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South Sudan's Government is Attacking Hospitals and Blocking Civilians from Accessing Lifesaving Food, Medicine, and Supplies

New Report Shows Government is Blatantly Denying Humanitarian Access; Children and Women are Disproportionately Affected

NEW YORK – The government of South Sudan is using humanitarian aid as a weapon of war by preventing civilians from accessing essential services, attacking medical facilities and personnel, and imposing bureaucratic hurdles to prevent NGOs from functioning, Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict said in a new report issued today.

The report points out both parties to the conflict – the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) and the Sudan People's Liberation Army-in Opposition (SPLA-IO) – have repeatedly attacked medical facilities and personnel, and denied humanitarian access to civilian populations in desperate need of aid. **In 2016 and 2017, there were at least 50 attacks on medical facilities and 750 incidents involving denial of humanitarian access, according to multiple sources.** This has dangerously impacted children's health, leading to more deaths and injuries, as well as spikes in malnutrition and preventable diseases such as cholera and malaria, according to the report.

“Both sides have done everything from stealing medical supplies to killing health workers and blocking humanitarian convoys,” said Christine Monaghan, Watchlist's research officer and the report's author. “The government of South Sudan is also shamelessly using every bureaucratic tool imaginable to stop NGOs from doing their lifesaving work. These kinds of denials of humanitarian access are some of the worst we have seen in conflict, and have created a dire public health crisis for children and other innocent civilians.”



For example, the report points out that the government has taxed humanitarian organizations, demanded they pay for the release of aid to civilians, and increased work permit fees for foreigners from \$100 to \$10,000.

Monaghan visited South Sudan and Uganda last year to conduct research for the report. Watchlist interviewed more than 90 people, including South Sudanese refugees, humanitarian actors and medical personnel. The report, “Everyone and Everything is a Target’ The Impact on Children of Attacks on Health Care and Denial of Humanitarian Access in South Sudan,” lists a number of recommendations to address the escalating crisis. This includes calling on the UN Secretary-General to ensure both major parties to the conflict are listed as responsible for attacks on hospitals in his annual report on children and armed conflict, due out later this year.

As of December, at least 20 percent of South Sudan’s 1,900 hospitals had closed, and about 50 percent were functioning with extremely limited capacity, according to the UN Office of Coordination for Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). The longest-running cholera outbreak in history has spread to multiple parts of the country, and in 2016 famine was declared in two counties, according to OCHA.

Four million South Sudanese have been displaced and children and women make up to 85 percent of this number, according to OCHA. Health care systems have been strained beyond capacity to treat internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees.

Watchlist’s report, which looks at 2016 and 2017, focuses on three regions: Greater Upper Nile, Bahr el Ghazal, and Equatoria. It lists details of many incidents, and includes quotes from sources on the ground.

“Humanitarian aid is being used as a pawn in a Machiavellian game,” said a representative of a health organization. “Humanitarians are playing by the rules of International Humanitarian Law and parties to the conflict are playing a game by an entirely different set of rules.”

Today’s report is the third in a series focusing on attacks on health care and their impact on children. Watchlist issued a report on [Afghanistan](#) in March 2017 and [Yemen](#) in April 2017.

Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict is a New York-based global coalition that serves to end violations against children in armed conflict and guarantee their rights. For more information: <https://watchlist.org/>