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**For Immediate Release**

## **South Sudan: Thousands Still Missing**

***Ratify UN Treaty, Investigate, Ensure Truth, Justice, and Healing***

(Nairobi, August 28, 2020) – [South Sudan](#) should investigate the fate and whereabouts of scores of victims of enforced disappearances and those still missing from years of civil war, [Human Rights Watch](#) and [Remembering the Ones We Lost](#) said today. On August 30, the world marks the International Day of the Disappeared.

Since the conflict broke out in December 2013, the United Nations and other organizations including Human Rights Watch have documented major human rights violations including attacks on civilians and targeted killings, abductions, and detentions by the parties to the conflict. An unknown number of people are still missing.

“People have vanished in South Sudan, and are presumed detained or dead,” said [Jehanne Henry](#), East Africa director at Human Rights Watch. “These unresolved cases are spreading fear and terror among the public. The government needs to acknowledge that people are still missing and take concrete steps to investigate and hold those responsible to account.”

Remembering The Ones We Lost, a local initiative established in 2014, has documented 280 names of missing people since December 2013, some of whom were abducted or detained by security forces and meet the definition of enforced disappearance. These figures, based on interviews with families of victims, represent a fraction of the numbers of those missing in South Sudan. The International Committee of the Red Cross [reported in 2019](#) that over 4,000 people were still missing since the war started and their fate or whereabouts remained unknown.

In many cases, the military and National Security Service (NSS) were implicated in the disappearances. In one example, in January 2017, Dong Samuel Luak, a prominent South Sudanese lawyer and human rights activist, and Aggrey Ezbon Idri, a member of the political opposition, were abducted [from the streets of Nairobi, Kenya](#). More than two years later, the United Nations Panel of Experts on South Sudan [issued a report](#) finding that South Sudan’s National Security Service was responsible for kidnapping them and that it is “highly probable” that the two were executed on January 30, 2017.

South Sudan’s government has not investigated the disappearances of the men or ensured accountability for them. Kenyan police [opened an investigation](#), but it was never concluded.

Enforced disappearances arise when people acting on behalf of the government arrest, detain, or abduct people and then refuse to acknowledge the act or conceal the whereabouts or what happened to them. International law prohibits enforced disappearances, which violate

fundamental rights to liberty and security, and to be free from torture or cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment.

The International Convention on the Protection on All Persons from Enforced Disappearances (ICPPED) provides that “no one shall be subjected to enforced disappearance” and imposes an absolute ban on secret detentions. It also requires countries to end abusive practices that facilitate enforced disappearances including arbitrary incommunicado detention, torture, and extrajudicial executions. South Sudan is not a party to the treaty.

International law [requires](#) the parties to a conflict to account for people reported missing and provide their family members with any information the authorities have about what happened to them. The United Nations Security Council, in a landmark [resolution](#) in 2019, called on parties to armed conflicts globally to strengthen efforts toward uncovering what happened to those missing and giving closure to their families. While some of those reported missing may turn out to have been forcibly disappeared, others may have been abducted or detained by other people, forcefully recruited into armed groups, or fled, perished, or met other outcomes. But in South Sudan, neither the government’s army, nor armed opposition groups, have properly accounted for the missing.

The authorities have also not begun to address Sudanese government abuses during the South’s long war for independence, which ended in 2005. In one example, in the early 1990s, during a brutal crackdown by Sudan’s army on the civilian population in the Equatoria region, at least 300 civilians were executed and another [230 people](#) including clergy, aid workers, and members of Southern security forces were arrested and [never accounted for](#). These abuses continue to have lasting impact on families of victims today and enhance impunity. South Sudan should reckon with past abuses, including those committed by the Sudanese government and militia, and Southern rebel forces in the territory that is now South Sudan, the groups said.

The authorities should take immediate, concrete steps by ratifying the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance and end the practices of unlawful and secret detentions by its security forces. They should also set up the transitional justice bodies provided for in the 2015 and 2018 peace agreements. They include a Commission for Truth, Reconciliation, and Healing; a Compensation and Reparations Authority; and a hybrid court, with officials from South Sudan and elsewhere in Africa, to address abuses from the recent conflict period.

These envisioned bodies have [potential to help stem the cycle of violence](#) and bring needed redress and healing to victims of abuses committed since December 2013, but there has been no progress to establish them, despite years of pressure.

“South Sudan’s leaders have been preoccupied with power sharing rather than addressing the gravity and impact of past and ongoing conflict-related abuses,” said Daud Gideon, executive director of Remembering The Ones We Lost. “Another year should not pass without justice for

the countless missing and their families, who continue to suffer in vain.”

For selected cases, please see below.

**For more Human Rights Watch reporting on South Sudan, please visit:**

<https://www.hrw.org/africa/south-sudan>

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### **Selected Cases of Alleged Enforced Disappearances and Missing Persons**

**Drapaga Christopher**, 23, was arrested by South Sudan’s government forces on July 12, 2016, in Kerepi, Eastern Equatoria, on suspicion of supplying food to rebel fighters in the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement Army-in Opposition (SPLA/IO). A family member told Remembering The Ones We Lost that he was taken to government barracks the same day and tortured, and that his whereabouts remain unknown.

**Mary Selwa Michael**, 26, has been missing since May 9, 2020, during a confrontation in Lainya between government forces and rebel forces from the National Salvation Front loyal to General Thomas Cirillo. Family members told Remembering The Ones we Lost that they suspect she may have been abducted but have not been able to obtain information from the authorities.

**Gatchock Gatluak Nyang**, 31, from the Nuer ethnic group, disappeared on December 19, 2013 in the Gumbo neighborhood of Juba, where he lived. A relative told Remembering The Ones we Lost that he had gone to a nearby shop. They suspected that he may have been arrested or killed during the [crackdown by government forces against Nuer civilians](#) in Juba during the initial days of the conflict.

**Lodu Yuggu**, a 2-year-old boy, was traveling with his mother by bus from Juba to Lobonok on April 21, 2017. Unidentified gunmen ambushed the bus in the bush and took away all the children under 10, his mother told Remembering The Ones we Lost.

**Clement Lochio Lomornana**, a journalist and photographer with Gurtong Media, and two brothers, **Amin Venansio** and **Nailo Venansio**, were [arrested at their homes](#) in Chukudum, Budi county, by South Sudan’s military on August 6, 2015, and detained in military barracks in Budi. The three were [reportedly tortured](#) in detention, the UN said.

The Venansios were allowed family visits but Lochio Lomornana was not. Lochio Lomornana and Nailo Venansio were [last seen](#) on August 15, 2015 being forced into a military vehicle. There has been no further information on their whereabouts. Media reports say that family members tried to locate the three in military barracks and other detention sites in Torit, Kapoeta, and Juba, but the authorities denied arresting them and the three are presumed dead.

**Dong Samuel Luak**, a renowned South Sudanese human rights lawyer and activist, and **Aggrey Idri**, a vocal government critic and member of the opposition, were abducted off the streets of Nairobi on January 23 and 24, 2017, respectively by people believed to be affiliated with South Sudan's and Kenya's security agencies. Multiple witnesses told Human Rights Watch that the two men had been seen at the National Security Service Blue House detention facility in Juba. A 2019 report by the UN Panel of Experts on South Sudan said that the men were transported to South Sudan on a commercial airline, with the support of the South Sudanese embassy in Kenya, on January 27, 2017.

Upon arrival, they were driven to the security agency's headquarters in Juba and detained at the Blue House, then moved to the agency's training centre in Luri. The panel concluded it was "highly probable" the two men were killed there on January 30, 2017 on orders from the commander of the National Security Service training and detention facilities in Luri, the commander of the National Security Service, Central Division and, ultimately, Lieutenant General Akol Koor Kuc, the director general of the internal security bureau. The government has neither acknowledged nor investigated the kidnapping or apparent death of the two men.

**Nelson James Adieng**, an airline company staff member, was arrested on May 4, 2017 by the head of security personnel in the National Security Service "protection unit" at Juba International Airport. His family has been unable to find out anything about what happened to him from the authorities. His brother told Human Rights Watch that attempts to seek information from both the police and the security agency authorities have not yielded results.

**Anthony Nyero**, a staff member of the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) Civil Affairs Division based in Torit was arrested by security agency officers on the evening of September 17, 2014, at a market in Torit. He was immediately taken to Juba and detained at the Riverside detention facility. Witnesses told Human Rights Watch that Nyero was transferred to the Blue House in June 2015. In January 2016, he was transferred back to the Riverside detention facility. Efforts by his family and his employer to find out what happened to him have led nowhere.

**James Lual** also worked for the UN mission as a security guard based in Wau. Witnesses told Human Rights Watch that the security agency arrested him in Wau on August 23, 2014 and took him to Juba by air the next day. Like Nyero, he was initially detained at the Riverside facility. In early 2015, he was transferred to the Blue House. In January 2016, he was transferred back to Riverside and what happened to him after that has not been revealed.

**Richard Lokeya**, a Canadian-South Sudanese citizen, and **Dominic Lodai**, a youth from Chukudum, were arrested by Ugandan security forces on August 15, 2015 on accusations of

illegally crossing the border and of being rebels, and handed over to South Sudan's military intelligence in Gulu the next day. On August 18, they were transferred to Juba and held at the White House detention site in Giyada Military barracks in Juba. Reports by [media sources](#), said they were tortured by being pricked with needles, made to sit on a wooden chair with nails sticking out, kicked, and slapped. On August 22, they were removed from the White House and driven to an unknown location where, a witness said, they were killed. Authorities have to date not accounted for them.