



As Ivan Simonovic, UN Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights, wrapped up his four-day visit to the nation, he did not come back with good news in his luggage. “ [Fighting](#) in South Sudan has turned into a horrifying humanitarian and human rights disaster with mass atrocities committed by both sides”, he told reporters.

“During my visit, I have received reports of mass killings, extrajudicial killings, arbitrary detention, enforced disappearances, sexual violence, the widespread destruction of property and the [use of children](#) in the conflict,” he added.

Thousands of people have been killed and hundreds of thousands are now displaced, with some 70,000 people seeking protection in UN camps and 30,000 in the two UN compounds in Juba alone.

The worst affected communities are in the capital, Juba, and in communities which have changed hands several times, like those in Bentiu and Bor, leading to widespread communal violence and destruction.

After having visited the town of Bentiu, Unity state, which has been the scene of heaving fighting over the past few weeks, Mr Simonovic concluded: “What I saw was a horror.

Destruction and death is everywhere in Bentiu, which has now become a ghost town,” he said. “I myself saw some 15 bodies lying on a road. The extent of the looting, burning and destruction is hard to grasp for anybody who hasn’t been there.”

He lauded the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) for playing a key role in protecting civilians over the past few weeks.

“If UNMISS had not opened their gates to protect civilians fleeing the violence, there is no doubt that killings on an even larger scale would have happened. Their impartial presence is also of great importance to help preventing further atrocities from being committed and for the protection of civilians.”

Mr. □ Simonovic is slated to brief Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and the UN Security Council upon his return to New York. In addition, a report on human rights violations committed in South Sudan after 15 December will be issued within the coming weeks.

For more information, see UNRIC’s [backgrounder](#) on South Sudan.