



**Alliance for  
Peacebuilding**

# Statement by the Alliance for Peacebuilding on Increasing Tensions in South Sudan

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **CONTACT**

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**Washington, D.C., USA.** – The [Alliance for Peacebuilding](https://www.allianceforpeacebuilding.org) (AfP), the leading nonpartisan global network of 150+ members working in 181 countries to end violent conflict and build sustainable peace, is deeply concerned about the deteriorating situation in South Sudan. Social, political, and ethnic tensions are significantly escalating and the threat of [famine](#) looms large. Following the world gathering for the Summit for Democracy, the United States and international community partners must act now, using all available diplomatic, financial, and development tools, to prevent continued violence and conflict, and build sustainable peace and development in South Sudan.

In the 10 years since South Sudan's independence, deeply rooted and unaddressed [grievances](#), disenfranchisement, and a political struggle between President Kiir and Vice President Machar, led to violence along ethnic lines and eventually civil war in 2013. An estimated [400,000 people were killed and four million were internally displaced or fled](#) the country before a ceasefire and [power-sharing agreement](#) was reached in 2018. Today, a severe humanitarian crisis, stemming from [decades of conflict and exceptionally limited development](#), has left over [half its population facing acute food insecurity](#). COVID-19 is [exacerbating this crisis](#), as is major flooding driven by [climate change](#).

A pressing challenge that the international community must swiftly confront is the government's manifest corruption and mismanagement of state finances. Currently,



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[85%](#) of government revenue comes from oil, yet that money is rarely used for government services or to the benefit of South Sudan's people. When declining oil prices in 2020 triggered an [economic crisis](#) in the country, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) gave the government [over half a billion dollars in relief](#). The stopgap measure, alongside rebounding oil prices, helped prevent economic collapse. However, it did not address South Sudan's long-term economic, governance, justice, or human rights challenges. Further, the funds were given with [few tangible stipulations of reform](#). This large transfer of funds to a government rife with and well-known for corruption frustrated other donors and advocates from within and outside of the country. The government currently has little incentive to stop using its oil revenues and IMF funds as a slush fund for political elites.

In a recent audit of IMF funds for South Sudan, [millions were already unaccounted for](#). The International Crisis Group's October [report](#) provided further scathing details of gross and systemic mismanagement and patronage. An investigation by the United Nations Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan [noted](#) in September that Kiir and South Sudan's ruling elites diverted more than \$4 billion USD by 2012. Since 2018, they looted over \$73 million. The South Sudanese people lack confidence in the government as impunity runs rampant, [exacerbating political and ethnic tensions and undermining security](#). Although the 2018 peace deal included reforms meant to hold public finances accountable, decrease corruption, address serious human rights abuses, and more, the government failed to implement the vast majority of the deal.

The government is also using IMF funds to pay National Security Service (NSS) personnel who regularly and systematically [commit serious human rights abuses](#), including torture and other ill-treatment of detainees, arbitrary arrests, unlawful detentions, unlawful killings, enforced disappearances, forced returns, and violations of privacy. The NSS routinely [targets](#) civil society members, including human rights defenders, students, humanitarian aid workers, journalists, businessmen, and government critics. The NSS undertakes extensive technological surveillance and uses other fear tactics to [silence dissent](#). The escalation of threats and violence against civil society members in recent months reflects a troubling and [growing global trend of closing civic spaces](#).

Compounding South Sudan's increasing instability, [democratic backsliding is being accelerated by COVID-19 globally](#). As of 2020, approximately [75% of the global](#)



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[population](#) is living in a country with deteriorating freedoms. The Biden Administration's Summit for Democracy aims to confront authoritarianism, fight corruption, and promote respect for human rights. The U.S. and its international community partners must demonstrate their commitment to these goals through tangible actions in South Sudan. In keeping with the principles of the Democracy Summit, the international community and donors must act swiftly and in concert to demand financial reform; condemn the escalating violence; call for the cessation of and accountability for human rights abuses and war crimes; and work to create a viable democracy in the world's newest country.

AfP urges the international community, including the Troika states—the U.S., United Kingdom, and Norway—to urgently create a [coordinated strategy](#) towards South Sudan to: (1) address systemic corruption, human rights abuses, and widespread insecurity; (2) facilitate inclusive constitutional reform, law enforcement, elections, and fulsome implementation of the 2018 peace agreement; and (3) ensure protection for peaceful dissent, including by civil society members, against the NSS and other state security institutions.

Given South Sudan's existential reliance on external funds, the international community must formulate and enact a coordinated strategy to coerce President Kiir and those South Sudan's ruling elites who, together, are imperiling millions of lives. The strategy should demand and incentivize the government of South Sudan to undertake critical financial reforms to:

- Deposit all oil revenues into a single public account;
- Publicly disclose all government debts and revenues; and
- Institute safeguards to prevent the potential diversion of all government funds.

A featured component of the international community's coordinated strategy must be to utilize the threat of regulation, licensing, and additional certification requirements to commercial firms, their insurers, and banks to leverage the disclosure of their payments to the South Sudanese government—and promote, for the first time in the young country's history, the transparent flow of funds to the government.

Without immediate, coordinated international action to address the increasing social, political, and ethnic tensions in South Sudan, and the culture of corruption



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and impunity that has left people and economy of South Sudan turmoil, there is a serious threat of a resumption of civil war, widespread famine, and further destabilization of the region.

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*Named the “number one influencer and change agent” among peacebuilding institutions worldwide—AfP is a nonprofit and nonpartisan network of 150+ organizations working in 181 countries to prevent conflict, reduce violence, improve lives, and build sustainable peace. At our core, AfP cultivates a network to strengthen and advance the peacebuilding field, enabling peacebuilding organizations to achieve greater impact—tackling issues too large for any one organization to address alone.*