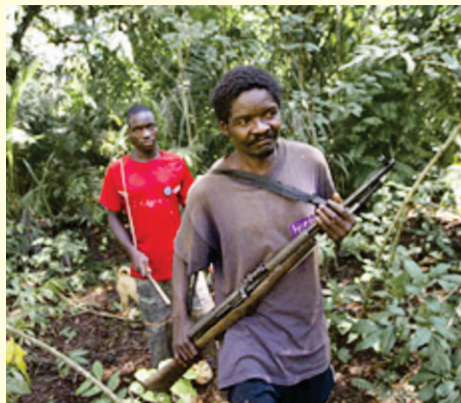


We are not a militia, say Southern Sudan's 'Arrow Boys'

By Phillip Mbugo William



Heavily armed arrow boys hunt for LRA raiders

They are youthful and daring. Villagers who have borne the brunt of the attacks of the Ugandan rebels – the Lords Resistant Army (LRA) – see them as their saviours. Armed with traditionally made bows and arrows, the Arrow Boys, as locals call them, have successfully protected their villages in Southern Sudan's Western Equatorial State against attacks by the LRA. The Arrow Boys, a rag tag community policing outfit, was formed to fight off the LRA that had set up a base at Nabanga-Rikuangba along the border of South Sudan and Northern Congo. The base was set up at the time when peace talks were going on in Juba between the Government of Uganda and LRA. The talks later broke down after LRA leaders refused to continue with peace negotiations. Besides bows and arrows, the Arrow Boys also use home made guns, known as “Fabri Casio” which cannot match the fire power of the LRA rebels who use sophisticated automatic weapons and even grenades. The Chairperson of Traditional Authority in WES, Wilson Hassan Peni, said that the group was formed after consultations with top Southern Sudanese leaders. “When the situation worsened with frequent attacks by the LRA, a team was selected in WES to meet the Vice President of South Sudan Dr. Riak Machar in 2008 and seek the

government's help,” said Peni. Peni said the name “Arrow Boys” was a borrowed from Northern Uganda where the LRA originated in 1986 to fight the Government of Uganda. Arrow boys or Rhino Groups were formed at community level in Gulu, Teso in order to protect civilians against attacks from the LRA. Led by charismatic Joseph Kony, the LRA has killed thousands of people, raped women and abducted hundreds of children, many of whom are either turned into wives or drafted as fighters. In Western Equatorial state the rebels have caused untold suffering to the locals, besides the many killings and abductions. Their attacks have continued to hinder post civil war reconstruction of the rich agricultural state, with most farmers staying away from their arable land in fear of being abducted or maimed. Peni said that there is no specific number of Arrow boys because households were expected to contribute volunteers to join the group. He said that although the LRA attacks had reduced after the rebels scattered deep into the Congo forest, the Arrow Boys still need help because the rebels could return to molest the people. “We are urging well-wishers to support the Arrow boys with food and communication equipment to help them prepare for any future attacks against the villages,” he added. Peni said the Arrow Boys also needed logistical support to supplement the efforts of the Southern Sudanese Army. “This group is not a militia. It is a community policing outfit whose efforts must be appreciated,” he said. A member of the Arrow Boys in Yambio County Mr. Khamis Pee acknowledges that his colleagues have put their lives at risk to protect the community against attacks by the LRA. “We need support. We need food and logistical support from well

wishers. We also need motivation because we are supplementing the government's efforts in protecting the people,” said Pee. He added: “We assure the SPLA soldiers of our cooperation as we struggle to give support to our communities.” The Official Government spokesperson who is the State Minister of Information and Communications WES, Gibson Bullen Wande, stated that there was strong

cooperation and coordination between Arrow Boys and Government forces. Wande cautioned against reference to the Arrows Boys as militia, explaining that they were just Home Guards or vigilantes. “The Arrow Boys are not a creation of the government. Chiefs are responsible for their operations because they are directly under them,” he said.■

MAN STABS HIMSELF OVER WITCHCRAFT ALLEGATIONS

By Agele Benson Amos

In the remote villages of Yei River County, in Southern Sudan, superstition still runs deep in the blood of the local residents. Here, a mention of the word witchcraft sends shivers down the spines of many residents. Traditional medicine men instil fear into superstitious villagers, some of whom part with huge amounts of money to appease these 'doctors'. But the 'doctors' are loathed because it is believed they cause suffering to innocent people. This perhaps is what drove a 35 year old man to attempt to kill himself after he was branded a witch doctor. Francis Likambo, a resident of Mahad area in Payam stabbed himself in the stomach following allegations he has been bewitching his neighbours and is now in hospital in a critical condition. The incident occurred at his elder sister's home on Sunday 23rd January 2011. Francis told reporters that he left his village in Bura in Mugwo payam because of allegations of witch craft against him by many residents. “I had to move to Mahad where I lived with my wife and five children because I could not stand the false accusations any more,” he said. But the accusations followed him even after fleeing his home. “I wanted to kill myself because I knew I could be attacked by mobs. It was better to kill myself than wait to be killed by a mob,” he said as he writhed in pain at Yei state hospital. He added: “I thought killing myself would give the people in the village the freedom they needed. I didn't want my presence to threaten peace because some people have been hunting for me for two days.” After a long meditation on the

problem, Francis rushed to his kitchen and grabbed a knife which he violently plunged into his stomach. But death did not come as quickly as he wished and he was rushed to hospital by friends and relatives. But while he denied ever practicing witch craft, Francis admitted his 'careless' utterances after drinking local brews made the neighbours brand him a witch. “It is true I sometimes utter bad words when drunk. People decided to judge me by what I say and what I do,” he said sadly. He said that just before he stabbed himself, a friend had told him that security officials were planning to arrest him. Francis' elder sister, Betty Kiden, defends her brother, saying he had never bewitched anyone. “I am challenging his accusers to show me a single grave of any of his victims, if truly he was a witch,” he said angrily. She added: “Witchcraft is inherited and none of my forefathers practised witchcraft.” A military officer and a neighbour to Francis, Abdu Jima Timiyan defended him, saying he was an innocent man. “I have known him for many years. We often eat together. He has not bewitched anyone,” said Timiyan. The Criminal Investigation Department director for Yei civil police, John Hassen Elsapa, urged chiefs and other locals to put an end to mob psychology and attacks on suspects. “Don't accuse anybody without evidence. But even if there is evidence, only the police are allowed to arrest such suspects,” he said. He said investigations have been launched into the matter, as Francis fights for his life at the hospital.■

YAMBIO STATE HOSPITAL CRIES OUT FOR HELP

By Gift Friday

It is a tale of a medical facility in an Intensive Care Unit. While it is expected to save the lives of people living in the expansive Yambio state, the Yambio State Hospital is itself in dire need of a comprehensive facelift to meet standards for operations.

The facility is faced by an acute shortage of vital facilities and can hardly cope with the high number of patients. It has only four functional departments, according to a senior doctor at the facility, Dr Munadil Atif. He disclosed that only the Surgical Department with two theaters, the pediatric department, the maternity and medical departments are functional. The health facility, he said, has only 6 general doctors and practitioners, and 43 nurses among whom only four are certified and registered. “We lack buildings to accommodate medical personnel, specialists and consultants, forcing us to refer many cases to the Juba teaching Hospital,” he said. The hospital's X-ray, ultra sound and dental machines, scanners and eye care departments were not functional. But he said the situation was set to improve after an international medical organization – Medicines sans Frontiers (MSF) – sent a group of medical experts to the hospital to help patients. The MSF, Dr Atif said, had also donated drug supplies to the health facility. However, the doctor who has spent three years in Yambio, refuted reports that the hospital had



Patients lying outside Yambio hospital waiting to be attended to.

high mortality rates. “In 2010 we made 422 deliveries in Yambio state hospital, of which there were severe complications with 69 but, no single mother died” he said. He added: “The mortality rate in

doctor said that over 40,000 people were treated at the hospital last year. He asked the Government of Southern Sudan to post more doctors and deliver

Western Equatoria over the past few years is less than 0.4 % which has never happened anywhere. There were about 455 major operations done in the state hospital, and no single death was recorded despite working with limited resources.”

The doctor working with the MSF, Dr Francisco Bartolomer, said his team decided to help the hospital after seeing its deplorable condition. He said MSF was more facilities at the hospital, which is located in Western Equatoria. The hospitals' Matron, Teresa Dabi, said, the state hospital's security remained poor since it had no fence, putting the lives of staff and patients at risk. “To make matters worse, the whole hospital does not have stretchers, shelter for patients, no emergency ward, and no ambulance” she said. Teresa who has worked at Mulago Hospital in Kampala, in Khartoum and many parts of Sudan said that unlike in other hospitals, doctors working in Western Equatoria had no risk allowances. She stated that the hospital has a capacity of only 120 beds – a very small number for a state hospital. A doctor working with the MSF, Dr Francisco Bartolomer, said his team decided to help the hospital after seeing its deplorable condition. He said MSF was

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SOUTH SUDAN'S VETERAN FEMALE JOURNALIST PASSES ON

By Paul Jimbo

It was on Friday 18th March 2011 when the ugly and greedy face of death snatched the life of South Sudanese seasoned journalist Apollonia Mathia. And as fate would have it a jovial Apollonia came face to face with death following a grisly road accident that involved a truck and the motorcycle she rode on.

The incident happened shortly after Apollonia left the Association of Media Development in South Sudan (AMDISS), whose premises are located in Juba Hai Malakia, along the busy Customs-Juba highway. She was headed to her place of work located at

the World Bank's premises along Ministries Road in Juba.

Apollonia, according to eye witnesses, met her death after a truck lost control, veered of the road and crashed into the



The late veteran journalist

motorcycle that was ridden by her son Peter. The son however cheated death by a whisker though with serious injuries.

Apollonia was one of the leading figures in Southern Sudan's media; she served as an editor in various media houses and was instrumental in founding the Union of Journalists of

Southern Sudan (UJOSS). At the time of her death, Apollonia was the Executive Director of the Association of Media Women in Southern Sudan (AMWISS) besides working at South Sudan's World Bank Micro-finance investment department.

“She died on the spot, we were all shocked, we cannot come to terms with what actually happened”, said Lilly Nelson, AMWISS treasurer who worked very closely with Apollonia. Following her death, messages of condolences started pouring in with UJOSS Chairperson Oliver Modi saying, “Working tirelessly as Journalist in Sudan during the time of the Khartoum regime, Apollonia as a female journalist was able to demonstrate her journalistic skills without fear to report on the political, economic and social life of the people of Southern Sudan”.

Cont. p2 ■■■■■▶

EDITORIAL

DO NOT GIVE UP ON TOWN PLANNING

Earlier this year, authorities concerned with town planning seemed to have mapped out a proper plan to ensure sanity was restored in Juba city and its environs. Indeed it was through this strategy that we saw a clear re-organisation of the small towns and market centres. Before mashrooming structures littered Juba and it was done as if with full impunity. Several people carelessly put up structure in places hitherto considered public utility lands and even on road reserves. Some of the places affected by this trend included the cemeteries which bore the brunt of pressure from human settlements. In some cases playing fields were encroached into, probably with sinister motives to grab them at the end of the day. When the Government of Southern Sudan (GoSS) alongside the Central Equatoria state authorities combined forces, they successfully secured these areas.

The demolition of illegally erected structures from areas considered not meant for market saw some order in town. It also helped define what public utility lands were as far as provision of essential services to the residents is concerned. It is also believed that previously the upsurge in crime cases came as a result of the structures which some theories say, were used as hide-outs for criminals. At some point, the criminals even used the shanties to peddle drugs besides lay their strategies. Soon after the demolitions, we saw a decline in crime rate in town and thank God, the crackdown by security personnel on those who illegally owned weapons, too came handy. It should therefore be understood by all that the recent disarmament exercise is part of the ongoing efforts by the government to ensure there is law and order besides some sanity in doing business. ■

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March 2011

YAMBIO STATE HOSPITAL CRIES OUT FOR HELP

currently working at the surgical department, maternity and the pediatric department. They are also supplying stationary to the hospital for record keeping. The hospital also lacks a drug store and laboratory equipment, according to its administrator, Mr Samuel Bambise. The hospital was initially managed by CORDAID, a Non Governmental Organization run by the Catholic diocese of Tambura-Yambio from 1994-

2005. The administrator said the hospital had no mains electricity and uses a generator to light up its facilities. The MSF, he added, had also helped to construct latrines at the facility. But despite the problems facing the hospital, patients put up a brave face, hoping that their conditions will improve. One of the patients, Enoka Ephraim said the services were not very good. "We come to this hospital for medical

prescriptions and get our drugs from private clinics which are very expensive," he said. Another patient, Roseline Margaret, a mother, expressed her dismay that the hospital does not have enough syrups for small children. Margaret says she walks long distances to the hospital and that it takes long hours to access the services in the hospital because there are many patients," she said. ■

SOUTH SUDAN'S VETERAN FEMALE JOURNALIST PASSES ON

The UJOSS Chairman added, "She contributed as a founding member of UJOSS and later established AMWISS in Juba with the aim of encouraging South Sudanese women to join the journalism profession and be active. Her work and vision will never be forgotten by the UNION". Veteran journalist Richard Ruati said, "her memorable moment with me was when we had gone to Juba Raha to meet some politicians for a story. I was shocked to learn about her death from a fellow journalist who went to the accident scene."

Apollonia worked closely with Media Diversity Institute (MDI) staff and the entire UJOSS executive body. According to MDI's Tim Williams, Apollonia's death is a great loss to the entire media fraternity in Southern Sudan and the world over. "Apollonia's passing is a great loss to us and the country as a whole and to me, who has learned a lot from her and still needed her help", Tim added. He described the late Apollonia as "a rock of Sudanese journalism", who

doubled up as a determined woman journalist, and had a clear vision for the role of women in the future state of Southern Sudan. UJOSS founder member Edward Ladu Terso said that Apollonia's demise had left a vacuum where there had been a journalist and activist who respected women's rights and who sought to put to an end to lack of representation of women in media.

MDI's Executive Director, Milica Pesic, said, "We are deeply saddened by the death of Apollonia Mathia. MDI had the honour of meeting her and even working with her on several occasions, the last one being when she kindly contributed to The People's Voice's roundtable organized by our partner UJOSS last November in Juba." Milica added, "We appreciate enormously what she has done with her sisters from AMWISS – for the women of South Sudan, for journalism in South Sudan and for the country as a whole". Milica said that that she had nothing but admiration for woman like Apollonia who were like the engines of their societies, the

beacons of their gender and a huge inspiration for all. "When I met Apollonia, what struck me was what a modest and dignified lady she was. She did not speak a lot but, each word she put forward came out of her personal and professional experience, her wisdom, and her passion for journalism and the people of South Sudan. It would be great if UJOSS could establish an award to immortalise her needs and her name", Milica commented.

MDI's Juba office, through their Project Coordinator, Paul Jimbo, described the late Apollonia as a beacon of hope and a woman who defied all the odds to weather the media turbulence in a post conflict region such as Southern Sudan. "She stood for a free and independent media, she sought to have full representation of female voices in the media, she sought to use the media as a tool to further gender equality and even lobbied for more women in the media", said Jimbo. ■

March 2011

YEI 'BODA BODA TAXI' RIDERS CALL FOR HELP

By AGELE BENSON AMOS



Yei traffic director Andrew Kenyi

Alarmed by the high number of accidents, motor cycle and bicycle taxi operators in Yei River County are pleading with the police to help them with training on road safety. Although it has been a major source of livelihood for the

many youths in the County, the 'boda boda' business, as it is known in Yei, has killed many operators in road accidents. The operators are now pleading with the police and government officials to organize training sessions to equip their members with traffic safety skills. The 'Boda Boda' Union Secretary, Mr Wayi Kennedy said road accidents would wipe out all young people in the county if nothing was done to train them on road safety. "We are losing many young people in road accidents. They are struggling to make a livelihood but they don't have the road safety skills needed. Something has to be done," he said. Some of the riders, he added, were very young and did not know how to ride the automobiles. "The Union does not register members according to age because if age was to be used, many of the youths will be shut out of the business. What we need is training and not regulations that will bar many of us from the business," he said. The secretary urged the 'boda boda' riders to obey traffic signs on the road and also use a moderate speed. "I am also cautioning the riders against operating at night because most of

the accidents occur at that time," he added. Kennedy said many of the riders also operate motorcycles without number plates and insurance, making it difficult to get insurance whenever they were involved in accidents. The traffic director for Yei River county, Andrew Kenyi said the number of accidents in the county has reduced because of strict enforcement by his officers. However, he said there was an urgent need to train the 'boda boda' cyclists on road safety. According to Kenyi, five people have died in road accidents since in December while forty others were injured. He said more traffic police officers will be deployed to schools and market areas to control traffic and avoid accidents. "We are deploying more police officers because the bumps that were controlling the movement of vehicles have been removed," he said. A fifty year old woman, Ester Asa, a resident of Erap area in Yei town payam, Yei River County, expressed her worries about the safety of nursery school children who had to cross the roads every day. "Motorists over speed on the roads, putting the lives of the children in danger. If nothing is done, then we will lose all our children," she said. ■

Clashes kill eight, causing humanitarian crisis

By Gift Friday

A major humanitarian crisis is unfolding in Western Equatoria following clashes over pasture that left 8 people dead and more than 15,000 people displaced. The displaced, among them women, children and the elderly have gone for days without food, blankets and shelter after their houses were destroyed during the clashes in Yirol West in Lake State and Western Equatoria. Government officials said the incidences occurred after pastoralists from Yirol clashed with farmers from Mvolo County over grazing fields. The commissioner of Mvolo County, Paul Tier said, the fight broke out late on 8th March when the pastoralists from Yirol West raided Bar Girindi Payam, where one policeman from Mopourdit Payam of Yirol West started shooting at local residents. Peter Bede, a youth from Mvolo expressed concern over the state of security in the region and asked the Government to intervene. "It does not mean that we do not want the pastoralists, but they need to know where and when to graze their cattle", he added. Stephen Dominic a resident of Yambio said conflict management and peace conferences should be conducted for the two communities in order to avoid continued bloodshed. He added: "We are living in fear because of insecurity. It is sad the communities are fighting over an issue that can be resolved." The director of the South Sudan Relief and Re-integration Commission Western Equatoria State (SSRRC), Lexson Amuzai Worri, said available food aid for the displaced was quickly running out. "It will be a catastrophe if nothing is done to restock the food supplies to the displaced. They are suffering," he said. South Sudan is due to become independent in July after a referendum earlier this year, as part of a 2005 peace deal with Khartoum. Despite the peace agreement, violence, often related to cattle raiding, is still common in South Sudan where many communities are still armed with weapons left over from the civil war. Villagers interviewed said they

were sleeping in the cold and had not had meals for days. Many of their fellow villagers, they told reporters, had been injured during the attacks. The commissioner of Mvolo County, Paul Tier, added that on the 9th and 10th March, Korikori Payam had been attacked and several houses, primary health care facilities, the Payam administrator's office, an education office and schools were burnt down. "The Dinka Atuot of Yirol West did the same destruction in Bar Girindi Payam, looting kiosks and drugs from the health centres and burning the Payam into ashes" said Tier. He said security forces sent from Yirol West to restore order also suffered casualties after one of them was injured in a shoot out with the locals. "The officer was shooting at the locals from a tree when he was caught in a crossfire," sources said. Meanwhile Makur Kulang Liei, county commissioner of Yirol West County, said the fight was unexpected as it came at a time when plans were being made to hold a peace meeting between the two communities. On Wednesday 16th March 2011, the State Minister of Local government and Law enforcement Western Equatoria State, Wilson Sidgi, together with the County commissioner of Mvolo toured the two counties to appeal for calm. The Minister confirmed that over 15,000 people have been displaced and feared that the number could rise as tension was still high in the area. He also confirmed that they were living under pathetic conditions and were in dire need of relief assistance. "We toured the two Payams of Bargirindi and Korikori where we recovered two P.Kem machine guns and other new rifles," he said. The Minister disclosed that he had spoken with the commissioner of Yirol West, Makur, who had agreed to lobby the community to stop further attacks against Mvolo. He said the Inspector General of Police Achuil, had recommended that a team of investigators be sent to Mvolo to establish the real cause of the clashes. The governor of Western Equatoria State, Bangasi Joseph Bakosoro, said the state



Displaced people from Bar Girindi Payam in Mvolo town

government is working to reconcile communities through peace building conferences. The Governor of Lake State, Chol Tong, and his Western Equatoria State counterpart, Bakosoro, also resolved to form an investigation committee to scrutinize the incidents that took place in Mvolo. According to the resolution of the meeting held in Mvolo County between the two states, the committee will comprise neutral members who do not support either side. The committee will be made up of the Chairman, from WES Legal administration unit, Secretary from Lakes, Police, a member of Military intelligence from WES, a member of National security from Lakes state, and Public security from WES. Meanwhile the Governor of WES, Bangasi Joseph Bakosoro, called upon the Mvolo local authority to protect all the communities. "We don't want segregation. We should not ask some people to leave because they are our people. We should all live together as the people of Southern Sudan," he said. The clash between the two neighboring communities of Mvolo in Western Equatoria state and Yirol West in Lakes state is not new. Similar fights erupted in Mvolo County on the 9th February 2011, which left 14 people dead, and many more displaced. Over 300 people have lost their lives in such clashes in Mvolo County since 2005 with many more displaced from their hometowns. ■