AFTERMATH OF MASS RAPE IN SOUTH SUDAN AUGMENTS NEED FOR HEALTH CARE

On July 11, 2016, South Sudanese soldiers went on a four-hour pillage at the Terrain Hotel in Juba, assaulting and gang-raping foreign aid workers while also killing a local journalist. The United Nations peacekeeping force, which was stationed less than a mile away, did not respond to their cries for help. This lead health facilities, such as the Southern Sudan Healthcare Organization (SSHCO), to assist the abandoned.

When recounting the attack to The Associated Press, a female aid worker explained that a soldier pointed an AK-47 at her and gave her the following choices: “Either you have sex with me, or we make every man here rape you and then we shoot you in the head.”

This foreign aid worker was not the only woman raped during the attack at the Terrain Hotel. A group of 30 foreign aid workers was staying at the hotel when roughly 80 soldiers stormed the compound, beating, assaulting and raping its inhabitants.

Survivors of the attack reported they signaled for help via Facebook, text, and email to United Nations peacekeeping troops that stationed less than a mile from the Terrain Hotel. The United Nations Joint Operations Center in Juba received the first cry for help at 3:37 p.m.

The timeline of events indicated that at 6:52 p.m., the United Nations Department of Safety and Security declared it would not send military help to the compound.

This attack indicates growing hostility toward aid workers and foreigners by soldiers under President Salva Kiir’s command. Kiir has been fighting supporters of rebel leader Riek Machar since 2013 during the outbreak of South Sudan's civil war.

The aftermath and health implications of the attack, which were increased by the United Nations’ inaction, augments the need for health care facilities in South Sudan. North of Juba in Maar, South Sudan, SSHCO is working to serve this vital need.

Co-founder of SSHCO Jacob Atem expressed the consequences of these atrocities by stating:

“South Sudan already has the highest maternal mortality rate in the world, and these attacks do nothing to improve this. The possibility of becoming pregnant or contracting an STD, these women must also deal with the psychological consequences of rape on their own. Caught in the crossfire of war, these women are unable to access the care they need. This must change.”

To combat these issues SSHCO has welcomed victims while uplifting them with health care services, medical supplies, and education.

In light of the recent attacks, the importance of accessible prenatal care and women’s health facilities continues to increase. Jacob Atem argues:

“If we want to improve the communities in South Sudan, we need to focus on taking care of the women and children who live there. These children are the backbone of South Sudan’s future. They are our future leaders. SSHCO is the frontline of defense against diseases in Maar, and we are working toward making prenatal and maternal care more accessible to better serve the women in the community.”

SSHCO will ensure women and their children have access to high-quality health care and provide them with the best possible future.

By: William Janey

Our History

Founded in 2008, Southern Sudan Healthcare Organization (SSHCO) began when co-founders Jacob Atem and Lual Deng Awan reconnected to build a health clinic in their home village of Maar, South Sudan. Like many villages in South Sudan, Maar experienced a genocide that took many lives and separated families, forcing Jacob, Lual and other refugees to flee their villages during the Sudanese Civil War in the mid 90's.

Before the civil war broke out, Jacob and Lual grew up as neighbors in the Jonglei State of South Sudan. Once the war erupted, the two parted ways as they fought for their lives and sought refuge. They later reconnected in Kakuma Refugee camp in Kenya. After Jacob and Lual relocated to Michigan, the two maintained a strong relationship with frequent visits and phone calls.

The location of Maar’s isolates its citizens from medical attention, as the closest clinics are located in Panyagor and Bor. These villages can take over three days to reach, and the clinics are often poorly funded. In some cases, patients are left to use folded blankets between poles to form stretchers. Other improper forms of treatment are not uncommon in the region.

Lual and Jacob created SSHCO to bring proper health care treatment to an area in desperate need of hope and healing. With only $25 in the SSHCO bank account, the organization started the process of putting together a Board of Directors and later applied to become an official 501(c)(3) organization.

After establishing itself as a nonprofit, the SSHCO board members began raising funds and awareness to build a health clinic in Maar, South Sudan. With the help of generous donors and influencers from North Sudan, Egypt and Kuwait, SSHCO was able to construct its first clinic - an $800,000 facility in Maar.

Since its creation, the health clinic has offered respectable levels of health care to the people of Maar and surrounding areas for the first time. For less than $5 per patient, SSHCO has provided hundreds of people with a better life.