

KEY ASKS SOUTH SUDAN

Averting Civil War and Protecting Civilians in South Sudan

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

South Sudan is standing on the precipice of a full-scale civil war. The 2018 Revitalized Peace Agreement (R-ARCSS) is unraveling following the detention of First Vice President Dr. Riek Machar and 22 other opposition leaders, and escalating clashes between government and opposition forces. Political maneuvering in Juba has culminated in controversial July 2026 constitutional amendments that delink the permanent constitution and national census from the December 22, 2026, elections, severely undermining the credibility of the democratic transition.

Why This Matters to U.S. Policy

Compounding this political crisis, the United States led a UN Security Council decision in April 2026 to drastically shrink the UN Mission in South Sudan's (UNMISS) mandate and resources. This reduction severely limits the mission's capacity to protect civilians, prevent atrocities, and support



democratic elections. Behind these high-level political and security fractures is a devastating human catastrophe: over two-thirds of the population requires life-saving assistance, while decades of war and recent climate shocks have left communities traumatized, displaced, and hungry. Without immediate, coordinated diplomatic intervention and sustained support for local peacebuilders, South Sudan risks sliding back into a catastrophic conflict.

BACKGROUND

Civic space has been shrinking for years, but the 2026 post-election militarized politics and succession uncertainties have accelerated democratic backsliding. While the economy is growing (6.3% GDP growth) with first oil production expected in late 2026, rising public debt and questions over oil revenue transparency pose significant risks. Furthermore, Uganda hosts two million refugees, but a severe funding shortfall is crippling food, health, and protection services, threatening social cohesion.

Political and Security Developments

The Human Cost of the Crisis

- **Mass Displacement and Hunger:** Over 10 million people (more than two-thirds of the population) need humanitarian aid in 2026. An estimated 7.5 million face severe food insecurity. Renewed communal violence has displaced 280,000 additional people this year, while 1.4 million refugees fleeing the conflict in Sudan have strained host communities.
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- **A Deepening Mental Health and Trauma Crisis:** Decades of conflict, combined with recent political violence and climate-induced disasters, have inflicted profound psychological wounds. The WHO estimates that 1 in 5 South Sudanese experience a mental health condition, with PTSD rates exceeding 34% in affected communities. This untreated trauma severely undermines social cohesion and reconciliation.
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- **The Climate-Conflict Nexus:** The lingering impacts of the 2024 El Niño event created a severe flood-drought paradox. Catastrophic floods in the Greater Upper Nile and prolonged droughts in the southeast have decimated livelihoods, intensifying deadly inter-communal violence over scarce grazing land and water resources.
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- **Civilians Bearing the Brunt of War:** Recent escalations in Jonglei, Upper Nile, and Equatoria have featured aerial bombardments and indiscriminate attacks. Civilians are facing increased conflict-related sexual violence, child abduction, and a 63% increase in blocked humanitarian access in the first half of 2026.

KEY ASKS

U.S. GOVERNMENT

1. Reverse UNMISS Mandate Cuts to Protect Civilians from Atrocities: Reconsider the April 2026 decision, led by the US, to narrow UNMISS's mandate and reduce its troop and civilian footprint. Shrinking the mission's capacity for early warning, conflict prevention, and electoral support directly increases the risk of atrocity crimes. The US must urge the UN Security Council to restore UNMISS's resources to ensure robust civilian protection and support for a credible democratic transition.
2. Demand the Release of Political Detainees and Inclusive Dialogue: Use diplomatic leverage to call for the immediate and unconditional release of First Vice President Riek Machar and the 22 detained opposition leaders. The US must press President Salva Kiir's government to cease politically motivated detentions, return to the power-sharing framework of the R-ARCSS, and engage in good-faith mediation with regional bodies (AU, IGAD) to prevent a return to nationwide conflict.
3. Scale Up Life-Saving Humanitarian and Trauma-Informed Aid: Increase flexible funding for life-saving humanitarian interventions, ensuring unimpeded access to conflict-affected and climate-impacted communities. Crucially, integrate and fund mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) programs to address the severe, untreated trauma and PTSD afflicting millions of South Sudanese, which is vital for long-term reconciliation and social cohesion.
4. Empower Local Peacebuilders and Protect Civic Space: Increase direct funding to South Sudanese civil society organizations, faith-based institutions, and women-led movements. These local actors are the backbone of grassroots conflict prevention, transitional justice, and community healing. Concurrently, diplomatic engagement should be tied to measurable improvements in human rights and the protection of civic space ahead of the December 2026 elections.

KEY ASKS

UNITED NATIONS AND DIPLOMATIC MISSIONS

1. Mediate an Inclusive Political Resolution to Avert Civil War:
Apply coordinated diplomatic pressure on all signatories to return to the R-ARCSS framework. The UN and international partners must facilitate dialogue between the government and the opposition to resolve the power-sharing crisis, cease hostilities, and halt the alarming spread of violence in Jonglei, Upper Nile, and Equatoria.
2. Safeguard Credible Elections and Constitutional Integrity:
Express deep concern over the July 2026 constitutional amendments that delink the permanent constitution and national census from December 22, 2026, elections. The international community must insist that these foundational democratic benchmarks are met to ensure the elections are free, fair, inclusive, and credible, rather than a rushed exercise that exacerbates divisions.
3. Renew and Strictly Enforce the UN Arms Embargo:
Advocate for the renewal of the UN arms embargo on South Sudan beyond May 2027. Furthermore, strengthen enforcement mechanisms by holding member states and regional actors accountable for facilitating the transfer of weapons and military assistance that fuel both political violence and deadly inter-communal cattle raiding.
4. Support Regional Mediation and Transitional Justice:
Strengthen support for AU and IGAD-led mediation efforts to restore trust between political leaders. Concurrently, call upon the African Union to hasten the selection and deployment of commissioners for the Commission for Truth Reconciliation and Healing to address the deep historical and recent traumas of the South Sudanese people.

KEY ASKS

RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES AND CIVIL SOCIETY

1. Advocate for Peace, Dialogue, and the Release of Detainees: Leverage the moral authority of faith-based and civil society networks to demand an immediate end to political violence and the release of VP Machar and other detainees. Call upon political leaders to prioritize the lives and livelihoods of citizens over political grievances and urge a return to the provisions of the peace agreement.
2. Mobilize Resources for Grassroots Healing and Humanitarian Aid: Channel financial and material support directly to South Sudanese local peacebuilders, faith-based institutions, and women's groups. These organizations are uniquely positioned to provide life-saving humanitarian relief, facilitate inter-communal dialogue, and deliver trauma healing and psychosocial support in areas where international actors cannot reach.
3. Amplify the Voices of the Marginalized and Climate-Impacted: Ensure that IDPs, refugees, women and youth devastated by the climate-conflict nexus meaningfully participate in peacebuilding, and in advocacy for shape policies addressing vulnerability, displacement, and conflict.
4. Support electoral integrity and accountability: Strengthen independent accountability mechanisms and support credible, transparent electoral institutions and processes
5. Sustain Global Advocacy and Solidarity Networks: Work with global ecumenical, interfaith, and civil society networks to ensure South Sudan remains on the international agenda. Prevent the country from being forgotten by the global community and advocate fiercely with international donors and governments to maintain humanitarian and peacebuilding support.

ABOUT THE CONVENERS

The American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) Salama Hub and the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) jointly implement the Horn of Africa Research and Advocacy Joint Project, an initiative established to respond to the complex and evolving peace and security challenges facing the Horn of Africa. The project convenes a diverse coalition of civil society organizations, faith leaders from multiple religious traditions, women and youth-led movements, and academic institutions to promote collaborative research and advocacy on peace and security in the Horn of Africa.

Through this partnership, AFSC and AACC work to address the root causes of violent conflict, militarization, shrinking civic and democratic space, and the humanitarian crises affecting communities across the region. By fostering inclusive dialogue, supporting locally led solutions, and amplifying the voices of affected communities in key policy and advocacy forums, including the United Nations, African Union, and United States Government, the project seeks to advance sustainable peace throughout the Horn of Africa.

ABOUT AFSC

The American Friends Service Committee, AFSC, is a 109-year Quaker international NGO (1917-2026) and a co-recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize on behalf of all Quakers (1947). AFSC promotes a world free of violence, inequality, and oppression. We work with people and partners worldwide of all faiths and backgrounds to meet urgent community needs, challenge injustice, and build peace. AFSC is particularly active in the Horn of Africa, where we have created the Salama Hub, a research and advocacy program for peace and stability.

The AFSC's Salama Hub, a research and advocacy program, works for peace and stability in the Horn of Africa by strengthening local civil society organizations and faith leaders in influencing policies from research. It also fosters community-led healing and reconciliation. What makes it unique is its African-led research, that connects issues from the communities to the policy level. The program presents an opportunity for civil society organizations (CSOs) and faith-based organizations (FBOs) capacities to be strengthened. The program works with a wide range of partners—from local groups to regional and international bodies like the African Union, IGAD, European Union, and the U.S. policymakers—to ensure these local insights directly influence policies and social dynamics.

ABOUT AACC

The All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) is a continental ecumenical body that accounts for over 200 million Christians across the African continent. AACC is the largest association of Protestant, Anglican, Orthodox, and Indigenous churches in Africa, and a member of the worldwide ecumenical network. As an ecumenical body, AACC is a fellowship of more than 215 members comprising of Churches, National Christian Councils (NCCs), theological and lay training institutions, and other Christian organizations in 43 African countries.

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SECOND UNITED STATES ADVOCACY TOUR 2026

CONTACT

Pauline Muchina
pmuchina@afsc.org
Phone: 202-4154112