

Murle - Minority Rights Group

Profile

Murle are a Surmic speaking group living in South Sudan's Jonglei State. Murle, while one ethnic group, are divided into a primarily agriculturalist eastern group residing in the mountainous Boma plateau and a primarily pastoralist western group residing in Jonglei's wetlands. Murle society is organized by age set. Both highland and lowland Murle are members of the same age-sets which may include men within a ten-year age range. The dominant age set typically is responsible for community security and border protection, and has the right to marry.

History

Murle joined the SPLA early in the war but abuses against civilians and the killings of some of their senior members soon turned many Murle against the SPLA. Under the leadership of Sultan Ishmael Konyi, many lowland Murle formed the Pibor Defence Forces (PDF). At the same time, the SPLA maintained a base in Boma and many highland Murle remained with the SPLA. The PDF were supplied by the Sudanese government and this wartime alliance led to widespread suspicion of Murle by the SPLM/A government following the 2005 peace agreement.

Murle have been subject to discrimination at the state and national level as well as being both victims and perpetrators of deadly inter-communal violence. Their rebellion in 2012, in response to state-sponsored violence, led to a peace agreement in 2014 granting them greater self-government under a 'Greater Pibor Administrative Area'. However, the creation of this regional authority was not matched with adequate resources to ensure its viability

In 2013, Murle communities were subjected to revenge attacks by Lou Nuer militias, after Murle youth had been accused of attacks on Lou Nuer communities several months earlier.



Murle woman and child in South Sudan. Credit: Judy McCallum

Current issues

Murle remain threatened by the ongoing conflict between Murle and other ethnic communities, including Bor Dinka and Lou Nuer. Murle militias have themselves been responsible for a number of brutal assaults on rival communities, reinforcing a cycle of revenge attacks that leave Murle civilians vulnerable to reprisals. In particular, the continuing actions of the Yau Yau militia, associated with the Murle

community, led to a government crackdown and brutal disarmament campaign in Jonglei in 2012.

Murle have frequently been typecast as the primary aggressors in the vicious cycle of cattle raiding, child abductions and killings that has consumed Jonglei state for years – a position reinforced by the atrocities perpetrated in particular by Yau Yau militants. This, however, overlooks the complex reality of ethnic conflict from multiple communities that has frequently seen Murle targeted by militias from other ethnic groups, as well as the broader backdrop of their prolonged exclusion by dominant Dinka and Nuer within Jonglei.

Updated July 2018



Peoples Under Threat map

Our interactive map highlights countries most at risk of genocide and mass killing.

[See where South Sudan ranks](#)