



Peace, Mediation, and Justice in South Sudan

Developments from 2025 by Leah Rose, Zoe Gudino, and Nicholas de Carvalho

South Sudan gained independence from Sudan on 9 July, 2011, following decades of conflict. However, the promise of peace quickly faded as political rivalry between **President Salva Kiir** and **Riek Machar** led the country to **civil war** in 2013. Since then, South Sudan's history has been shaped by repeated cycles of violence, fragile ceasefires, and power-sharing agreements that have failed to hold up. Efforts to restore peace, such as the **2015 Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (ARCSS)** and the **2018 Revitalised ARCSS (R-ARCSS)**, offered frameworks for reconciliation, but implementation has faltered due to **mistrust, governance challenges, and ongoing armed disputes**. Despite setbacks, **regional and international mediation** has remained central to South Sudan's peace process.

This poster explores the country's ongoing struggle for **peace, mediation, and justice**, focusing on three recent developments that reflect these issues. The **Tumaini (Hope) Initiative**, led by Kenya, represents **renewed diplomatic efforts** to re-engage opposition groups. The African Union's **Panel of the Wise** serves as a key **third-party mediator**, promoting dialogue and encouraging adherence to peace commitments. Finally, **Riek Machar's arrest in 2025** underscores the complex **relationship between justice, accountability, and political reconciliation**. Together, these cases demonstrate both the persistence of mediation efforts and the challenges that continue to impede South Sudan's path to peace.

Tumaini: hope or hollow promise

Mediator: Kenya
Goal: Re-engage non-signatories of the 2018 R-ARCSS in renewed peace talks (Wol, 2024)

Strengths

Renewed dialogue: Revived talks with holdout groups to address local violence and power-sharing (Akuocpiir, 2024)
Inclusive: Brought in civil society and faith leaders to build trust (Akuocpiir, 2024).
Support: Mediation revived diplomatic momentum and global goodwill (Pospisil and Magara, 2024)

Downfalls

Duplication: Repeated 2018 R-ARCSS content (Wol, 2024)
Overlap: New bodies clashed with old structures (Wol, 2024)
Fractures: Machar's SPLM-IO withdrew, over mandate concerns (Wol, 2024)
Mistrust & weak will: Government overreach, poor funding, and poor political will stalled progress (Manyang, 2025)

Current Status

Tumaini has largely stalled. Stands as a reminder that without political will, peace remains a hollow promise

Panel of the Wise

Panel of five African high-level officials (including former heads of state) appointed by the African Union
Goal: De-escalate tensions and promote dialogue (AU, 2025)

Actions

Visited Juba on April 2nd. Talked with President Salva Kiir, but could not see Riek Machar due to his arrest
Visited Juba again in May, again only meeting President Salva Kiir. Discussed preserving the 2018 peace agreement (Amaniasafrica, 2025)

Result

Due to inability to meet all belligerents, even a high level delegation failed to mediate the South Sudan conflict. There is potential for the Panel of the Wise to visit Juba again, but so far no progress. Without a possibility to mediate with all local belligerents, the Panel of the Wise exemplifies that dialogue alone only goes so far

Machar's Arrest

11 September, 2025 Riek Machar was formally charged with murder, treason, and crimes against humanity for allegedly commanding a White Army attack in Nasir County that killed 250 soldiers and a UN crew member

Court Proceedings

A **Special Court** ruled it had jurisdiction to try Machar and seven co-accused despite defence claims that his immunity as vice-president must be lifted first
Defence lawyers have contested court legitimacy, citing overlap with the Hybrid Court for South Sudan (HCSS) established under the 2018 peace deal (*Special court: We Have Jurisdiction to Try Dr. Machar, Co-Accused*, 2025)
Justice Minister **Joseph Geng Akech** said the case shows **no one is above accountability**; Machar's allies call the trial a **"political witch hunt"** (Winter and Mandel, 2025)

Significance

Domestic: Jeopardises peace implementation and widens ethnic and political divides. Analysts warn the prosecution is a **major escalation** that could collapse the unity government and risk **renewed civil war** (Mureithi, 2025)
Legal: Tests South Sudan's judicial independence and obligations under international law and the 2018 Peace Accord
International: Signals the fragility of post-conflict justice and raises questions about Hybrid Court relevance



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