMED
CIVILIANS AT NASIR TOWN.**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Upon taking office in September 2024, the County Commissioner had directed that firearms be prohibited in the area of Nasir market, this directive extended to both SSPDF and civilians. On 16 October 2024, around 1550hrs, CTSAMVM MVT Malakal received a telephone account from the Nasir County Commissioner reporting that the SSPDF was shelling Nasir Town. Follow up investigations indicate that a SSPDF Lt Col Marko arrived to Nasir town accompanied by his young child and two bodyguards. It has been suggested that the Officer may have been attending a prearranged meeting with the child's mother or attending a court case related to the mother's former marriage.

The Officer was observed at around 1500hrs in the vicinity of Mr Simon Gatwich Rankdit's shop within the market, shots were subsequently fired resulting in the death of the Officer, both bodyguards and the child. It cannot be determined with certainty who fired the first shots, as witness accounts differ as to who was the intended target of the initial shooting. Other SSPDF soldiers were also in the Town conducting routine business and or employment, and witnesses report that the initial shooting quickly escalated.

Accounts of events immediately after the initial shooting vary significantly, but a timeframe of approximately 1500-1800hrs is relatively consistent. Several accounts suggest that an armed civilian group, (*routinely referred to in transcripts as White Army*), shot the other soldiers in Nasir town and searched for others. Other accounts suggest that the SSPDF launched a premeditated attack upon Nasir Town and a number of civilians were killed. Casualty figures suggest that thirteen SSPDF soldiers were killed and six injured, whilst five civilians (one female, three male and one infant) were killed and 14 wounded.

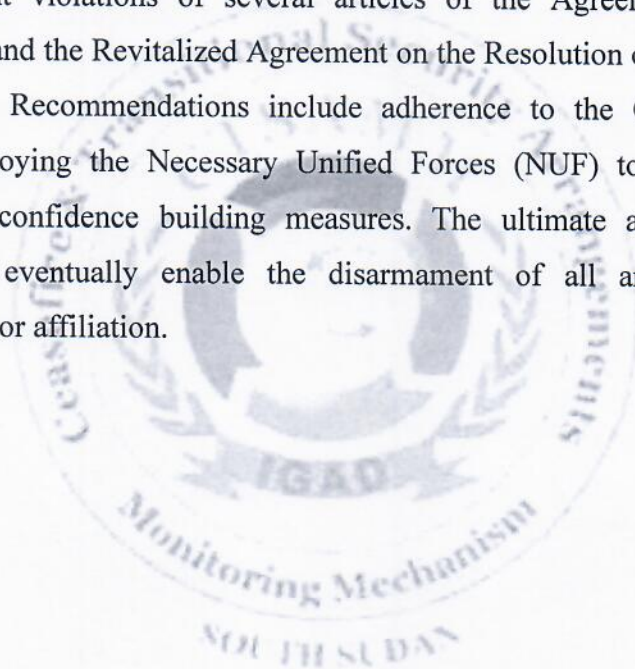
During this subsequent armed exchange there is reliable verbal and physical evidence that indirect fire munitions were employed within civilian residential and business areas (*Comment: CTSAMVM Violation Report 2024/12 records SSPDF employment of indirect fire munitions against civilian areas on 3 July, 14 and 15 August 2024*). It is reasonable to link the use of indirect fire with the large but unverified numbers of civilians displaced. The Nasir County Commissioner attempted to broker mediation efforts between the SSPDF and the



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armed civilian group, specifically to halt the use of indirect fire munitions and for both party to maintain position within the Nasir Barracks (3Km West of Nasir Town, referred to within transcripts as *Wech Yaradiw*) and Nasir Town respectively. His attempts seem to have been successful through the dark hours and several soldiers were able to make their way back to their barracks during this time. It should be acknowledged that several residents of Nasir Town incurred considerable personal risk to hide SSPDF soldiers until they could safely return to their barracks. There are credible accounts reporting that indirect fire munitions were again employed within the civilian areas of Nasir Town on the morning of 17 October 2025.

These acts represent violations of several articles of the Agreement on Cessation of Hostilities (COHA) and the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (R-ARCSS). Recommendations include adherence to the CoHA and R-ARCSS provisions and deploying the Necessary Unified Forces (NUF) to stabilise the area to promote trust and confidence building measures. The ultimate aim of a future NUF deployment would eventually enable the disarmament of all armed civilian groups, irrespective of name or affiliation.



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CTSAMVM REPORT 2025/01 - ARMED EXCHANGES INVOLVING SSPDF AND ARMED CIVILIANS IN NASIR TOWN.

References:

A: 20250117 Investigative Report into Armed Exchanges involving SSPDF and Armed Civilians in Nasir Town.

B: JMCO Task Number JMCO_S2-118_

INTRODUCTION

Historical Background:

1. On 16 October 2024, a telephone report from Nasir County Commissioner, indicated that the SSPDF were using indirect fire munitions within Nasir Town. Verification telephone calls from local sources suggested that a SSPDF Officer, his wife and child with two body guards had gone to Nasir town to attend a court case against him on alleging that he had taken another man's wife. The court ruled in favour of the Officer and he and his party departed to Nasir Market. Their arrival incensed some members of an armed civilian group, (*routinely referred to in transcripts as White Army*), who reportedly demanded that the child be handed over to them. His refusal led to an argument, which subsequently later escalated to a gunfight during which the Officer, child and bodyguards were fatally shot. The members of the armed civilian group continued to shoot other soldiers in Nasir town, resulting in the death of 13 SSPDF soldiers the child. Six soldiers were also wounded. The SSPDF Commander at Nasir Barracks (*3Km West of Nasir Town, referred to within transcripts as Wech Yaradiw*) reported that soldiers were deployed to reinforce those within Nasir Town, to locate and evacuate the wounded and transport them back to the barracks. He stated that the soldiers who had been killed remained where they had fallen.

The Nasir County Commissioner assessed that the incident on 16 October was a planned attack by SSPDF forces against the Nasir civilian community. He claimed that a few SSPDF personnel came to the Nasir market to buy goods. Thereafter they became intoxicated and around 1500hrs, began shooting. He recalls that the indirect fire began shortly after this original shooting incident, munitions impacted upon the market,

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Commissioner's Office and the Commissioner's residence. He further stated that SSPDF ground forces advanced upon the market, where they killed four (one female and three males) and wounded 14 civilians.

The County Commissioner reported that he talked with the armed civilian group and appealed that they do not attack the SSPDF other than in self-defence, and all agreed to fight on self-defence. He estimated that the attack displaced more than 20,000 civilians and the severity of the incident would require the National and the State Government mediation to avoid an escalation.

The Nasir County Commissioner reported that the SSPDF again targeted Nasir Town on 17 October 2024 at 0906hrs employing indirect fire. On that same day, a telephone account from a local religious leader described that Nasir Town had been targeted using indirect fire that morning. The religious leader reported that two elderly civilians had been shot by SSPDF forces. On 18 October 2024, the Nasir County Commissioner reported that the majority of the civilians in Nasir Town, especially women and children have fled Nasir County.

On 21 October 2024, the Upper Nile State National Security Service (NSS) Acting Director confirmed the death of 13 soldiers. He stated that on 16 October 2024, a SSPDF Lt Col had been summoned to a traditional court in Nasir Town. A misunderstanding followed the court session which escalated into an armed exchange during which the Officer and guard were fatally shot. SSPDF soldiers responding to the situation were also ambushed and eleven killed. He estimated that four civilians were killed and 14 wounded.

On 22 October 2024, the UNMISS Public Information & Communications Office Team Leader, also reported that the majority of the civilians, especially women and children have fled Nasir County.

On 23 October 2024, the Director General of the Upper Nile State Relief and Rehabilitation Commission, also reported the death of 13 soldiers and four civilians as a result of violent conflict, with a further 14 civilians wounded. He assessed that the armed

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civilian group intend to have the SSPDF soldiers removed from Nasir County. He further assessed that National intervention is required, involving a multifaceted engagement with all the local leaders to come up with a resolution aimed at promoting peace in the County.

On 31 October 2024, the Malakal World Food Programme Security Officer reported that access to Nasir is becoming a challenge because of the armed exchanges between SSPDF and armed civilians. He stated that some of their food items are being held at Gambela in Ethiopia and the occurrence of the armed clashes and the presence of armed civilians is a threat to humanitarian operations.

On 1 November 2024, the Upper Nile State Minister of Peace Building reported that the security situation in Nasir remains unpredictable due to the frequent armed exchanges between the SSPDF and armed civilians. He remarked that the exchanges are most prevalent when soldiers are collecting firewood from the nearby areas or market visits. He stated that he had met with the Commissioner during a visit to Nasir, and they concluded that the SSPDF and armed civilians should maintain the current distance between both.

On 4 November 2024, a local religious leader reported that during the recent Upper Nile State Governor's visit the main discussion focused upon the need for a NUF deployment to replace the SSPDF garrison. The Governor stated that a decision from the Joint Defence Board is pending.

On 6 November 2024, the Nasir SSPDF Commander reported that the security situation in Nasir County has improved since the visit of the Governor of Upper Nile State. He stated that there had been no further attacks by armed civilian groups. He claimed that the armed civilian groups are supported by the SPLM/A-IO. He confirmed that soldiers remain within the barracks but family members are permitted to buy basic needs from the market without military accompaniment. He reported that there is a direct line of communication to the Nasir County Commissioner to share information on a daily basis.



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On 9 December 2024, the Assistant Protection Officer of UNHCR Malakal Office reported that UNHCR river access is difficult due to the risk of being engaged by small arms. He also cited the presence of armed civilians as a threat to humanitarian operations.

On 20 December 2024, the SSPDF Commander in Nasir County alleged that armed civilians have established a checkpoint on the route to market. They have conducted searches on the wives of the SSPDF soldiers visiting the market. He stated that while he maintains formal communication with the County Commissioner of Nasir County, he is not permitted to visit the Commissioner's office.

On 31 December 2024, the Nasir County Commissioner reported that the Deputy Governor had consultative meetings with civilians, local chiefs and the military on how to restore peace in Nasir. The local chiefs and civilians felt that the deployment of unified forces and redeploy of SSPDF is required. He claimed that the local chiefs and civilians alleged that than 20 women and 15 children belong to husbands and fathers in Nasir were taken by the SSPDF and transported to Juba as their own wives and children without consensus with the families of those women. The relatives of the women are requesting State Government intervention to resolve this issue.

2. Based on the above accounts, MVT Malakal was tasked by the Joint Monitoring Coordination Office to prepare an investigative report, JMCO task numbers S2/118 and S2/119. The MVT was tasked with investigating the following:
 - a. What or who was the catalyst for the series of armed clashes between SSPDF and armed civilians in Nasir County?
 - b. Were the actions of the participants proportionate to the threat posed by their adversary?
 - c. Have there been any other contributory acts perpetrated that has compounded the pre-existing tension in Nasir County?



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- d. Is the armed civilian group (*routinely referred to in transcripts as White Army*), operating under the direction or command of SPLM/A-IO force elements?
 - e. Did the wives/dependents of SSPDF soldiers deployed to Nasir Barracks (*3Km West of Nasir Town, referred to within transcripts as Wech Yaradiw*), have personal property removed and retained by SPLM/A-IO soldiers?
 - f. Were women and children from Nasir Town or surrounding environs forcibly moved to Malakal and/or Juba by the SSPDF?
3. Aim: This report aims to present the findings of Monitoring and Verification Team's investigation regarding the armed exchanges involving SSPDF and armed civilians in Nasir Town Barracks (3Km West of Nasir Town), referred to within transcripts as Wech Yaradiw. To attribute responsibility for violations of the R-ARCSS if proven, and where appropriate make recommendations to foster compliance with the R-ARCSS.
4. Investigations were undertaken with national monitors from all parties, although it should be noted that the SSPDF national monitor elected not to sign this report. The SSPDF national monitor objects that the names of SPLM/A-IO Officers he alleges exercise command over the armed civilians were not recorded within the report and has expressed his concerns in writing.
5. Methodology:
- a. From 9 – 13 January 2025, CTSAMVM MVT Malakal conducted multiple face-to-face interviews and visited both Nasir Town and the SSPDF barracks at Nasir Barracks (*3Km West of Nasir Town, referred to within transcripts as Wech Yaradiw*).
 - b. CTSAMVM interviewees include:

SER	POSITION
1	Nasir County Commissioner



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2	Nasir County Executive Director
3	Nasir County Deputy Executive Director
4	Police Director Ulang and Nasser.
5	Nasir Town Trade union leader
6	Chairlady Nasir County Women Association
7	Chairlady Nasir Payam
8	Paramount Chief Nasir County
9	Head Chief, Dhordeng Payam
10	Civilian Armed Group Leader
11	Civilian Armed Group Deputy Leader
12	Nasir County Cattle herder
13	SSPDF Comd Nasir Bde
14	SSPDF Dep Bde Comd
15	SSPDF 1st Bn Comd
16	SSPDF 2nd Bn Comd
17	SSPDF Officer 1
18	SSPDF Officer 2
19	SSPDF Bde Intelligence Senior Non-Commissioned Officer
20	SSPDF Artillery Officer
21	SSPDF Sergeant Major
22	Nasir Town Trader
23	Nasir Town Trader



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24	Acting Chief Insp of Police (IG) of Nasir County
25	NSS officer
26	Nasir Town Businessman
27	Nasir Town Businessman
28	Dep Pastor in charge Nasir Presbytery

- c. Standard of proof: The standard of proof employed 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 has occurred". This is in accordance with accepted practice for monitoring mechanisms, human rights and humanitarian entities. Reasonable grounds imply that sufficient facts and evidence has been collected to conclude that an event happened.
6. Assessment: Whilst conducting this investigation, CTSAMVM assesses that a violation of both R-ARCSS and CoHA articles did occur during the period 16-17 October 2024. CTSAMVM acknowledges that the actions of only one party under investigation, namely the SSPDF can be measured against the above referenced documents. Therefore, the findings and observations below do not reflect an equal assessment of culpability, given that signatory parties are held to a higher standard of conduct.
7. Key findings and observations: In answering the questions outlined above and based on the evidence available, CTSAMVM has concluded the following;
- That armed exchanges did occur between the SSPDF and armed civilians on 16 October 2024. This happened following the shooting incident that occurred in the vicinity of Mr. Simon Gatwich Rankdit's shop.
 - Women and children referenced in the allegation on 31 December 2024 were flown to Juba via Malakal. It is the finding of this report that the women were not coerced or



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forced. The Nasir County Commissioner provided a list of names of women and numbers of children.

- c. That looting of property belonging to the wives or dependents of SSPDF soldiers transiting to from Nasir market did occur. This act was perpetrated by two civilians and not SPLM/A-IO soldiers. The items were later recovered and returned to the owners.
- d. Armed SSPDF troops entered Nasir Town on 16 October 2024 and targeted civilian residential areas with indirect fire on both the 16 and 17 October 2024.
- e. The presence of SPLM/A-IO forces within Nasir Town remains unproven.
- f. Civilians within Nasir Town and the surrounding environs are armed with weapons beyond what would reasonably be considered necessary for personal protection. Weapons included belt-fed light machine guns (PKM), and some dressed in military clothing to differentiate themselves from the remainder of the civilian population. This would indicate an attempt by civilians within Nasir and the surrounding environs to equip and organise themselves as an organised group separate from the State security structure. This armed civilian group (*routinely referred to in transcripts as White Army*), is not a signatory party and therefore not constrained by the articles contained within the R-ARCSS.
- g. Some SSPDF soldiers were able to return safely to the Nasir Barracks (*3Km West of Nasir Town, referred to within transcripts as Wech Yaradiw*) in the dark hours following the armed exchange. They were assisted in this endeavour by some Nasir Town civilian residents.
- h. The perception among the civilian populous of Nasir Town and the surrounding environs is that the Nasir Barracks (*3Km West of Nasir Town, referred to within transcripts as Wech Yaradiw*), belongs to the Cie Mut sub-clan and is considered occupied civilian area.



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- i. The casualty estimates during the armed exchanges of 16 – 17 October 2024, are four civilian fatalities and 17 wounded alongside 13 SSPDF fatalities and six wounded.
 - j. The Nasir County Relief and Reconciliation Commission (RRC) recorded that 28,600 civilians were displaced as a result of the October armed exchanges. As of January, the RRC estimate that 27,500 have since returned.
8. Conclusion: It is the conclusion of CTSAMVM that armed exchanges did take place between the SSPDF and an armed civilian group (*routinely referred to in transcripts as White Army*), on 16 and 17 October 2024. That the use of indirect fire weapons within civilian areas by the SSPDF soldiers garrisoned at Nasir Barracks (*3Km West of Nasir Town, referred to within transcripts as Wech Yaradiw*), constitutes violations of R-ARCSS articles 2.1.10.1, 2.1.10.5 and 2.1.10.7.4 and CoHA article 6, (a). The violations contributed to large scale temporary displacement of civilians from Nasir County. From the testimonies received, the actors responsible for initiating the armed exchange could not be determined. The drivers of conflict in Nasir Town and the surrounding environs are now deeply entrenched. They are inter-related and mutually reinforcing, they include land ownership, historical acts of violence by SSPDF and armed civilians. The armed civilian group has organised and equipped members beyond the requirements of self-defence and has sought to establish a monopoly over security provision in Nasir Town and the surrounding environs. The Civil-Military relationship in Nasir Town has deteriorated to a point that appears irretrievable even with the highest level mediation efforts. Witness accounts recorded by the MVT over the period 9 – 13 January 2025, and stakeholder statements delivered during the CTSAMVM Joint Visit on 16 January 2025 request that the deployed SSPDF are relieved by a contingent of the NUF at the earliest opportunity.
9. Recommendations, CTSAMVM recommends that:
- a. ITGoNU to ensure that all military actions comply with the CoHA (Agreement on the Cessation of Hostilities) and R-ARCSS (Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of

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the Conflict in South Sudan) provisions to protect civilian populations and prevent retaliatory actions against non-combatants.

- b. RTGoNU to accelerate the deployment of the Necessary Unified Forces in Nasir County to stabilise the area and promote trust and confidence among the civil population.
- c. All parties involved in the conflict that led to the death, injuries and displacement of civilians should be formally investigated and held accountable for their actions.
- d. CTSAMVM recommends that all armed civilian groups are disarmed to reduce the likelihood of further conflict with the SSPDF and among themselves. An attempt to implement a DDR programme at this time would likely exacerbate tensions in the area. Confidence building measures such as a NUF deployment to replace the SSPDF garrisoned at Nasir Barracks (*3Km West of Nasir Town, referred to within transcripts as Wech Yaradiw*), will almost certainly be a necessary prerequisite.
- e. RJMEC and the IGAD Council of Ministers to take all appropriate and timely action at the political level as a response to violation reports to ensure those responsible are held to account.

