

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

**Embargoed until: 00:01 GMT on 30 April 2020**

## South Sudan: Evidence of violations and illicit concealment of arms must spur UN to renew arms embargo

- *Amnesty International visited 12 military camps in South Sudan*
- *Site visits and satellite imagery reveal multiple forces violating arms embargo*
- *Child soldiers, illicit concealment and diversion of arms also documented*

The UN Security Council must renew and strengthen enforcement of the arms embargo on South Sudan, Amnesty International said today, exposing new evidence that multiple security forces are breaching it and concealing weapons amid a volatile security situation. Next month the Security Council is set to vote on a resolution that would renew the embargo, which currently expires on 31 May 2020.

Earlier this year, the organization's investigators gained access to 12 military training and cantonment sites across the country run by members of formerly opposed forces including the South Sudan People's Defence Forces (SSPDF), Sudan People's Liberation Army-In Opposition (SPLA-IO) and South Sudan Opposition Alliance (SSOA), as well as the so-called "Organized Forces" of the police, fire brigade, and wildlife service.

Amnesty International discovered evidence of newly imported small arms and ammunition, illicit concealment of weapons, and diversion of armoured vehicles for military uses not approved under the arms transfer licenses. Government and former opposition forces' reporting on security arrangements actively deceived Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD)-supported monitors, showing an urgent need for meticulous, independent verification.

"The African Union has dubbed 2020 the year to 'silence the guns' on the continent, which, as they have stated, includes taking measures to prevent UN arms embargo violations. Renewing the embargo on South Sudan is a crucial part of this effort. Weapons have been used to [commit horrific human rights violations and war crimes](#) throughout the conflict," said Deprose Muchena, Amnesty International's Director for East and Southern Africa.

"The UN arms embargo hasn't been a panacea, but the situation would almost certainly be worse without it in place. The ceasefire continues to be broken sporadically, the implementation of critical security, governance and accountability arrangements are persistently delayed, and South Sudan – awash with small arms – is also facing the public health crisis posed by COVID-19. Now is not the time to let even more weapons flow into this volatile mix."

### **Evidence of UN arms embargo violations**

Most of the hundreds of rifles and other small arms that Amnesty International investigators observed in the hands of soldiers were acquired prior to the embargo the UN Security Council imposed on all of South Sudan in July 2018. However, several bodyguards for prominent

generals from government and opposition forces alike, who would have first access to newly acquired weapons, carried models of Eastern European weapons never before documented in the country (see technical addendum for more details). Amnesty International therefore believes that these weapons were brought into South Sudan in violation of the arms embargo.

Amnesty International has also acquired verified photographs of ammunition used by the National Security Service (NSS) at Luri, a highly secretive NSS base outside South Sudan's capital, Juba. The images show Chinese cartridges manufactured in 2016, after China's last acknowledged sale to South Sudan. Either these cartridges breached the arms embargo, were secretly sold beforehand, or were acquired from a third-party seller who would have broken the embargo or illicitly diverted the ammunition.

Small arms imports are not the only likely violations. Sources have told Amnesty International that at the time the arms embargo was established, the South Sudan government's fleet of Mi-24 attack helicopters was dysfunctional and grounded. Since then it has acquired spare parts to refurbish the helicopters, violating the arms embargo.

Satellite imagery analysis by Amnesty International shows that several of the helicopters underwent significant maintenance at Luri and Juba International Airport in October 2018 and have been flown several times since. Two aircraft were missing twice from the ramp in Juba, on 4 March and 10 March 2019, and one was missing on 10 February 2020. There are many reasons the aircraft could have flown, but it is noteworthy that in March 2019, fighting took place against the National Salvation Front in Yei, in the southern part of the country. The Mi-24s are especially problematic in the context of South Sudan, where the heavy armed gunships have unfettered opportunity to strafe ground targets with rockets and machine guns and have been used in [attacks that have unlawfully killed and injured civilians](#).

"Just one of these attack helicopters costs USD \$36 million, and parts and maintenance come at a premium, particularly when these components violate a UN arms embargo. Given the tremendous challenges facing South Sudan's grossly under-funded health and social welfare systems – particularly in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic – priority must be given to protecting people's health and livelihoods, rather than purchasing and importing arms. The embargo must remain, be strengthened and independent monitors based in South Sudan must be mandated to inspect exempted shipments," said Deprese Muchena.

### **Weapons hidden from monitors**

As part of the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS) signed in September 2018, government and opposition forces committed to moving troops to joint cantonment sites, turning in their weapons to independently monitored armouries, and beginning a training process to form unified forces as a step towards building a new military.

However, Amnesty International investigators did not find this disarmament process occurring at any of the 12 sites visited. Some fighters did not bring their weapons to the cantonment sites, as a wariness of the peace process prompted SSPDF and opposition forces to retain their arms. In other cases, fighters arrived with weapons but then hid them away in their dwellings rather than turn them in.

The only site that had a nominally established armoury was Gorom, where the special VIP protection force is being formed and trained. In a presentation to diplomats and independent ceasefire monitors, the brigadier general leading the training there said they had dedicated

four shipping containers to store weapons. However, when Amnesty International researchers requested the containers be opened, they discovered they were all stuffed with bags of grain stacked to the ceiling, and only a handful of small arms were laid against the door of a single container.

The government carefully orchestrates what monitors can see and blocks access to strategic sites, thereby effectively largely controlling what information is reported to IGAD. For example, in December 2018, when three ceasefire monitors and their driver attempted to gain entry to Luri, NSS officers arbitrarily detained them, blindfolding, handcuffing and physically assaulting them. The monitors were turned away after NSS agents stole their money and valuables.

### **Child soldiers and other violations**

During the investigation, Amnesty International observed child soldiers present in at least two cantonment and training sites, within ranks of government and opposition forces, including the VIP protection force. UNICEF estimates there are 19,000 children used by armed forces and armed groups in South Sudan as of late July 2019. Only 53 have been released from barracks, bases and cantonment sites as at 7 February 2020.

In February 2020, the government signed an action plan with the UN to end and prevent all grave violations against children. The SPLA-IO and SSOA endorsed the plan which will apply to the opposition forces as they unify with government forces. Two weeks after the signing of the action plan, on 26 February, 15 children associated with armed forces and armed groups were released, but more needs to be done to end the perpetration of violations against children affected by conflict and holding those responsible for it to account.

Besides blatant UN arms embargo violations, the Government of South Sudan has also violated sales agreements for legally acquired weapons. In 2014, it purchased armoured vehicles from STREIT Group, a Canadian company with a major manufacturing plant in the United Arab Emirates that typically supplies African countries. At the time of the sale, the Government of South Sudan promised only to use the vehicles for policing.

However, photographs obtained by Amnesty International show the vehicles being used in military operations against opposition forces, in violation of the sales agreement. And during its recent field investigation, Amnesty International researchers observed one STREIT Typhoon armoured vehicle in Western Equatoria State in the south-west of the country, a tense strategic area that saw persistent fighting from 2016 until 2019. This shows that the government continues its practice of illicit diversion.

“Until forces in South Sudan stop illegally concealing weapons, and use the ones they have responsibly, the arms embargo must stay in place. The security situation in South Sudan is too fragile while basic international norms, such as the prohibition of the recruitment and use of child soldiers, continue to be violated. South Sudan must seriously tackle these problems and the UN Security Council must renew the arms embargo to stem the flow of weapons into the country,” said Deprose Muchena.

## TECHNICAL ADDENDUM

South Sudan has been covered by a comprehensive European Union arms embargo since July 2011, following its secession from Sudan. The embargo encompasses not only the supply of arms by EU member states, by their nationals, or on ships and aircraft flagged in their jurisdictions; but also the provision of technical advice and assistance relating to embargoed weapons, and financial assistance for arms supplies. The global Arms Trade Treaty, which came into force in December 2014, prohibits the transfer of weapons which carry a substantial risk of being used for war crimes, such as attacks directed against civilian objects or civilians protected as such – principles that are also enshrined in many domestic arms control laws.

The UN arms embargo on South Sudan was instituted on 13 July 2018. The resolution legally obliges all UN member states to prevent the direct or indirect supply, sale or transfer of arms and related material – including ammunition, military vehicles and spare parts – from entering South Sudan. This includes using ships that sail under their flag or aircrafts. The embargo also extends to technical support, training, financial or other assistance related to military activities.

Amnesty International researches violations of all three arms control regimes.

The vast majority of the hundreds of small arms observed by Amnesty International investigators during their time in South Sudan were either two standard Kalashnikov variants—Russian AKMs and Chinese Type 56s—or Chinese CQs, a copy of the American M-16. Investigators also recorded a small number of Israeli Galils in the security details of senior government officials. All of these weapons were most likely imported into the country prior to the UN arms embargo.

This finding is consistent with other surveys of small arms and light weapons undertaken in South Sudan by outside monitoring organizations, including Small Arms Survey, Center For Advanced Defense Studies (C4ADS), and Conflict Armament Research, the latter of which produced the most thorough and complete dataset of weapons in the country to date in its November 2018 report [Weapon Supplies Into South Sudan's Civil War](#).

However, Amnesty International investigators documented several weapons, held by members of the SSPDF and SPLA-IO, which do not appear in any of these databases. At one training site, near the border in the south-west, several SSPDF soldiers were armed with MPi-KMS-72 rifles manufactured in the former East Germany. The MPi-KMS-72 is identifiable from its side-fold triangular stock and distinctive “plum furniture,” or purplish pistol grip and front hand-guards. In addition, at an SPLA-IO camp in Western Bahr el Ghazal State, in the north-west of the country, where clashes with government forces took place from December 2015 until January 2019, and at a nearby training site that hosted both government and SPLA-IO forces, Amnesty International investigators identified several PM md. 90 carbines, manufactured in Romania. The PM md. 90 is identifiable from its side-fold triangular stock and distinctive wooden front pistol grip.

Neither the East German MPi-KMS-72s nor the Romanian PM md. 90s appear in any published inventory or survey of South Sudanese small arms, including the detailed Conflict Armament Research iTrace database. While these weapons are not newly manufactured, it is reasonable to believe they are newly shipped to South Sudan, which would constitute a violation of the UN arms embargo. Multiple sources confirmed to Amnesty International that South Sudanese government forces and armed groups were seeking older Eastern European

arms from illicit arms traffickers, as they were available in quantity and, because of their date of manufacture, less obviously a UN arms embargo violation. However, note that sales from Eastern Europe would also constitute a violation of the European Union embargo.

In addition, Amnesty International has acquired detailed photographs of the ammunition cartridges fired at Luri. The photos show 7.62x39mm cartridges, standard ammunition for Kalashnikov-style rifles, with a headstamp of 811\_16. This indicates that the ammunition was manufactured at Chinese State Factory 811 in 2016.

This finding is significant. As detailed in the 2018 Conflict Armament Research report, the majority of the 7.62x39mm cartridges they documented in South Sudan were manufactured in Chinese State Factory 811 in 2013, and so bore the headstamp 811\_13. Conflict Armament Research also documented a small number of 811\_14 headstamps, the latest date that appears in their dataset. These cartridges most likely came from two large shipments of 20 million rounds from China in May 2014. [Amnesty International protested the sale at the time](#), correctly predicting that the shipment by China would fuel human rights violations and war crimes. Significantly, China [claims that it has not sold arms or ammunition to South Sudan since September 2014](#), saying it would be “inappropriate.”

If the NSS acquired the ammunition directly from China, then either the Chinese government broke the arms embargo or sold the arms after pledging not to, but before the UN Security Council imposed the arms embargo on the territory of South Sudan in July 2018. If the NSS acquired the Chinese ammunition from a third-party seller, then they either broke the embargo or illicitly diverted the ammunition.

In 2015, South Sudan purchased at least four Mi-24 attack helicopters from Ukraine. When the UN arms embargo was instituted in July 2018, these helicopters were in disrepair and unserviceable, unable to fly. Any provision of spare parts to maintain these helicopters would constitute a violation of the arms embargo. In addition, Ukraine is signatory to the Arms Trade Treaty. As a signatory, Ukraine is bound not to undermine the treaty’s object and purpose, which includes “contributing to international and regional peace, security and stability”.

At the start of the embargo, satellite imagery indicates that two of the helicopters were based at Luri and two at Juba International Airport (JIA). Amnesty International consulted a series of 308 satellite images to build a detailed timeline of the specific locations of the four helicopters since the imposition of the embargo. This analysis demonstrates that the helicopters have been undergoing maintenance, moving between sites at Luri and JIA, and flown for other purposes, including possibly in support of ground combat, since the July 2018 arms embargo.

In October and November 2018, several months after the embargo was implemented, satellite imagery shows maintenance and movement of the two helicopters on the southern military ramp at JIA. Similarly, in October 2018 one of the helicopters at Luri underwent maintenance and moved to JIA, where it remains until today. The last Mi-24 at Luri does not have its rotors installed, and appears to be in a long-term state of disrepair, though in the last month new rotor blades have been placed near the airframe, indicating refurbishment is possibly imminent.

For the majority of the time since, the three Mi-24s at JIA have stayed in the same parking locations, except for two cases.

On two separate occasions, on 4 March and 10 March 2019, two of the helicopters were missing from JIA. Satellite images show that the helicopters returned to the ramp on 8 March. There are many reasons the aircraft could have flown, but it is noteworthy that at that time, fighting took place against the National Salvation Front in Yei, in the southern part of the country. In addition, one of the helicopters was missing on 10 February 2020. Amnesty International investigators personally observed that on 12 February 2020, one of the Mi-24 helicopters lacked its standard cloth windscreen, which is placed on the aircraft during non-flying times to protect the glass from weather and debris. The lack of the windscreen is another indication that the helicopter had recently flown.

Amnesty International believes that flight operations are the only reasonable explanation for the helicopters to be missing from the ramp. The nearby hangars are blocked from the ramp by concrete barriers, and in any case have doors too small to accommodate the helicopters. The helicopters also do not appear on the rest of the grounds of JIA, which are reserved for civilian and UN aircrafts.