

# UN rights chief calls for release of hundreds abducted and abused in South Sudan

Hundreds of civilians who were taken by opposition forces in South Sudan's Western Equatoria region during an uptick in fighting are still missing, the UN's top rights official said on Thursday, in a call for their immediate release.

The development reportedly happened in April, ahead of the signing in August of a new peace agreement aimed at ending years of bloody civil war involving President Salva Kiir and former vice-President, Riek Machar, who has backing from the Sudan People's Liberation Army in-Opposition (SPLA-IO).

"Most of the abducted civilians are, as far as we know, still being held captive", said Michelle Bachelet, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. "The SPLA-IO (RM) must immediately release them, first and foremost the children."

The High Commissioner's appeal follows the publication of a UN [report](#) into grave rights abuses against villagers in South Sudan's Gbudue and Tambura states, both of which are in Western Equatoria region.

A new peace agreement has been signed which puts the onus and responsibility on the warring parties to ensure that no atrocities are committed in future – *David Shearer, Head, UNMISS*

It details testimonies from victims and witnesses that indicate how women and girls as young as 12 were abducted by opposition forces...then paraded and lined up for commanders to choose as "wives".

Some 900 people were abducted in total and 24,000 were forced to flee their homes, the report notes. Those who were not chosen were left for other fighters who subjected them to repeated rapes, while abducted young men and boys were forced to fight, or work as porters.

At least 28 villages were attacked by the same troops, along with a settlement for internally displaced people and a refugee camp, according to the report, which was compiled jointly by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights ([OHCHR](#)) and the UN peacekeeping mission in South Sudan, [UNMISS](#).



## UNMISS

A delegation of UN and humanitarian agencies travelled to remote Tumbura in Western Equatoria to see first-hand the plight of thousands of people who have fled escalating violence and are in urgent need of safe shelter and aid. 12 July 2018.

During these attacks, victims were subjected to “unlawful killings, abduction, rape, sexual slavery, forced recruitment and the destruction of property”, OHCHR said in a statement, which noted that three commanders had been identified who “allegedly had effective command and control of the forces committing these abuses, which may amount to war crimes”.

Government forces were also found to have harmed civilians in their offensives against SPLA-IO (RM) militia, the report said, noting that “these operations failed to distinguish between civilians and combatants”.

Head of UNMISS, David Shearer, expressed disappointment that the spike in violence happened while warring parties were negotiating a new peace agreement and despite reconciliation efforts in the region at the time.

“A new peace agreement has been signed which puts the onus and responsibility on the warring parties to ensure that no atrocities are committed in future,” Mr Shearer said. “UNMISS will be closely monitoring any potential violations and abuses.”

In addition to calling for the release of those taken during the attacks in Gbudue and Tumbura, High Commissioner Bachelet called for rights abusers to be held accountable.

“As part of the revitalised peace process, it is also essential that the Government of South Sudan acts to hold the perpetrators of the abuses and violations detailed in this report to account,” she said.