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# South Sudan Conflict Escalation – UN Warns of War Crimes, 280,000 Displaced

22 March 2026

CURATED &amp; WRITTEN BY

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# South Sudan Conflict Escalation — UN Warns of War Crimes, 280,000 Displaced

22 March 2026 · 3 min read · 2 tags

## WHY IN NEWS

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Turk has urged an immediate ceasefire in South Sudan as the conflict between the South Sudan People’s Defence Forces (SSPDF) and opposition forces escalates dramatically, with over 280,000 people displaced and war crimes fears mounting.

## South Sudan: The World’s Youngest Country in Crisis Again

### Scale of the Crisis

INDICATOR	DATA
People displaced	280,000+ (since December 2025)
Civilians killed	160+ in 17 days (March 2026)
Single-day massacre	139 killed in Abiemnom on March 1
Affected states	Jonglei, Lakes, Upper Nile

On March 6, the military issued an **evacuation order** for all civilians in Akobo town and directed the closure of the **UNMISS (UN Mission in South Sudan) temporary operating base** in Akobo — a deeply alarming move that restricts humanitarian access.

### Background: A Fractured Peace

South Sudan gained independence on **July 9, 2011** — the **world’s youngest country**. However, it has been plagued by civil war since December 2013 when a political dispute between President **Salva Kiir** (Dinka) and Vice President **Riek Machar** (Nuer) turned violent.

### Timeline:

- **2011:** Independence from Sudan
- **2013:** Civil war erupts along ethnic lines (Dinka vs Nuer)
- **2015:** Agreement on Resolution of Conflict in South Sudan (ARCSS) — collapsed within a year
- **2018:** **Revitalized ARCSS (R-ARCSS)** signed in Addis Ababa — created unity government
- **2020-2024:** Fragile peace, delayed elections, continued localized violence

- **2025-2026:** R-ARCSS effectively collapses; full-scale hostilities resume in Jonglei

The 2013-2018 civil war killed an estimated **400,000 people** and displaced 4 million.

### **Ethnic Dimensions**

The current violence has strong ethnic dimensions, with fighters from the **Bul Nuer** ethnic group responsible for the Abiemnom massacre, and SSPDF forces and allied militias accused of targeting Nuer civilians in Jonglei. South Sudan has over **60 ethnic groups**, with the Dinka (~35%) and Nuer (~15%) being the largest.

### **India's Role**

India is one of the **largest contributors** to UNMISS, with approximately **2,400 peacekeepers** deployed. Indian engineers and medical units have been providing critical infrastructure and healthcare in South Sudan.

### **International Response**

- **UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres** expressed “deep concern” over heightened violence and community targeting
- **OHCHR:** Called for independent investigation into potential war crimes
- **AU (African Union):** Urged parties to return to R-ARCSS framework
- **IGAD (Intergovernmental Authority on Development):** Regional mediation body for the Horn of Africa; has been the primary mediator

#### **UPSC RELEVANCE**

South Sudan independence year, UNMISS, R-ARCSS, IGAD, India's peacekeeping contribution.

#### **MAINS GS-2:**

India's role in UN peacekeeping, conflict resolution mechanisms, ethnic conflicts and state-building challenges in new nations.

#### **MAINS GS-1:**

Post-colonial state formation in Africa.

## ★ FACTS CORNER — KNOWLEDGE PEDIA

### SOUTH SUDAN — KEY DATA:

Independence: July 9, 2011 (world's youngest country)

Capital: Juba

President: Salva Kiir Mayardit

Ethnic groups: 60+ (Dinka ~35%, Nuer ~15%)

Civil war (2013-18): ~400,000 killed, 4 million displaced

Peace agreement: R-ARCSS (September 2018, Addis Ababa)

### CURRENT CRISIS (2025-26):

Displaced: 280,000+ since December 2025

Killed: 160+ civilians in 17 days

Affected states: Jonglei, Lakes, Upper Nile

UNMISS base in Akobo: Ordered closed by military (March 6)

### INDIA AND UN PEACEKEEPING:

India's contribution to UNMISS: ~2,400 peacekeepers

India: Largest cumulative troop contributor to UN peacekeeping

Total Indian peacekeepers globally: ~5,500+ (2026)

India has lost 179+ peacekeepers in UN missions — highest among any country

### OTHER RELEVANT FACTS:

UNMISS (UN Mission in South Sudan): Established July 9, 2011

IGAD: Intergovernmental Authority on Development (8 member states in Horn of Africa)

IGAD members: Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Uganda

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights: Volker Turk (Austria, since 2022)

South Sudan HDI rank: Among lowest 3 globally

Sources: [OHCHR](#), [Al Jazeera](#), [ReliefWeb](#), [UN News](#)

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