



Dancing in the streets of Juba has been replaced with fear of even stepping outside your own doorstep. One month ago, on 15 December 2013, fighting broke out between different fractions in South Sudan's capital.

The gunfire has since spread and is now threatening big parts of the country as the international community fears the breakout of a new civil war. A few years back, the people of South Sudan were celebrating their independence – but now they have been thrown into a chaos which leaves little hope for the bright future they once dreamed about.

The South Sudanese are used to a tough life in a country where draughts and floods occur almost every year, and where rare existing infrastructure is poorly made and maintained. Most South Sudanese communities depend on foreign aid, and different UN agencies provide basic services to the vulnerable population. As a [result](#) of the new crisis, at least 352.000 people have been internally displaced and 42.300 are seeking refugee status in neighboring countries.

Meanwhile, peace talks are being held in Ethiopia and mediators are discussing with president Salva Kiir and the former vice-president, now rebel leader, Riek Machar. But so far, no [tangible progress](#) has been made. Mainstream media has portrayed the conflict as one of tribal origins, as Kiir belongs to the majority Dinka and Machar to the Nuer. This, however, is not the entire truth. It seems as part of the reason may be a political struggle between the two men for power – and, as some might add, even a struggle for money with South Sudan's oil reserves at stake. Although there are underlying ethnic tensions, the conflict [remains](#) mainly political.

The violence is threatening to increase hunger and human suffering considerably, according to the UN Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO). The fighting causes not only loss of life and displacement, but also disrupts agricultural development and humanitarian activities, crucial to the survival and future livelihoods of millions.. "It is essential that security and stability return to South Sudan immediately so that displaced people can return to their homes, fields, herds and fishing grounds. Timing is everything; there are fish in the rivers now, pastoralists are trying to protect their herds and the planting season for maize, groundnut and sorghum starts in March," [said](#) Sue Lautze, FAO Representative in South Sudan.

According to the United Nations Mission in South Sudan ([UNMISS](#)), as it continues to gain access to besieged areas, the number of people killed in the current round of fighting in the world's youngest country "must be much higher" than the 1,000 figure given earlier in the conflict.

In a news release from Juba two days ago, UNMISS notes fresh media reports estimating that up to 10,000 people may have been killed since the conflict started a month ago. The UN has appealed for \$166 million to be able to provide assistance to the displaced civilians through March.

South Sudan: from hope to chaos

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