

South Sudanese displaced people caught in no man's land – in pictures

About 30,000 people have fled the violence along the border between Sudan and its southern neighbour, South Sudan, and sought refuge in the disputed 23km buffer zone known as Mile 14, in South Sudan's Northern Bahr el Ghazal state. The conflict and the treacherous terrain make it hard to get humanitarian aid to people in need

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Jacob Zocherman in Northern Bahr el Ghazal

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The border area between Sudan and its southern neighbour has been plagued by fighting since South Sudan gained independence in 2011. Both countries claim the area south of the river, known as Kiir in South Sudan and Bahr al-Arab in Sudan. A border war broke out in 2012, but fighting abated towards the end of last year when Sudan's attention turned to Kordofan and civil war broke out in South Sudan. A 23km-wide buffer zone

known as Mile 14 was established this year along the southern bank of the river.



Officially no man's land, and with almost inaccessible terrain, it is difficult for aid organisations to operate in the buffer zone. About 30,000 people have fled the violence and sought refuge in and around the town of Pamat. But the sheer number of people, coupled with a very basic healthcare system, mean that even benign illnesses can be fatal



In Pamat, women and children queue outside a primary healthcare facility operated by Médecins sans Frontières (MSF). This is one of the few places in the Aweil region

where those who have found refuge after fleeing the violence along the border can seek medical care. Malaria is widespread during the rainy season. But many patients, because of the vast distances, poor roads and inadequate healthcare facilities, get help too late.



Cimir Cimir, 11, who has an abdominal mass, is waiting for an operation. Despite scarcely being able to feel his legs, he has walked a long way to reach the MSF clinic in Pamat. Unless he has urgent surgery, his legs will have to be amputated. The clinic does not have the facilities to operate. Cimir and his mother desperately hope that MSF can transfer him to another hospital so that his legs can be saved



Most come to the area empty-handed. This year's harvest is likely to dry up because of the irregular rains, worsening the humanitarian situation



The roads around Calek, which lies in the buffer zone, are impassable during the rainy season. The last time food was distributed by an aid organisation was in 2012. The civil war in South Sudan has diverted attention from the situation along the border. Most aid is instead reaching the eastern parts of the country where there has been more recent conflict



For most people, walking is the only mode of transport. Since civil war broke out in South Sudan, the conflict along the border with Sudan has faded from the public eye. People living in the area feel abandoned by their governments and the international community



A notice from a local pharmacy tells customers that there are no medicines available

Photograph: Jacob Zocherman



Achol Akuei is on her way to the market in Calek to sell sorghum to raise money for her grandchild's medicine. Five-year-old Angui is ill with malaria. Akuei receives 15 South Sudanese pounds (\$5) for the sorghum. If she cannot raise enough money, her grandchild could die. For Akuei, the choice is straightforward – she says it's better to be hungry and in good health than to have a full stomach and be ill and uncared for



The rains stopped suddenly, and insects destroyed many of the crops before the rains came again. Once the wet season is over, the few crops produced will be harvested. This year, many people face acute hunger, and the humanitarian situation is expected to deteriorate



Kiir Adem is the northernmost part of the buffer zone between Sudan and South Sudan

Photograph: Jacob Zocherman



Very little aid has reached Kiir Adem and the people who have sought refuge here. MSF has a mobile clinic that goes to Kiir Adem when the security situation allows. Community leaders claim Unisfa (the UN interim security force for the disputed Abyei area) has never visited the area, except for a few times when representatives flew past in a helicopter



Aciriin Deng, 27, is seven months pregnant. Clean drinking water is rare in Kiir Adem and there is constant shoving and pushing near the boreholes. The day before this picture was taken, Deng was kicked in the back while queueing for water. Since then, her unborn baby has not moved. The nearest clinic is a day trip away, but she has no money to pay for transport