

**Is There Any Hope for Peace in South Sudan?**

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JUBA, South Sudan — For nearly two weeks, they have hunkered in a schoolyard with nothing to do and nowhere else to go, dozens of people battling hunger, swarms of mosquitoes — and fear.

“I just want peace so I can go back to school,” said Betty Christian, a chatty 19-year-old who fled her home here in the capital, Juba, when clashes erupted across the city this month. As she ran to find shelter, she passed soldiers who debated whether to shoot her, she said. When they decided not to shoot because she was female, she thanked them.

Eventually, Ms. Christian made her way to this makeshift displacement site with her aunt and several of her cousins. But she has not heard from her mother since the gunfire began, and does not know where to find her.

South Sudan’s civil war is supposed to be over. In April, after more than two years of conflict that killed tens of thousands of people, the opposition leader, Riek Machar, returned to Juba with nearly 1,400 troops to resume his post as the vice president to his wartime rival, President Salva Kiir.

To steady South Sudan, the world’s newest nation, Mr. Kiir and Mr. Machar formed a transitional government, and for months soldiers from both sides of the conflict endured a tense coexistence in Juba.

Then, on July 7, a checkpoint shootout between the rival sides ended in the deaths of five soldiers who were loyal to the president. The next day, gunfire erupted at the presidential palace as Mr. Kiir and Mr. Machar were meeting inside.

By July 10, heavy artillery could be heard all over Juba as the two sides fell back to their old war footing and took up arms once again. Hundreds of soldiers and civilians lost their lives in the crossfire.

A cease-fire agreed upon last week has largely held across the capital. But Mr. Machar maintains the recent fighting was part of a deliberate plot against him and his soldiers. He still fears for his safety, he said, and was in hiding at an undisclosed location not far from Juba.

On Thursday, Mr. Kiir issued a statement calling for Mr. Machar to return to the capital, and asked for a response within 48 hours. The statement, however, did not clarify what would happen if the vice president failed to do so.

“If Riek Machar comes back to Juba without attack forces, there will not be any other problem,” said the president’s spokesman, Ateny Wek Ateny.Mr. Machar has said he would return to Juba only when other nations in the region send troops here to serve as a buffer.

At an African Union summit meeting this week in Rwanda, representatives of Mr. Machar accused Mr. Kiir’s government of targeting opposition members, saying that the army had used helicopter gunships to destroy Mr. Machar’s residence during the clashes.

The African Union has called for the deployment of regional forces in South Sudan, with a stronger mandate than that of the approximately 12,000 United Nations peacekeeping troops already stationed here. But Mr. Kiir has said he would not allow additional international forces. The peace plan that officially ended the war, which called on the former rivals to work together, appears to be unraveling.

 Mr. Machar’s troops have been driven out of Juba, leaving Mr. Kiir’s forces in control of the capital. Since then, some opposition members — while serving as ministers in the transitional government — have faced intimidation and, in at least one case, assault.

“The transitional government cannot operate under the current situation of intimidation,” Mr. Machar said. “People are fearing for their lives, and the president cannot protect me. After all, it was started by me being targeted.”

With its leader in hiding, the opposition has become increasingly fractured. Some of those loyal to Mr. Machar have accused Mr. Kiir’s government of trying to unilaterally appoint the mining minister, Taban Deng Gai, who represented Mr. Machar during last year’s peace negotiations, as the new head of the opposition.

“The idea of unity of command has always been a fictitious idea in the context of South Sudan; that applies to Riek Machar and to Salva Kiir as well,” said Harry Verhoeven, a South Sudan expert and professor of government at Georgetown University. “As we saw during the war, sometimes their generals take command on their own. That’s one of the big problems in general with the peace process.”

The situation is also tense outside Juba. Deadly skirmishes have continued to erupt in several states since the peace agreement was signed last year. In the northeast, where much of the civil war fighting occurred, the government is warning militias not to take up arms in response to the clashes in the capital.

Civilians should not get involved because “the conflict is between rival militaries, and there are political dimensions,” said Lul Ruai Koang, an army spokesman loyal to Mr. Kiir, warning that the government would launch airstrikes if civilians in the northeast began to mobilize.

Many residents of Juba say the politics behind the recent bloodshed are perplexing and, ultimately, beside the point. They are simply frustrated with a government that, they say, has repeatedly failed to ensure peace and stability for its people.

While the streets of the capital are lively once more, tensions still remain. Thousands of people remain displaced by the latest round of fighting. The smell of dead bodies still wafts through some of the worst-hit areas. There has been an uptick in robberies; abandoned homes, as well as the World Food Program’s main warehouse, which stores more than 4,000 tons of food for emergency assistance, have been looted.

Like so many of the displaced people around her, Ms. Christian says she cannot return home. Much of her neighborhood has been destroyed. The charred hulks of government tanks sit along the road. What was once a row of small shops has been decimated, leaving behind heaps of corrugated steel.

Scattered among bullet casings are mementos of lost livelihoods: locks of copper-colored hair extensions, children’s schoolbooks, scraps of clothing.

But Ms. Christian is also afraid to go to the United Nations displacement camps, citing ethnic divisions that played a role in the civil war. Mr. Kiir belongs to the Dinka ethnic group, South Sudan’s largest, while Mr. Machar is a member of the Nuer, which is believed to be the second largest. Tens of thousands, mostly members of the Nuer, fled to the camps after being targeted by government forces in Juba when South Sudan’s civil war began in 2013.

Ms. Christian is Equatorian, a catchall term that encompasses several ethnic groups from the country’s southern regions. She says she fears mistreatment at the camps because she is not Nuer, and she does not trust the United Nations peacekeepers to protect her.

She is also afraid of being exposed to cholera. A new outbreak of the disease, in the capital and across the country, has made an already desperate situation worse.

“The fighting has pushed people into more crowded areas, and they don’t have the access they usually have to food or clean water,” said Maria Guevara, medical coordinator for Doctors Without Borders, which has set up four clinics in Juba and is delivering water despite a number of recent staff evacuations in response to the clashes. “That will obviously contribute to a higher risk of spreading.”

Ms. Christian says she has no idea where to go, or how to stay safe. She also does not know who to blame, because she has heard that both Mr. Kiir and Mr. Machar have called for peace.

“But they don’t hear,” she added. “The soldiers — they don’t hear.”

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