

In South Sudan, mothers teaching daughters 'safer' ways to survive rape

Sexual attacks in South Sudan are so common that mothers now teach their daughters how to survive the ordeal of being raped, in such a way as to minimize the violence. That's according to Yasmin Sooka, chair of the [UN Commission on Human Rights](#), who was [speaking on Tuesday](#) in front of the Human Rights Council in Geneva, during its latest session.

She said that "the protracted conflict in South Sudan has had the most profound impact on women and girls, who have suffered sexual violence, including multiple rapes, at the hands of both government forces and opposition forces."

The Commission, she added, has documented countless incidents of "brutal rapes including multiple gang rapes, sexual slavery, abductions, forced marriage, forced pregnancy, forced abortion, and mutilation of sexual organs, as well as killing."

The on-going culture of sexual violence on all sides, comes despite the signing of a [Revitalized Agreement last September](#), which Ms. Sooka said had led to an "overall improvement" in peace and security, although fighting has continued in Yei state.

The world's youngest country has become riven by civil conflict between forces loyal to the President and his former Vice-President, since 2013, leading to thousands of deaths, more than 2.2 million refugees who have fled across the border, famine in some areas, and a devastated economy.

'Every societal norm' being broken

"The Commission was outraged by the testimony of many South Sudanese women who said that the risk of rape is so high in going out of the Protection of Civilians sites to forage for food and collect wood", said Ms. Sooka, "that they have had to teach their daughters how to respond to their rapists...to minimize the violence."

The rights expert also noted that thousands of youngsters had been recruited by commanders who promised them that they could loot villages and rape women and girls, in lieu of payment.

"These are not random incidents of sexual violence but a systematic widespread pattern and characteristic of the conflict in South Sudan, where rape and sexual violence are used as a tactic of warfare against women and girls by all of the warring parties to sow terror and fear amongst the civilian population", said the Commission Chairperson.

"No one is safe – not young boys, the elderly or the disabled, as the

belligerents break every societal norm that has long held the people of South Sudan together.”

Responding to the claims, South Sudan’s Minister of Justice and Constitutional Affairs, Paulino Wanawilla Unango, insisted that sexual offences were punishable under national law.

Mr. Unango also told the Human Rights Council that there had been “no serious military engagement” between Government forces and any other armed group.