

**By John Actually**

**Despite the much hyped tribal peace talks in Jonglei state, deadly tribal conflicts** continue to claim a high toll in lives. The government's efforts to restore peace amongst feuding communities, many of them cattle keepers, have hit a snag, as evidenced by the upward trend in the number of cattle raiding incidents.

Jonglei is the most populous administrative unit in South Sudan and has for a long time desperately sought to secure a lasting peace amongst its multi-ethnic population. The vast territory is occupied by the Nuer, Dinka and Murle communities, with Anuak, Jie and Khasipo tribesmen as minorities.

Jonglei's tribal conflicts can be traced back to the 1950s when local communities; Murle, Dinka and Nuer resorted to cattle raiding from each other. Since then the communities have continued to sporadically attack each other using spears, bows and arrows and sticks. The situation worsened towards the end of the 1980s with the introduction of fire arms. The conflict took on a new dimension after both sides started abducting children.

The government has over the years failed to stop the fighting and casualties have continued to rise. This year, so far, over 900 people have been reported killed and many more injured in the clashes between Murle and Nuer tribesmen in Pibor County. Almost all the cattle in the 31 Bomas of Pibor County were stolen by Nuer raiders between 15<sup>th</sup>-30<sup>th</sup> June.

In a recent incident, a resident of Nuer, Mr Gatwich Dual, suffered severe injuries during a fight between the Murle and Nuer communities over cattle rustling. When asked why he took part in the raids, Mr Dual said he and a group from his clan decided to embark on a revenge mission following an alleged earlier attack on their village by suspected raiders from their Murle neighbours. He added that the attacks are normally carried out either to get quick riches or to revenge earlier attacks, leading to a vicious cycle of fighting.

A youth who has participated in many raids, James Tut, pointed out that women, children and the elderly are usually targeted due to their vulnerability, and in order to weaken the community

under attack. The fighting between Nuer and Murle communities over cattle has resulted in many women and children being either killed or kidnapped. Tut also elaborated that they have recently resorted to taking some children and women alive to compensate the many children and women abducted from them by Murle in the past. He said any women who resisted were killed. He added that a man who kills many men and kidnaps many women and children is regarded as a hero.

A Murle woman, Mrs Sahara Thamatho, describes the conflict between the two communities as extremely regrettable. She said women and children, due to their vulnerability, had borne the brunt of the skirmishes. "Some of the abducted children are sold to childless couples in far flung areas. It's a serious abuse of human rights and the new government must act to stop it," she asserted.

In a separate interview with villagers at Malual-Agorbaar, Mr Magak Deng, a victim of raiding, said the government should hold a peace conference with representatives of all the tribes and find a peaceful resolution to the problem. He added that state law should be amended to severely punish those involved in raiding, with the death penalty and long prison sentences being used as a deterrent.

According to Magak, the Murle are not the only cattle thieves and rustlers, and there are also some communities from Lakes State involved. He said he was raided this year in Lakes State by Aliap tribesmen who robbed 19 cattle from him while he was trying to cross Nile River to Bor.

Another resident of Malual-Agorbaar village, Man Kur Makol, said that his cousin was killed in July during a raid on Gam cattle camp by suspected Murle raiders. He blames the government of being reluctant to address the Murle issue, adding that the SPLA and some politicians armed the Murle back in the 1990s to fight against the Khartoum government but have never attempted to disarm them after the war. He said the guns are being used to kill the innocent people of Bor.

According to Kur, nobody from Bor has ever gone to raid Murle or other communities to avenge the attacks because they do not want their leaders in the central and state governments to be blamed, adding that he hopes peace will one day be restored in Jonglei. Kur suggests that the government should prioritize road construction in the state so that all counties are linked up to Bor town for easy security patrols.

Apparently, the state government has already set insecurity as the first priority in the state to be dealt with and has vowed to eradicate cattle raiding and child abduction by building good roads as well as holding peace conferences with all the tribes in Bor town. The governor of Jonglei, Kuol Manyang, says that all the cattle keeping communities in the state will also be encouraged to diversify their sources of income in order to reduce the dependency on cattle; growing crops for example. Manyang also promised to deploy adequate security personnel to all conflict prone borders to track down aggressors.