

[New UN report cites violations of rights to freedom of opinion and expression in South Sudan](#)

Undue restrictions on freedom of expression are having a “chilling effect” and “further shrinking the space for debate and dissent” in war-torn South Sudan, a new United Nations human rights report has revealed.

Co-authored by the UN Mission in the country ([UNMISS](#)) and the Organization’s human rights wing, [OHCHR](#), the report also warned that incitement to hatred continues to cause mistrust, fear and violence as well as of a growing climate of self-censorship in the world’s youngest country.

“[South Sudan’s] people have been denied the right to life, the right to justice, and, as this report details, the right to freedom of opinion and expression – [rights that are not luxuries but are essential to bring about peace](#) and development,” said the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein, in a news release announcing the findings.

Across South Sudan, five years of ongoing conflict has uprooted more than four million people but peace efforts are under way both internationally and at grassroots level to end violence.

“It is vital that the voices of all the people of South Sudan are heard so that genuine, inclusive and durable peace can be achieved,” said the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and head of UNMISS, David Shearer.

“All parties to the conflict must respect people’s right to freedom of expression regardless of their ethnicity, beliefs or political views,” he stressed.

Rights are not luxuries but are essential to bring about peace and development – *High Commissioner Zeid*

The [report](#) identifies 60 verified incidents – including killing, arbitrary arrest and detention, closure, suspension or censorship of newspapers, and blocking of websites – in the period from July 2016 to December 2017.

It also found that Government security forces, including the National Security Service, Sudan People’s Liberation Army, and the South Sudan National Police Service, were responsible for two-thirds of the verified cases of human rights violations.

However, many victims said they had not lodged formal complaints because of fear of reprisals by influential people and a lack of trust in institutions including law enforcement and the judiciary, notes the report.

To address the situation, the report urges amendment to legislation to decriminalize defamation and ensure that powers given to security forces do not infringe on the legitimate exercise of the right to freedom of expression.

It also calls on all armed forces to guarantee the protection of journalists, civil society, and human rights defenders and respect their right to monitor and report on the armed conflict; as well as urges the Government to ensure that violations of the right to freedom of expression are promptly investigated and prosecuted.

In the news release, OHCHR also noted that the violations contained in the report include only those within the Government-controlled territory and not those in the opposition-held areas due to insecurity and access restrictions.