

Shilluk - Minority Rights Group

Profile

The Shilluk are a Nilotic group that lives along the Nile and Sobat Rivers. They are the third largest ethnic group in South Sudan. The Shilluk kingdom is hierarchical and falls under the authority of the hereditary Shilluk king or reth.

History

Hundreds of years ago the Shilluk settled in their current area and developed an intensive system of agriculture as well as animal husbandry. During the colonial period many Shilluk began to convert to Christianity while maintaining the role of the reth.

In 1991, Dr. Riek Machar, a Nuer, and Dr. Lam Akol, a Shilluk, split with the SPLM/A. Many Shilluk followed Akol due to perceptions of ethnic bias in the SPLA. In 1997, Akol signed the Fashoda Agreement with the Sudanese government. During this period, some Shilluk lands began to be occupied by Dinka and other ethnic communities.

Following the CPA, Akol founded the largest opposition party in South Sudan, the Sudan People's Liberation Movement – Democratic Change. There were several attempts to 'disarm' Shilluk, leading to widespread violence, including against Shilluk women and children. Shilluk land claims were ignored by the government during this period and many blamed Dinka leadership in the SPLA for blocking them.



A Shilluk woman at an IDP camp near Aburoc, South Sudan. Credit: Ilvy Njiokiktjien/Cordaid

Current issues

While South Sudan's conflict is primarily driven by fighting between Dinka and Nuer forces, like other smaller ethnic minorities Shilluk have been drawn into the conflict as victims of targeted violence. In April 2015, for instance, reports emerged alleging that government forces had deliberately targeted members of the Shilluk community as punishment for their perceived support of opposition forces.

These attacks escalated further in early 2017 following a brutal government-led assault in the Upper Nile. While ostensibly targeting an armed opposition group, Shilluk Agwelek, government forces and ethnic Dinka militias also launched targeted attacks on civilian populations, looting and razing homes to the ground. The violence

saw tens of thousands of Shilluk uprooted from their homes.

As Shilluk have begun to return to their homes in early 2018, the UN has been supporting conflict management efforts between Shilluk and other ethnic groups. Efforts have also been underway among Shilluk in Wau to provide veterinarian support to pastoralist cattle herds.

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