

Beat: Local

Ambush in South Sudan kills 12 UN peacekeepers, staff members

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USPA News - Five Indian peacekeepers and seven UN staff members were killed Tuesday when unidentified gunmen ambushed a United Nations (UN) patrol in South Sudan, officials said, marking the deadliest attack on the mission since it was formed in July 2011. Nine others were injured.

The attack happened around 9 a.m. local time when a group of unidentified assailants ambushed a UN convoy in the settlement of Gumuruk, which is located in the eastern state of Jonglei that is the largest in South Sudan and has been the scene of inter-communal violence since the country's independence from Sudan in July 2011. Martin Nesirky, a spokesman for UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, said twelve people working for the UN peacekeeping mission were killed in the ambush. He identified the casualties as five Indian peacekeepers, two UN Mission in Sudan (UNMISS) national staff members and five civilian staff contractors. Nine others were injured in the ambush, including four Indian peacekeepers, a fifth peacekeeper of an unknown nationality, and four civilian staff members. The exact conditions of the injured was not immediately known, but UN officials said some of them were reported to be in a critical condition. Nesirky said Ban was "appalled" to hear the news and condemned the attack in the strongest terms. "He calls on the Government of South Sudan to bring the perpetrators of this crime to justice," the spokesman said. "He recalls that the killing of peacekeepers is a war crime that falls under the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court." Hilde Johnson, Ban's Special Representative in South Sudan, also condemned the assault and expressed her condolences to the families of the victims. "This attack will not deter UNMISS and its peacekeepers from working to protect vulnerable communities in South Sudan," she said. "UNMISS is determined to continue its work in supporting authorities ensure peace." Syed Akbaruddin, a spokesman for India's Ministry of External Affairs, said its Embassy was in touch with UNMISS to bring the bodies of the Indian peacekeepers back to India. He identified the Indian fatalities as Lt. Col. Mahipal Singh, Nb Sub Shiv Kumar Pal, Hav Hira Lal, Hav Bharat Singh and Sep Nand Kishore. It was not immediately known who was behind Tuesday's ambush, but a South Sudanese military spokesman blamed armed groups led by David Yau Yau. There has been a sharp increase of fighting in the region in recent weeks, mostly between South Sudanese forces and David Yau Yau's armed groups. UNMISS was established by the UN Security Council in July 2011 to help South Sudan consolidate peace and lay the foundation for longer-term state-building, conflict prevention and economic development. The force consists of nearly 7,200 military personnel, 2,200 civilian staff members, and 400 UN volunteers.

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