

White House condemns S. Sudan ethnic massacre as an "abomination"

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USPA News - The White House on late Tuesday described last week's massacre of hundreds of innocent civilians in South Sudan on the basis of their ethnicity or nationality as an "abomination," urging both the country's president and rebel leader Riek Machar to end the violence. "We are horrified by reports out of South Sudan that fighters aligned with rebel leader Riek Machar massacred hundreds of innocent civilians last week in Bentiu," said White House spokesman Jay Carney.

"Images and accounts of the attacks shock the conscience: stacks of bodies found dead inside a mosque, patients murdered at a hospital, and dozens more shot and killed in the streets and at a church." The White House described as an "abomination" the violence which took place as hate speech was being broadcast on local radio. "They are a betrayal of the trust the South Sudanese people have put in their leaders," Carney said. "This is exactly the violence and suffering the South Sudanese people fought to escape for decades." Bulldozers have been used to build mass graves after last week's shocking acts of violence. Carney said the White House was "equally appalled" by another armed attack that hit a UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) compound in Bor last week, killing 48 civilians and injuring dozens. The White House urged all parties involved in the conflict in South Sudan to immediately end the violence and to bring the perpetrators on both sides to justice. "Both President Kiir and (rebel leader) Riek Machar must make clear that attacks on civilians are unacceptable," Carney said. Meanwhile, also on Tuesday, rebel commander Brig. Lul Ruai Koang denied that rebel forces were responsible for the massacre in Bentiu last week. He suggested that Kiir's government and their allies could be responsible to make the conflict appear as a "tribal war," according to the BBC. The UN on Monday accused soldiers who previously joined rebel forces of killing more than 200 civilians last week at a mosque in the South Sudanese oil town of Bentiu, making it one of the worst ethnic massacres since the world's newest state descended into civil war. The total number of deaths and the exact circumstances surrounding them remain unclear. UNMISS said its human rights investigators confirmed several mass killings took place on Tuesday and Wednesday last week when SPLA soldiers who have joined rebel forces captured the oil town of Bentiu in Unity State. Killings were reported at Bentiu Hospital, the town's Kali-Ballee Mosque, a Catholic church, and the vacated WFP compound. The United Nations said rebel forces searched a number of places where hundreds of South Sudanese and foreign civilians had taken refuge, killing hundreds after determining their ethnicity or nationality. "These atrocities must be fully investigated and the perpetrators and their commanders shall be held accountable," UNMISS Officer-in-Charge Raisedon Zenenga said on Monday. According to the investigators, SPLA soldiers in opposition forces entered the Kali-Ballee Mosque on Tuesday and separated individuals of certain nationalities and ethnic groups. Some groups were escorted to safety while more than 200 civilians were killed and more than 400 others were wounded, the UN said. Also on the same day, individuals from certain South Sudanese communities and civilians from the Sudanese region of Darfur were specifically targeted and killed at Bentiu Hospital, the investigators said. Several men, women and children belonging to the Lou Nuer ethnic group were also killed for hiding at the hospital and declining to join other Nuers who had gone out to cheer rebel forces as they entered the town. Rebel forces also slaughtered several people at a Catholic church and the vacated WFP compound after asking civilians to identify their ethnic origins and nationalities. The scale of the ethnic massacre remains unclear, with the UN reporting more than 200 deaths at the mosque alone. Some media reports claimed the death toll from Tuesday and Wednesday's violence in the town was no less than 400. The current crisis began on the evening of December 15 with an attack on a meeting of the ruling Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) party and the army headquarters near Juba University. President Salva Kiir attributed the attack to a "failed coup attempt" by soldiers loyal to former Vice President Riek Machar Teny, who was sacked along with the country's entire cabinet in July 2013 in Kiir's apparent struggle to maintain control of the SPLM. Fighting intensified on December 17 and spread to other parts of the country that is prone to ethnic instability, with Kiir being from the Dinka ethnic group and Machar being a Lou Nuer. The International Crisis Group estimates more than 10,000 people have so far been killed in the conflict, which led to the signing of a Cessation of Hostilities Agreement in January, though it was violated almost immediately and fighting continues.

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