



By: *Sharmila Devi*

US travel ban leaves South Sudan even more alone in facing myriad challenges



A US **travel ban** on people coming from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Uganda and South Sudan imposed after an Ebola outbreak in the DRC's South Kivu province was described by epidemiologists as a blanket measure that will do little to address the spread of the disease.

They say the ban illustrated ignorance of the many humanitarian pressures on South Sudan, where there have not yet been any confirmed cases of Ebola.

“Such measures can create fear, damage economies, discourage transparency, complicate humanitarian and health operations, and divert movement toward informal and unmonitored routes – potentially increasing public health risks rather than reducing them,” said the **Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention**, the main public health agency of the African Union.

South Sudan faces a civil conflict that threatens to spread and a long-standing humanitarian crisis that receives even less attention than that in its northern neighbour Sudan.

Is anyone listening?

South Sudan is the world's youngest nation, gaining independence in 2011 after fighting two civil wars against Sudan and winning the backing of many US Christian evangelicals and celebrities.

Many of these early backers have long since abandoned South Sudan, where a civil war fought between 2013 and 2018 left nearly 400,000 people dead, and conflict is threatening to engulf the country again.

War and famine could spread across the country, but is anyone listening to the UN and others who are raising the alarm?

UN's \$1.5 billion response plan has so far received only about \$350 million

Since last December, conflict has pushed more than 300,000 people to leave their homes. Nearly 10 million people – more than three quarters of the population – will need humanitarian assistance this year, but the UN's \$1.5 billion **response plan** has so far received only about \$350 million.

The current political crisis started in March 2025 when Riek Machar, the now-suspended vice-president, was accused of orchestrating an attack on a government garrison.

He was placed under house arrest in the capital, Juba, and he and 20 others face charges including treason linked to militia raids in the north-east. All deny the charges.

Ordinary South Sudanese pay the price

Fighting continues between the South Sudan People's Defence Forces (SSPDF), the government army loyal to President Salva Kiir, and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement In Opposition (SPLM-IO) led by Machar.

The SPLM-IO launched an offensive in co-ordination with the White Army, a youth militia drawn from Machar's Nuer community, in the northern part of Jonglei and captured several government outposts in December. The SSPDF mounted a counteroffensive in mid-January, calling it Operation Enduring Peace with little apparent irony.

“Civilians are bearing the brunt of a spike in indiscriminate attacks, including aerial bombardments, deliberate killings, abductions and conflict-related sexual violence,” said Volker Türk, the **UN's High Commissioner for Human Rights**.

In late April, the United Nations Security Council, including the US, voted to keep operating for another year the UN peacekeeping mission in South Sudan, called UNMISS and established in 2011.

But Washington insisted on cutting language

in the mandate on capacity-building, development, gender and climate change. China and Russia abstained in the vote.

“The United States remains deeply concerned that President Kiir’s actions are driving South Sudan backward while exploiting international support and obstructing those that are genuinely trying to help,” **Mike Waltz**, US representative to the UN, said in a statement after the vote.

Food insecurity projections showed 7.8 million South Sudanese, or 55% of the population, will face high levels of severe food insecurity by July

He said between last October and March, UNMISS recorded 480 incidents when peacekeepers were blocked, humanitarian access was denied, repatriation flights were obstructed and bases were forced to close.

“Future US support for elections, including through the United Nations, will depend on whether South Sudan’s leaders put their own public resources behind elections, public services, and government salaries,” said Waltz.

Thousands of schoolteachers, health workers and other civil servants in South Sudan say they have not been paid for months, some even for years, while leaders prioritise their fight for control. Meanwhile, ordinary South Sudanese pay the price.

The **UN** has warned of “a credible risk of famine” in four counties with conflict-affected communities “cut off from food, markets, and essential services ... These populations are experiencing extreme conditions marked by death, starvation and the collapse of livelihoods.”

Food insecurity projections showed 7.8 million South Sudanese, or 55% of the population, will face high levels of severe food insecurity by July. Compounding the crisis is the return of more than 1 million people fleeing war in Sudan and joining the more than 2.3 million

people displaced within South Sudan.

All parties to the conflict exploiting aid

The medical NGO **Médecins Sans Frontières** said earlier this month that attacks on its facilities, including the bombing of two hospitals in May 2025 and in February this year, had led to around 762,000 people losing access to healthcare.



Repeated attacks had forced the medical NGO Médecins Sans Frontières to close four hospitals

It accused the government of blocking humanitarian access into opposition-controlled areas and said all parties to the conflict were exploiting aid for political and military ends.

Repeated attacks had forced the NGO to close four hospitals. “Attacks on medical facilities, healthcare workers, and civilians are unacceptable and must stop,” said Gul Badshah, MSF’s operations manager. “Government and opposition forces, as well as all other armed groups, must take full responsibility for their actions.”

The Ebola outbreak in DRC means even less focus on helping South Sudanese while the World Health Organisation works to prevent any cross-border transmission. But international aid cuts have actively hampered disease control and are starting to reverse decades of gains in international global health.

Meanwhile, the US travel ban is unlikely to have much effect on the outbreak.