

South Sudan: First UN safe haven for displaced civilians closes

20 December 2017 – The first ‘Protection of Civilians’ site – a place of refuge and safety set up next to a United Nations base in South Sudan – has been successfully closed after internally displaced families expressed the desire and confidence to return to their homes, the UN mission in the country said Wednesday.

“It’s gratifying to finally see people [feel safe enough](#) to go home,” said the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the UN Mission in South Sudan ([UNMISS](#)), David Shearer.

“There is conflict across much of South Sudan where people fear for their lives. But in some areas, like Melut, we are able to help people out of the camps back to their communities,” he added.

The world’s youngest country, South Sudan has spent much of its short life mired in conflict, riven by a political face-off between President Salva Kiir and his then former Vice-President Riek Machar that erupted into full-blown war late in 2013.

The site, next to the UN base in Melut in the Upper Nile region, had provided sanctuary to hundreds of families since the conflict broke out four years ago in the world’s youngest nation.

Over the past week, these families have been returned to their homes with the assistance of UNMISS and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees ([UNHCR](#)) in partnership with other humanitarian agencies.

VIDEO: The United Nations peacekeeping mission in South Sudan, UNMISS, closed one of the sites where it was providing sanctuary for families in the wake of the conflict that broke out four years ago.

Of the 562 recently registered, most chose to settle in Melut town given the improved security situation there. Approximately 255 were relocated elsewhere with some choosing to shift to the Malakal site because of personal protection needs while others moved home to Renk, Ulang, Maban and Wau.

There has been significant consultation with the community and humanitarian agencies about the relocation process and ensuring the families continue to receive assistance for returns.

The protection of civilians is primarily the South Sudan government’s responsibility but, in many cases, people have fled from government security forces.

UNMISS provides sanctuary to almost 210,000 internally displaced people at

seven locations across South Sudan. These camps are a last resort and exist only to shelter people who genuinely fear for their lives.

“We will look at every camp individually to see if the conditions allow people to return home voluntarily and safely. Where these conditions exist, we will try to assist people back,” said Mr. Shearer. “Camps are not a long-term solution and certainly not the right place to bring up children or live with dignity.”

The closure of the site at Melut will enable the peacekeeping troops based there to shift their focus from guarding the camp to increasing patrols in the surrounding area. Extending their protective presence into other communities will save lives and build confidence so that, over time, more people will feel safe enough to return home.

Learn more about the UN Mission in South Sudan [here](#)