

UNDER EMBARGO UNTIL: Wednesday 24 July, 2024

MEDIA CONTACT: [Tim Bishop](#)

REPORT LINK: shcc.pub/SSD2023

PRESS RELEASE: shcc.pub/2023SSDPRESSRelease

Health Workers Attacks Continued in South Sudan in 2023 Amid Widespread Shortage of Trained, Skilled Health Workers

GENEVA – In its annual report, the Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition identified 12 incidents of violence against or obstruction of health care in [South Sudan](#). The total is likely an undercount, as data collection on violence is impeded by insecurity, communication blockages, and the reluctance of entities to share the data on violence.

Conflict and insecurity persisted throughout 2023 in South Sudan where approximately [9.4 million people](#), or 76% of the population, required humanitarian assistance. The ongoing conflict in Sudan led to an influx of over [500,000](#) refugees, returnees, and asylum seekers into South Sudan between April 2023 and January 31, 2024. Most of these individuals arrived in remote and hard-to-reach areas that lacked essential services, including health care. Armed Dinka Bor tribespeople, and South Sudan People's Defence Forces (SSPDF) and Sudan People's Liberation Army in Opposition (SPLA-IO) personnel were [accused](#) of violence against civilians, including attacks on and threats to health care.

Amidst this challenging security landscape, at least six health workers were killed and five arrested. In addition, four Red Cross volunteers working on COVID-19 vaccination and Ebola awareness campaigns in Central Equatoria were kidnapped from their homes together with other civilians and killed by suspected armed Dinka Bor herders. Although social media monitoring by [Insecurity Insight](#) did not find any evidence of disinformation targeting the Red Cross prior to the attack, a minority of users who were sympathetic to the herders alleged that the volunteers formed part of the Equatoriabased National Salvation Front (NSF) rebel group. These findings suggested that the herders and their sympathizers equated Red Cross aid activities among local Equatorian communities with collaboration with their enemy, the NSF.

South Sudan is experiencing a severe health crisis, with over 8.9 million people needing humanitarian assistance for health care. The [under-five mortality](#) rate stands at approximately 99 deaths per 1,000 live births. Decades of attacks on health care have severely weakened the health system's capacity, with only [25%](#) of health facilities providing minimum services. There is a significant [shortage](#) of skilled health workers. Additionally, communities affected by attacks on health facilities face ongoing obstacles, including widespread fear of seeking care at these facilities.

Among the report's recommendations are:

- The International Criminal Court and national courts, through principles of universal jurisdiction, should, at long last, initiate prosecutions for war crimes and crimes against humanity involving attacks on the wounded and sick and on health facilities.
- Governments should cease arms transfers to parties to conflict that engage in grave breaches of international humanitarian law.

- Ministers of Health should engage with their own military and security forces and armed groups to protect health care from violence and strengthen mechanisms to mitigate the impacts of attacks on communities, health workers, and the health system.
- Regional bodies and the UN humanitarian cluster system should expand initiatives to protect health care in conflict and mitigate the impact of violence against it.

In its 11th annual report, [Critical Condition: Violence Against Health Care in Conflict](#), the coalition documented 2562 incidents in conflicts across 30 countries, or regions within countries, or territories in 2023, a 25% increase from 2022, representing *500 more* attacks than documented last year, and the highest ever since the [Coalition](#) began reporting “Violence against health care reached appalling levels in 2023, said **Leonard Rubenstein, Chair of the Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition (SHCC) comprising more than 40 nongovernmental organizations.** “Whether a product of recklessness, indifference, or intentional targeting, fighting forces’ contempt for the law brought catastrophic harm to those in need of care and the health workers and systems intending to aid them. The world fails to ensure accountability for this violence at its peril.”

Methodology Note: The [data](#) in this report is [compiled](#) from open sources and partner-agency contributions of information, date, time, and location of incidents of violence and obstruction of health care in 2023 and is based on the WHO definition of attacks on health care. Due to this [methodology](#), there are some differences between SHCC’s numbers and other reports. Explore the incidents visually on this interactive [global](#) map.

###

[The Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition](#) is a group of more than 40 organizations working to protect health workers and services threatened by war and civil unrest. It has raised awareness of global attacks on health and pressed United Nations agencies for greater global action to protect the security of health care. The SHCC monitors attacks, strengthens universal norms of respect for the right to health, and demands accountability for perpetrators.