

# Brief on Violence Affecting Civilians

## HIGHLIGHTS

- ❖ In the first quarter of 2024, at least 913 civilians were directly affected by 240 incidents of violence (468 killed, 328 injured, 70 abducted, and 47 subjected to conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV)). In comparison with the same period in 2023, this represents a 24 percent increase in the number of incidents (from 194 to 240), and a one percent decrease in the number of victims (from 920 to 913).
- ❖ Compared to the previous quarter (October to December 2023), there was an eight percent increase in the number of documented violent incidents (from 223 to 240); and a six percent increase in the number of victims documented (from 862 to 913).
- ❖ Sub-national violence involving community-based militias and/or civil-defense groups accounted for 87 percent of the total number of victims (796 individuals), with the vast majority continued to be documented in Warrap State.

## CONTEXT

This quarterly brief presents an overview of trends in violence affecting civilians between January and March 2024, by assessing the four major forms of individual harm experienced by victims in the context of the armed conflict in South Sudan, i.e. killings, injuries, abductions, and CRSV. While the impact of violence extends beyond these forms of harm, these have been the most common incidents documented in conflict affected areas in South Sudan.

While incidents of violence attributed to conventional parties to the conflict remained relatively low due to general compliance with the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS), entrenched patterns of violence involving community-based militias and/or civil defense groups, including cattle raiding, border disputes, and retaliatory attacks, continued to be the predominant drivers of violence affecting civilians throughout the country. This includes incidents commonly referred to as “intercommunal violence”. Notably, Warrap State continued to account for the majority of civilian casualties (defined as killed or injured civilians), while parts of Central Equatoria State continued to experience civilian

casualties resulting from hostilities involving conventional parties to the conflict.

The information contained in this brief was obtained from victim and eyewitness accounts and reports from secondary sources identified during UNMISS Human Rights Division (HRD) monitoring and investigations through field missions. Sources of information include service providers, community leaders, and local authorities. Unless specifically stated, all information in the report has been verified using independent and credible sources. All incidents of intercommunal violence are deconflicted with incidents documented by the UNMISS Civil Affairs Division. Incidents determined as cases of CRSV are corroborated in consultation with the Women’s Protection Advisory Unit.

In accordance with its mandate, UNMISS has issued this brief as an advocacy tool to reduce the impact of armed violence against civilians. UNMISS also urges the Government of South Sudan to investigate human rights violations and abuses and to hold all perpetrators accountable.

## GENERAL TRENDS

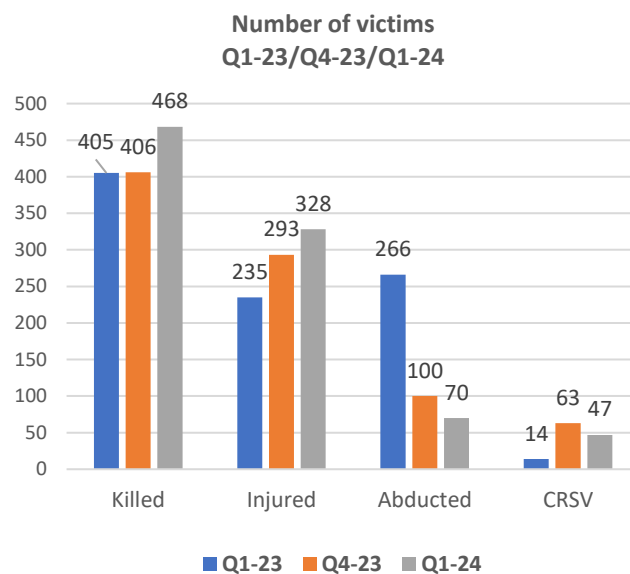
Between January and March 2024, UNMISS HRD documented 240 incidents of violence affecting at least 913 civilians, including 106 women and 95 children, who were subjected to one of the four major forms of harm (468 killed, 328 injured, 70 abducted, and 47 subjected to CRSV). Among these incidents, eight occurred prior to the reporting period but were documented and verified during the current reporting quarter.

Compared to the same period in 2023, this represents a 24 percent increase in the number of incidents (from 194 to 240), and a one percent decrease in the number of victims (from 920 to 913). Intensification of violence arising from intercommunal disputes related to cattle raiding were common in both reporting periods, with the majority of violent incidents attributable to community-based militias and/or civil defense groups documented in Warrap State in 2024, and Jonglei State in 2023 respectively.

Compared to the fourth quarter of 2023 (October to December) there was a slight increase of eight percent in violent incidents (from 223 to 240), and a six percent increase in the number of victims (862 to 913). The number of civilians killed increased by 15 percent (from 406 to 468), while injuries increased by 12 percent (from 293 to 328). Abductions decreased by 30 percent (from 100 to 70), while CRSV decreased by 25 percent (from 63 to 47).

Warrap State remained the most violence-affected area, experiencing 37 percent of the total number of civilian

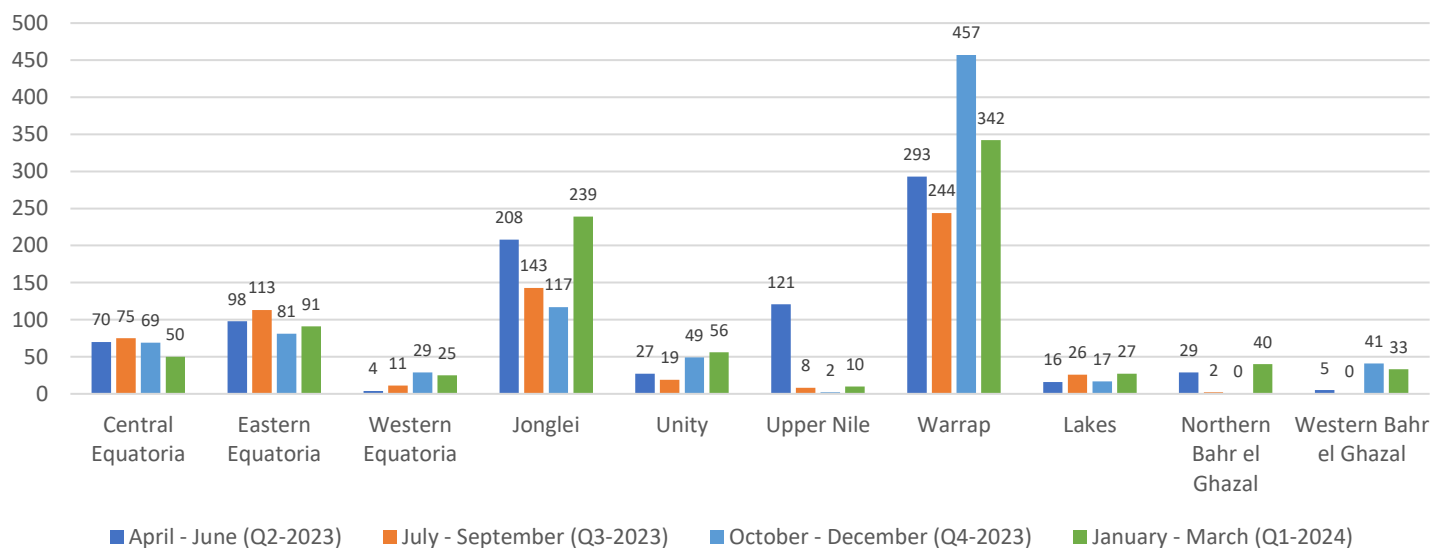
victims, mainly due to the persistence of intercommunal violence in the region, including in the context of cattle raiding, border disputes, and retaliatory attacks between communities.<sup>1</sup>



### *Community-based militias and/or civil defense groups*

During the first quarter of 2024, intercommunal violence involving community-based militias and/or civil defense groups, including cross border conflicts, constituted the primary source of violence affecting civilians in South Sudan, accounting for more than three quarters of

### Trends in the number of civilians affected by states



<sup>1</sup> Persistently, majority of sub-national violence and number of victims affected were concentrating in Warrap State since second quarter of 2023.

documented victims (87 percent or 796 individuals). This localized violence, continued to undermine peace across South Sudan, and was exacerbated by long-standing cultural practices and communal tensions over access to natural resources. Notably, incursions by these armed elements, including road ambushes, have disrupted humanitarian operations, mainly in parts of Greater Jonglei resulted in the killing of two individuals in two separate attacks.<sup>2</sup> In February, UNMISS Peacekeepers escorting a humanitarian convoy for service/aid delivery became the target of an attack.<sup>3</sup> Further, a United Nations staff member was killed in Abiemnom of Ruweng Administrative Area, following an attack by armed elements from Mayom County, Unity State.<sup>4</sup>

In Warrap State, despite UNMISS engagements with the state and county authorities and community leaders to cease hostilities and address grievances through peaceful dialogue, persistent attacks and counterattacks among Dinka-sub-groups continued, as well as incursions related to cross-border tensions, territorial disputes, and cycles of revenge attacks involving armed elements from the bordering areas such as the Nuer community in southern Unity State, Dinka Ngok of Abyei Administrative Area, Dinka Gok and Pakam from Lakes State, and the Luo/Dinka Marial-Bai of Jur River County in Western Bahr el Ghazal. Between January and March 2024, violence involving these armed elements resulted in 324 civilian casualties (193 killed and 131 injured), nine abducted, and one subjected to sexual violence, of which 25 were women and seven children. In many instances, intercommunal violence by these actors resulted in the displacement of civilians. For instance, in January 2024,

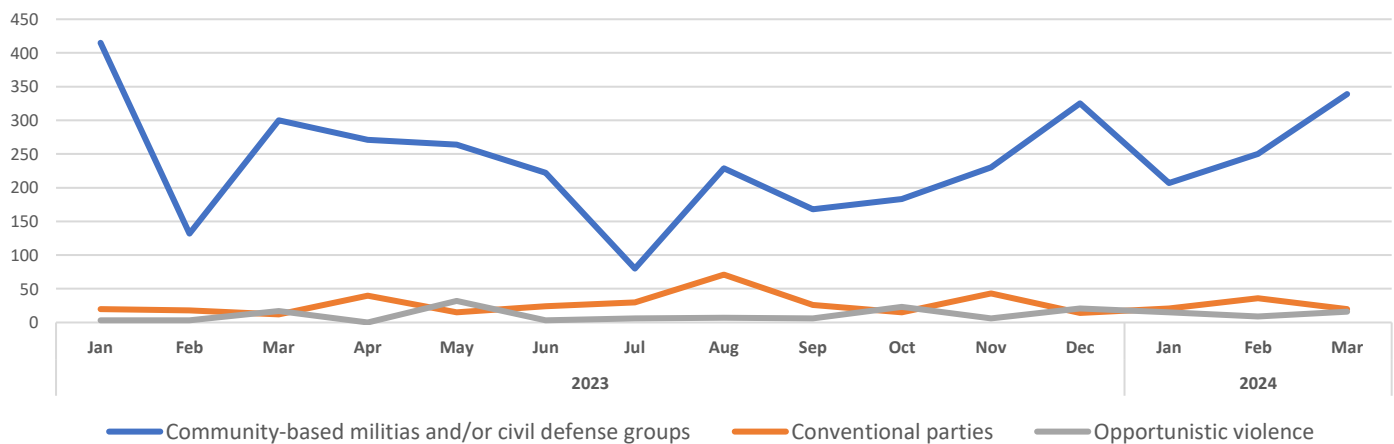
over 800 civilians were displaced as a result of armed clashes in the context of a territorial dispute between the Dinka Apuk and the allied Luo/Dinka Marial-Bai of Jur River county in Western Bahr el Ghazal State, exacerbating humanitarian needs in the area.

**Conventional parties**

The nationwide trends of violence involving the Government security forces and other organized armed groups remained relatively low during the reporting period, however exceptions were documented chiefly in specific areas of Central Equatoria State, involving the National Salvation Front (NAS) and Government security forces; followed by Western Equatoria, Western Bahr el Ghazal, Eastern Equatoria, Unity, and Upper Nile States, allegedly involving elements of the Sudan People’s Liberation Army – in Opposition (SPLA-IO) and Government security forces. In comparison, prior to the signing of the R-ARCSS in September 2018, these actors were responsible for the majority of violent incidents and civilian casualties reported. However, during the reporting period, these actors accounted for only nine percent (77 civilians) of the overall number of victims documented.

Of particular concern were alleged abductions by NAS in parts of Central Equatoria State such as Lainya, Wonduruba, and Yei, reportedly for the purpose of forced recruitment to boost its depleting number of troops.<sup>5</sup> Further, heightened tensions between the SSPDF and the SPLA-IO in Terekeka County in February threatened the security and protection of civilians in the area over

**Trends in the number of civilians affected January 2023 to March 2024**



<sup>2</sup> An aid worker was killed while at his homestead in Likuangole of GPAA during an attack and a truck driver of Somali nationality during a road ambush of a humanitarian convoy in Duk County.  
<sup>3</sup> UNMISS Peacekeepers repelled the attackers by returning fire, however, no casualties were reported.  
<sup>4</sup> On 6 March 2024, the Special Representative of the Secretary General of UNMISS strongly condemned the said killing. The cattle-raid related attack reportedly occurred in the area that straddled Abyei Administrative Area, Unity and Warrap States.  
<sup>5</sup> NAS chairman, Gen. Thomas Cirillo, in his speech during NAS 7<sup>th</sup> anniversary stressed their intent to increase military activities.

allegations of planned attacks in SPLA-IO sites, including parts of Juba County, Central Equatoria State.

### ***Unidentified and other opportunistic armed elements***

Incidents of violence by armed elements which do not fall within the above-noted categories but bear a link to conflicts or violence affecting civilians based on the modus operandi of the suspected perpetrators, location, and other relevant factors were also documented. Overall, violence involving these armed elements accounted for four percent (40 individuals) of the total civilian victims.

Western Equatoria State recorded the highest number of victims attributed to these actors, followed by Unity, Central Equatoria, and Eastern Equatoria States, with a total of 20 incidents affecting 40 civilians (16 killed, 10 injured, 10 abducted, and four subjected to CRSV), of whom five were women and 10 were boys). In one incident, unidentified armed actors shot and killed one female civilian and injured five others (including one woman and three children) in Ganji Payam, Juba County of Central Equatoria State during an ambush attack on a passenger vehicle.

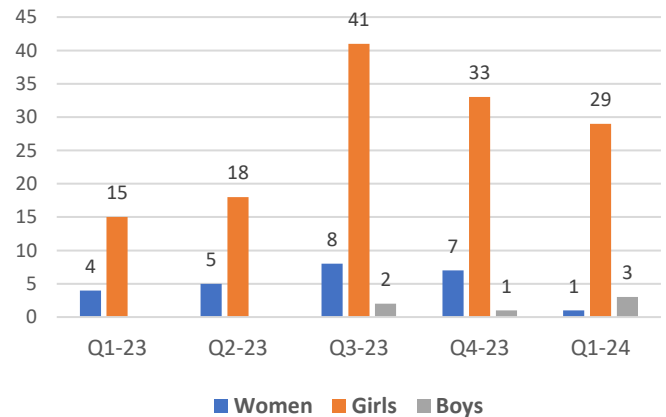
### ***Sexual and gender-based violence***

Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) remained one of the critical threats to the protection and well-being of women and children, particularly girls, following the decades-long conflict and a culture of armed violence in the country. SGBV in South Sudan is prevalent but underreported given that survivors often do not report incidents or seek redress due to limited access to justice, limited financial means, and social stigma. Despite the increase in awareness among women and the adjudication

of sexual violence cases perpetrated by members of the government security forces through the military General Court Martial and the GBV and Juvenile Court in Juba, SGBV continued to remain a significant concern to the protection of women and children.

During the first quarter of 2024, HRD documented 28 incidents of sexual violence classified as SGBV across the country, which affected 33 victims, (29 girls, three boys and one woman). This is in addition to 29 CRSV incidents linked to the armed conflict affecting 47 victims, including 14 girls. Among these 28 incidents, 24 were incidents of rape and four gang rape. However, compared to the previous quarter, this represents a 28 percent decrease (from 39 to 28) in SGBV incidents and a 20 percent decrease in the number of victims (from 41 to 33). Overall, CRSV and SGBV incidents directly affected 80 victims.

**Trends in number of SGBV victims  
(Q1-23 to Q1-24)**



## **GEOGRAPHICAL TRENDS**

The majority of states, except Central Equatoria State, were primarily impacted by violence involving community-based militias and/or civil-defense groups, which altogether accounted for 87 percent of the overall victims recorded. Jonglei State recorded the highest number of violent incidents followed by Warrap and Eastern Equatoria States. The majority of the victims impacted by violence were documented in Warrap State, followed by Jonglei and Eastern Equatoria States, which were also the areas most affected by intercommunal violence. Within these regions, incidents of violence were concentrated in 70 payams (out of 132), mainly due to the presence of grazing lands and accessible cattle to raid. Increasing food insecurity and the disruption of livelihood activities in many areas, as well as the desire to recoup the

loss of cattle, may have driven the persistence of this intercommunal violence. Compared to the previous quarter, the number of incidents in Warrap, Jonglei, and Eastern Equatoria States increased by 11 percent (from 147 to 163).

During the reporting period, Warrap State experienced the highest number of killings (199) and injuries (133), accounting for 48 percent of the total victims of killing and injury in South Sudan. Jonglei State experienced the highest number of abductions (32), accounting for 46 percent of all abductions in the country. Central Equatoria State experienced the highest number of CRSV cases (14), accounting for 30 percent of documented cases nationwide.

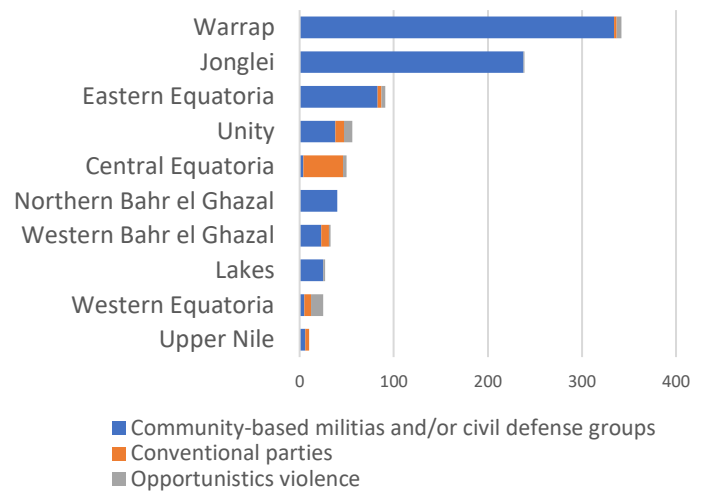
Notably, Jonglei State experienced the sharpest percentage increase in the number of victims documented compared to the last quarter of 2023 (from 117 to 239), followed by Lakes State (from 17 to 27), and Upper Nile State (from two to 10). Conversely, Central Equatoria State experienced a sharp percentage decrease in the number of documented victims (69 to 50), followed by Warrap State (from 457 to 342), and Western Bahr el Ghazal State (from 41 to 33).

Notwithstanding general respect for the ceasefire throughout the country following the implementation of the R-ARCSS, conventional parties to the conflict remained active in some parts of Central Equatoria State, particularly in the Lainya, Terekeka, Wonduruba, and Yei areas, primarily involving the Government security forces, SPLA-IO, and NAS.

Military operations and activities involving Government security forces and organized armed groups and their respective proxy armed elements, have continued to place civilians at risk of violence, predominantly in parts of

Central Equatoria State as well as in areas of Eastern Equatoria, Unity, Upper Nile, Western Bahr el Ghazal, and Western Equatoria States.

State most affected by violence



## VICTIMS

UNMISS HRD’s capacity to comprehensively document the number of victims affected by violence was impacted by capacity constraints, safety and security concerns, as well as access restrictions, particularly in conflict-affected areas, which may have resulted in the underreporting of the number of incidents and victims. Notwithstanding, from January to March 2024, UNMISS HRD documented 913 victims of one of the four main forms of harm experienced in South Sudan – a six percent increase compared to the final quarter of 2023.

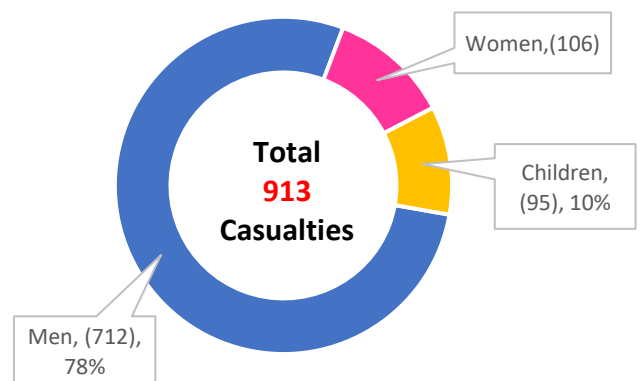
Men, particularly young men, comprised the majority of victims (78 percent or 712 individuals). Women were the second-largest group of victims (12 percent or 106 individuals), while children accounted for the remaining victims affected by violence (10 percent or 95 individuals). However, beyond the direct impact of violence, women and children were disproportionately affected by the indirect effects of conflict – particularly related to access to health care, education, and livelihoods in volatile areas.

98 percent of adult male victims were either killed or injured, largely in the context of intercommunal violence by community-based militias and/or civil defense groups. The next most frequent harm experienced by adult male

victims was abduction (one percent), followed by CRSV (one percent).

Women were primarily subjected to killings and injuries (63 percent or 67 victims) and sexual violence (30 or 32 victims), followed by abduction (seven percent or seven victims) primarily in the context of intercommunal violence. Sexual violence cases, including rape and gang rape, were recorded in seven states, with the majority recorded in Central Equatoria followed by Eastern Equatoria state.

Victims by gender/sex



Children (36 boys and 15 girls) were primarily subjected to abductions with most incidents documented in Jonglei States (28 victims) followed by Eastern Equatoria (8), Western Equatoria (8), Warrap (6), and Central Equatoria (1) States. Further, girls were primarily subjected to SGBV (29 victims) in incidents documented in seven

states, the majority of which were recorded in Yei County in Central Equatoria State.

## PERPETRATORS

UNMISS HRD identified three major categories of perpetrators involved in conflict-related violence affecting civilians: i) community-based militias and/or civil defense groups; ii) conventional parties to the conflict; and iii) unidentified armed elements.

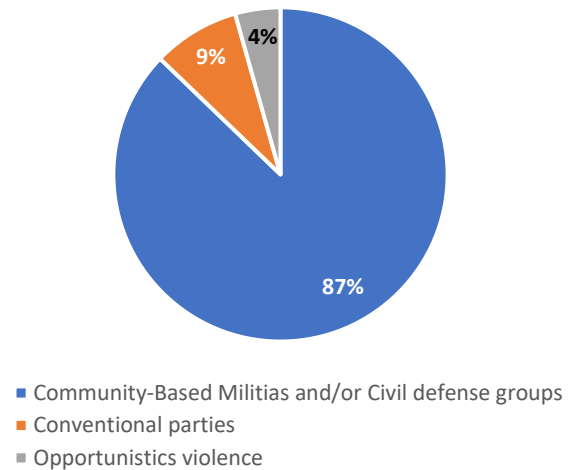
In the first quarter of 2024, HRD investigations attributed responsibility for violence affecting 87 percent of victims to community-based militias and/or civil defense groups. These groups represent a longstanding feature of pastoralist communities across South Sudan who culturally believe cattle to be a semblance of wealth and a key indicator of societal status. Traditionally, their main objective revolves around protecting herds of cattle from external attacks. However, compounded by years of armed conflict and the resultant illicit proliferation of small arms among local communities, members of these groups have been co-opted, armed, and used as proxy armed elements by all parties to the conflict as well as by local actors, which has contributed to the progressive militarization of intercommunal violence. At times, they become an extension of political rivalries at the national level. UNMISS HRD noted that, in many instances, military-scale attacks and mobilizations were carried out and incorporated into most of their offensives aimed at recovering looted cattle. The root causes of the conflict are notoriously complex, endemic and longstanding.

The second category of perpetrators remained the conventional parties to the conflict, including Government defense and security forces, as well as organized opposition armed groups, who were accountable for nine percent of incidents and 77 victims documented during the reporting quarter.

Reportedly, among the Government forces, violence affecting civilians were largely attributed to the SSPDF, National Security Service, South Sudan National Police Service, and/or joint security operations consisting mainly these three security agencies. As for organized

armed groups, both the pro-Riek Machar SPLA-IO, which is a signatory to the 2018 peace agreement, and the NAS and affiliated armed elements, who are not signatories to the R-ARCSS, also committed abuses against civilians, primarily in areas of Central Equatoria State. The primary form of harm perpetrated by the conventional parties to the conflict was CRSV (33

Civilian casualties by type of perpetrators



percent), followed by injury (30 percent), killing (27 percent), and abduction (10 percent).

Unidentified armed elements comprised the third category of perpetrators, primarily in the form of opportunistic violence, and accounted for four percent of civilians harmed during the reporting period. Often, they are deserters or have historical affiliations with the Government security forces or other organized groups and community-based militias and/or civil-defense groups, who have progressively acquired autonomy from their sponsors and now carry out acts of violence against civilians without any clear strategic or military objectives.

# Location of Violence Affecting Civilians in South Sudan January – March 2024

