

South Sudan: No Amnesty for International Crimes Human Rights Watch 9 June 2014
South Sudan

's peace talks should proceed on the basis that justice for serious crimes is an essential part of any peace agreement, Human Rights Watch said in a

[letter](#)

addressed to the mediators that was released today. The mediators should ensure that there is no amnesty for those responsible for serious crimes committed in violation of international law, Human Rights Watch said.

Peace negotiations are scheduled to resume in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, on June 9, 2014, mediated by the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), an East African regional body.

“The devastating crimes of the conflict in South Sudan have their roots in the lack of justice for brutal crimes during the long war,” said Daniel Bekele, Africa director at Human Rights Watch. “The mediators need to break with the past by ensuring that amnesty for serious crimes is not on the table.”

South Sudan's conflict began in the capital, Juba, in mid-December 2013 but has spread across much of the country. A January 23, 2014, cessation of hostilities agreement signed by both parties to the conflict in the early days of the talks has been repeatedly broken. IGAD has since sent teams of observers to South Sudan to monitor compliance with cessation of hostilities agreement.

Human Rights Watch research since December 2013 has found that forces from both sides have been responsible for serious violations of international human rights and humanitarian law, including war crimes and potential crimes against humanity. There has been widespread targeting of civilians, often because of their ethnicity, including in gruesome massacres. Forces on both sides have also committed massive looting and destruction of civilian property, including many medical and humanitarian facilities that people need to survive, which under the laws of war enjoy protection from attack.

The United Nations Mission in South Sudan, in a May 2014 [report](#), said that there are “reasonable grounds to believe that crimes against humanity have been committed during the conflict by both Government and opposition forces.”

International law is clear on the need for justice for serious crimes. International treaties including the 1949 Geneva Conventions, which South Sudan has ratified, require parties to a conflict to ensure that people allegedly responsible for serious crimes are prosecuted. Both the UN and the African Commission on Human and People's Rights have issued principles against amnesty for serious crimes in peace deals.

Human Rights Watch experience over the past 20 years in many countries suggests that peace without justice often fosters renewed cycles of violence. There has never been accountability for serious crimes in Sudan, including in the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement, which ended the long civil war in Sudan and eventually led to the creation of South

Sudan as an independent nation. The memory of the crimes committed during the civil war and the lack of accountability helped fuel the current crisis. (...) Read the full [article](#) .