

SOUTH SUDAN

Violence Against Health Care in Conflict 2024



**SAFEGUARDING
HEALTH
IN CONFLICT**



**Insecurity
Insight**
Data on People in Danger

Letter from the Chair



Assaults on health care in conflicts around the world reached new levels of horror in 2024, exceeding 3,600 incidents, 15% more than in 2023. They consisted of air, missile, and drone strikes; shelling; tank fire; shootings; arson; the looting and takeover of health facilities; and the arrest and detention of health workers. As the descriptions in this report show, each incident brings terror, trauma, and - in too many cases - injury, untreated illness, destruction and death.

By far the largest number of attacks on health care – more than 1,300 – took place in Gaza and the West Bank, far more than we have ever reported in one conflict in one year, including more than double the number of health workers killed. Gaza properly drew global attention for the ferocity and relentlessness of assaults on health care. But we must also reckon with the more than 2,300 attacks in other conflicts, including the hundreds in each of Ukraine, Lebanon, Myanmar and Sudan. The cumulative number of attacks over the course of wars that began in the past three years include more than 1,500 in Myanmar since the military coup in 2021; close to 2,000 in Ukraine since the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, and more than 500 since the outbreak of war in Sudan in 2023.

This onslaught of violence has been accompanied by attempts by perpetrators to limit legal protections for health care and civilians in war, driven, as the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) puts it, by a desire to have more “leeway to kill and detain.” Israel has sought to dilute legal requirements of precaution and proportionality during conflict. The new U.S. secretary of defense has called for “a law of war for winners.” Simultaneously, campaigns to delegitimize the International Criminal Court (ICC) are underway. The newly inaugurated U.S. president Donald Trump imposed sanctions on ICC staff and even their families for having charged Israelis with war crimes. In 2023, Russia’s Duma passed legislation criminalizing cooperation with the ICC or any foreign court or ad hoc tribunal that seeks to hold Russians to account. Hungary announced its plan to withdraw from the ICC, falsely alleging political bias.

These terrible developments threaten to make a mockery of the 10th anniversary of Security Council Resolution 2286 in 2026 and the 50th anniversary of the Additional Protocols of the Geneva Conventions (the law protecting health workers and civilians during armed conflict) in 2027. If this resolution and law are to be more than words, the current approach to protection, amounting to mere admonitions, must be replaced by centering accountability, accompanied by the political will to drive it.

That is the approach long taken by the Coalition, and recently taken by a report *In the Line of Fire*, issued in November 2024 by the World Health Organization and the World Innovation Summit for Health. It called for a new alliance of member states, UN agencies, and NGOs. It recognized that the renewal of long-ignored commitments could not possibly suffice. Instead, UN agencies, international organizations, NGOs, and civil society organizations must rally together to take tough action, including outreach to the International Criminal Court, to impose consequences on the perpetrators of violence. Actions must include states cutting off arms transfers to perpetrators of attacks and employing the power of universal jurisdiction to prosecute. If the laws of humanity are to be upheld and the carnage is to end, governments and all concerned citizens everywhere must find the political courage and will to act.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Len Rubenstein". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Len Rubenstein
Chair, Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition

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REPORTED INCIDENTS AND MOST COMMONLY REPORTED CONCERNS

 REPORTED INCIDENTS	 HEALTH WORKERS KIDNAPPED
2024	
8	5
2023	
14	0
2022	
36	20

↓ Source: 2022–2024 SSD SHCC Health Care Data

OVERVIEW

The Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition (SHCC) identified eight incidents of violence against or obstruction of health care in South Sudan in 2024, compared to 14 in 2023. Five health workers were kidnapped in these incidents. The actual number of incidents and the severity of the problem are likely much greater.

-  Protracted conflict, a cholera outbreak in October and over nine million people in need of aid have intensified the humanitarian crisis.
-  Attacks on health care were reported in Central and Eastern Equatoria and Jonglei states, where intercommunal violence remains at high levels.
-  The health care system suffers from serious long-term weaknesses and shortages of essential health care resources. International aid funding cuts have exacerbated the situation.

Information on incidents of violence against health care in South Sudan is compiled from open sources, information projects and aid agency data-sharing mechanisms. See [Methodology](#) for further information.



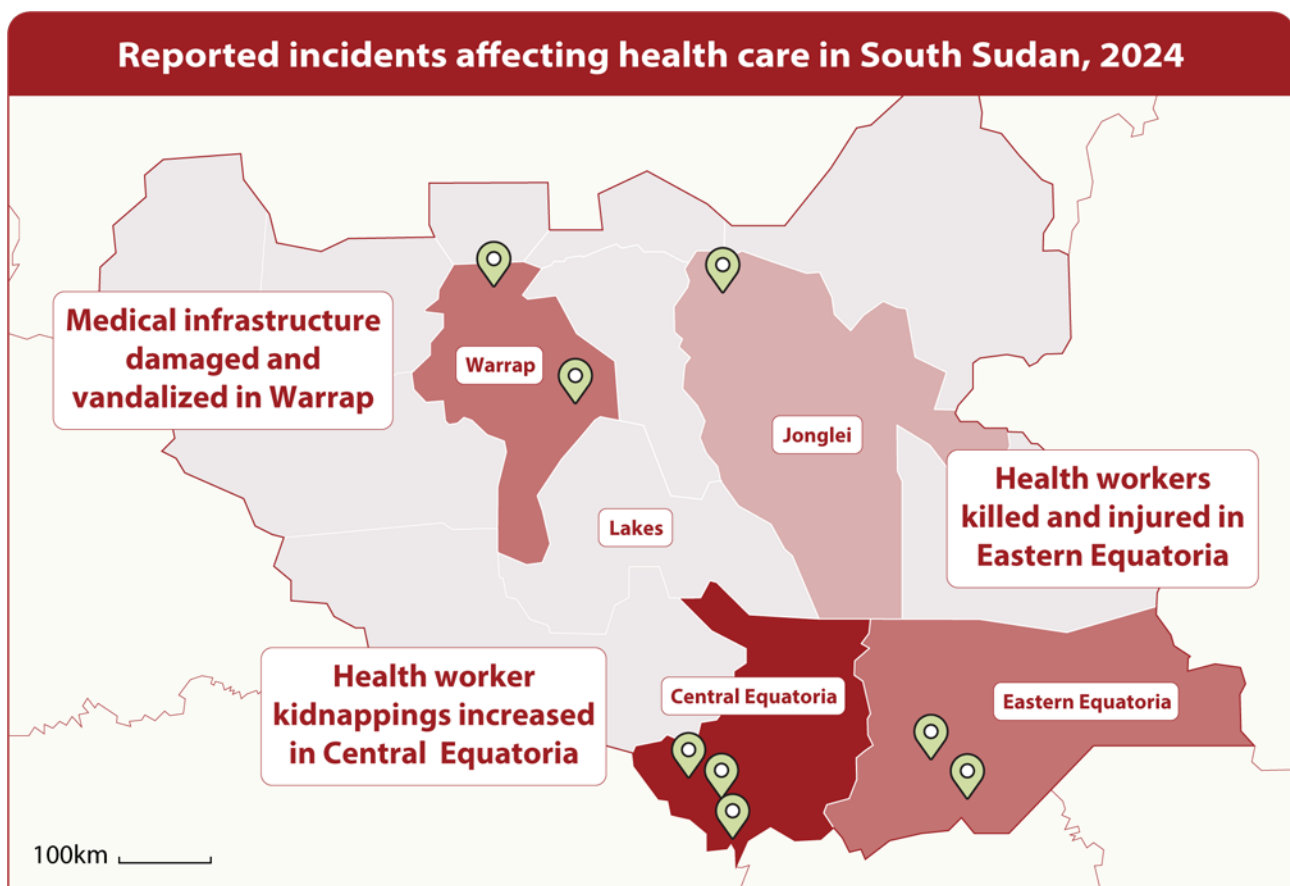
THE CONTEXT

Protracted conflict persisted in South Sudan in 2024. Violence continued to be regularly reported in the states of Jonglei, Warrap, Lakes, and Central and Eastern Equatoria, where a wide variety of militias and armed actors remained engaged in violent conflict. The Murle ethnic militia, which was involved in intercommunal violence in Jonglei state; the National Salvation Front (NSF), which continued an insurgency in Central Equatoria; and the South Sudan armed forces were the most frequently named conflict parties.¹

Over nine million people – most of the country's population – were in need of humanitarian assistance in South Sudan in 2024. The displacement of over 800,00 people from the war in Sudan to South Sudan and the outbreak of cholera in October 2024 contributed to the severe health care crisis.

VIOLENCE AGAINST OR OBSTRUCTION OF HEALTH CARE IN 2024

In 2024, incidents of violence against or obstruction of health care were reported in Central and Eastern Equatoria and Jonglei states, where intercommunal violence remains at high levels. Reported health worker kidnappings increased in Central Equatoria. A similar number of incidents affected both health care providers working for the national health care system and NGOs. Most cases were attributed to unidentified armed men. The NSF kidnapped three health workers, while Dinka Akook youth in Warrap state attacked and damaged an ambulance with rifle fire, endangering medical workers.²



Source: Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition



Health workers killed and kidnapped

Five health workers were reportedly kidnapped in three incidents in 2024, after no incidents in 2023. The NSF and unidentified attackers kidnapped health workers while they were traveling by road to treat patients or transporting medical supplies in Morobo and Yei counties in Central Equatoria state.³ One staff member was released after 24 hours, while the fates of the remaining staff members were not recorded.

Two health workers were reportedly killed in two incidents in 2024, compared to six in three incidents in 2023 and ten in ten incidents in 2022. In Eastern Equatoria, a health center guard was fatally stabbed after denying entry to three unidentified men, while in Jonglei a doctor was shot and killed by an unidentified armed group inside his compound.⁴

Other incidents

In Warrap, Dinka Akook youth attacked an ambulance with live bullets and gunmen vandalized a medical facility.⁵ In Eastern Equatoria, a UN aid worker was stabbed and robbed while transporting salaries for polio vaccination staff.⁶



This factsheet is based on 2022-2024 SSD SHCC Health Care Data. Download the data [here](#) or on the [Humanitarian Data Exchange \(HDX\)](#).

THE IMPACT OF ATTACKS ON HEALTH CARE

South Sudan is one of the world's poorest countries and is ranked 192 out of 193 countries on the [UN Development Programme Human Development Index](#). As such, even before the impact of attacks on health care are accounted for, South Sudan's health care system suffers from serious long-term weaknesses and shortages of essential resources. [According to the International Medical Corps](#), there are less than 200 doctors in the whole of South Sudan with its population of over 12 million people, far below the WHO's recommended doctor-to-population [ratio of 1:1,000](#).

Serious [funding cuts in international aid to South Sudan since 2022](#) have exacerbated the situation, and none of the health facilities that closed due to the funding cuts in 2022 [had reopened as of early 2025](#). Health workers in South Sudan also [went unpaid](#) for multiple months during 2024.

The funding cuts and overarching weaknesses of the health care system have resulted in the limited functionality of health services. [According to the South Sudan Health Cluster, as of January 2025](#), 35% of health care facilities in South Sudan were either non-functional or had only limited functionality.

Violence and attacks on health care contribute to this situation by disrupting health services. For example, MSF was forced to [suspend its health provision activities in Yei](#), Central Equatoria state, following the abduction of two staff members in September 2024. In areas such as Renk town in Upper Nile state close to the Sudanese border, the arrival of displaced people from Sudan, [including hundreds with war wounds](#), has also intensified pressures on the health care providers that have remained operational.



- 1 Armed Conflict Location & Event Data (ACLED) database attribution policy, <https://acleddata.com/privacy-policy/> (accessed March 26, 2025).
- 2 Insecurity Insight. Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition 2024 Report Dataset: 2022-2024 SSD SHCC Health Care Data. Incident numbers 84685; 67222; 92425.
- 3 Insecurity Insight. Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition 2024 Report Dataset: 2022-2024 SSD SHCC Health Care Data. Incident numbers 84685; 66729; 67222.
- 4 Insecurity Insight. Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition 2024 Report Dataset: 2022-2024 SSD SHCC Health Care Data. Incident numbers 84690; 46696.
- 5 Insecurity Insight. Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition 2024 Report Dataset: 2022-2024 SSD SHCC Health Care Data. Incident numbers 92425; 43871.
- 6 Insecurity Insight. Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition 2024 Report Dataset: 2022-2024 SSD SHCC Health Care Data. Incident number 60062.

SAFEGUARDING HEALTH IN CONFLICT

The Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition is a group of more than 40 organizations working to protect health workers and services threatened by war or civil unrest. We have raised awareness of global attacks on health and pressed United Nations agencies for greater global action to protect the security of health care. We monitor attacks, strengthen universal norms of respect for the right to health, and demand accountability for perpetrators.

<https://safeguarding-health.com>

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