

S Sudan attacks: US ups pressure; general arrested
By Charlton Doki and Jason Straziuso, Associated Press
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JUBA, South Sudan (AP) — U.S. political leaders are increasing pressure on South Sudan's young government to prevent ethnically motivated attacks by members of its military, pressure that may have led to the arrest Wednesday of an army general accused of human rights violations.

A medical aid group, meanwhile, said Wednesday that around 90,000 people are still missing and likely hiding in fear after ethnic violence last month.

South Sudan peacefully broke away from Sudan in 2011 after a brutal civil war and years of effort by U.S. leaders, but since then the country has seen multiple bouts of ethnic violence in rural Jonglei state. Attacks against the minority Murle ethnic group last month caused the deaths of 328 people, according to a Murle leader, and sent tens of thousands of Murle fleeing into the bush.

Doctors Without Borders said Wednesday it is concerned that its doctors have seen very few cases of Murle men wounded in the fighting. The group said that patients tell them that wounded men fear potential attacks from government soldiers or an enemy ethnic group, the Lou Nuer, attacks that have brought new U.S. pressure.

Responding to that pressure, South Sudan's military on Wednesday said it has arrested Gen. James Otong, who was in charge of a disarmament campaign launched in Pibor Country of Jonglei last year, as well as a counter insurgency campaign against rebels who follow David Yau Yau. In both operations soldiers were accused of raping, killing, looting and destroying civilian property.

Two soldiers accused of killing two women outside Pibor town last month were also arrested. "They have been investigated and are already being court-martialed," military spokesman Col. Philip Aguer said. Aguer said the army is also investigating the killing by government forces of another wildlife officer with the rank of brigadier general from the Murle ethnic group.

The arrests come shortly after the U.S. greatly increased diplomatic pressure to prevent further ethnic clashes. Secretary of State John Kerry last month phoned South Sudan President Salva Kiir, and U.S. Senate and House leaders last week expressed concern over ethnically motivated violence in a letter to Kiir that suggested members of his military are assisting in the attacks against the Murle.

"Multiple reports indicate that factions of the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) have engaged in or provided support for gross human rights violations against civilian populations and have incited ethnic violence," the letter said, adding: "Reports of ethnically-motivated violence directed against the Murle ethnic group are particularly disturbing."

The U.S. leaders reminded Kiir that South Sudan — a country of predominantly black Africans — fought against "a regime that sought to destroy populations based upon their ethnic identity," a reference to the mostly Arab Sudan. The letter added: "To engage in such practices now betrays the spirit in which the country of South Sudan was born and the historical basis for the United States' support."

Kerry urged Kiir to protect civilians and take steps to halt ethnically motivated violence in Jonglei. He said members of the SPLA must be held accountable.

The U.N. military mission in South Sudan said this week it has increased its patrols in Jonglei's Pibor Country to allow civilians to safely return to their towns and have access food distribution points. Doctors Without Borders, though, said it is concerned that people are arriving in villages "and sit all day waiting for food."

The rush of U.S. attention to South Sudan's human rights record reflects a series of human rights abuses in the country, said a congressional aide in Washington, D.C. who attended a classified briefing by the

State Department on South Sudan. The aide insisted on anonymity because he was not authorized to speak about a classified briefing.

The government of South Sudan is fighting rebels in Jonglei associated with Yau Yau, a member of the Murle community. That rebellion — and the effort to quash it — appears to have made all members of the Murle community potential targets for attacks.

The attacks on the Murle have sparked a debate about whether South Sudan is providing state support for genocide, but for now the U.S. is "skirting around the edges" of such language, the aide said.

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