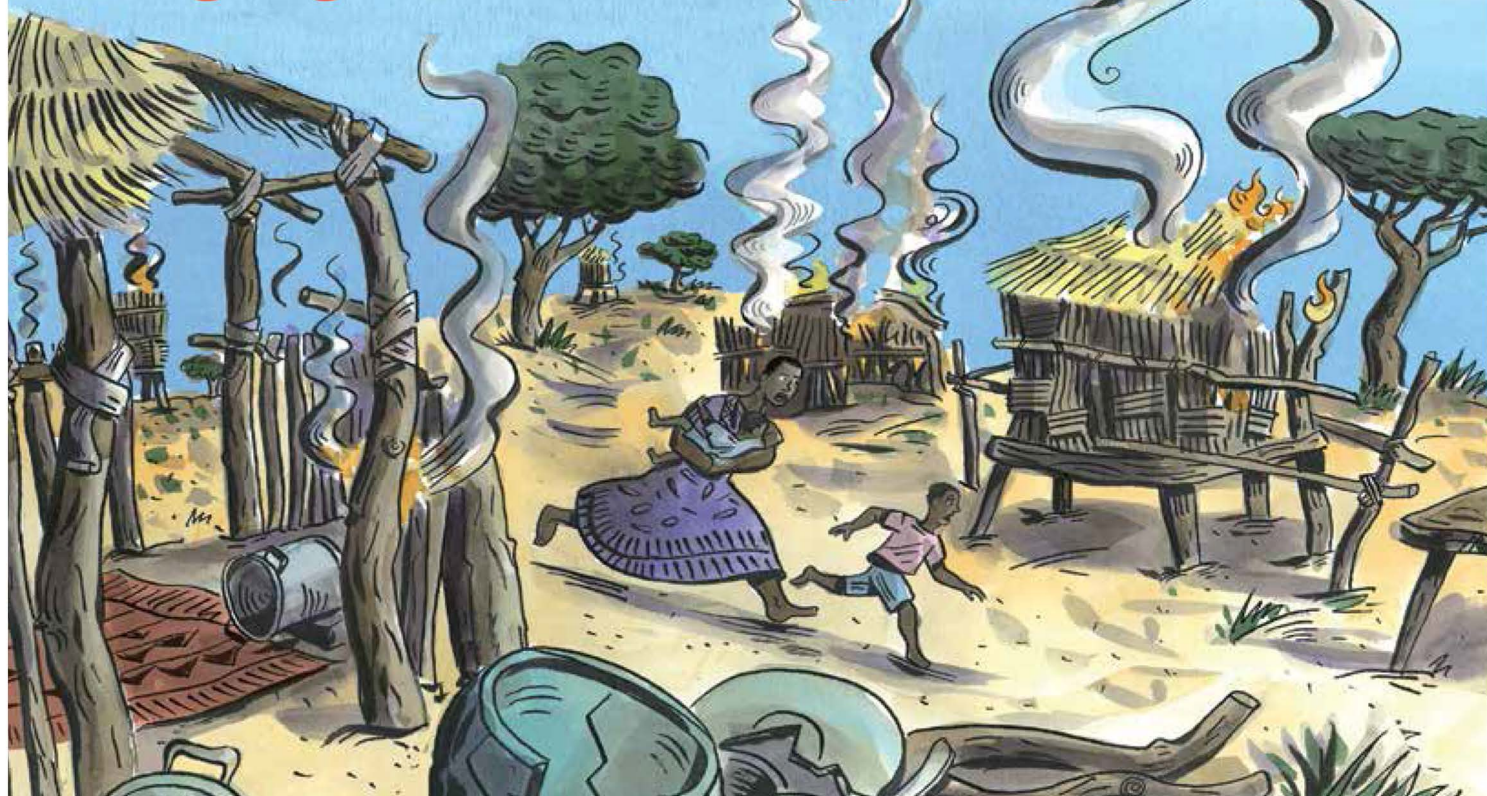


South Sudan

Bringing back the hope



The fine savannah grassland stretches to either side for much of our journey along the untarred road from Mingkaman to Juba. The serenity of the environment is deceptive, though, for as we turn right off the main road and drive for some 15 minutes, we chance upon a village that has been completely burnt to the ground during the recent fighting in South Sudan. The sight quickly becomes depressing.

A few villagers have refused to flee, despite what befell them. They are now trying to plant the few seeds they could garner, as well as tend to whatever is left of their cattle. They cheer up as we approach – a countenance that belies their recent fate. One of them is Lydia.

A group of fighters launched a surprise attack on the people in her village on that fateful day. The armed men came shooting at everyone and burning everything in sight. At the end of the assault, 10 people lay dead; the village had been completely razed to the ground.

Lydia was fortunate – she escaped with her life and her children. Her husband was shot and wounded but managed to flee as well.

While hiding in the bush, she said, they went without food for a month and had to survive on leaves and wild fruit.

Today, her husband is still nursing his injuries and so has not been able to work, leaving Lydia to assume the role of breadwinner. One of her immediate tasks is to rebuild the burnt-out house. The house is not yet completed but the roof has been finished. How did she accomplish that?

**To protect Lydia's identity, her real name has been changed.*



"I'm doing it by myself," she says, "I have to trek 5km to reach the place where we source the special grass for making the roof and walk 5km back."

Lydia and the other villagers received tarpaulins from the ICRC to be used for making temporary shelters to protect their families in the rainy season that is now at hand. The ICRC also distributed sorghum, beans, oil, sugar, salt, kitchen sets and soap, as well as sleeping mats, mosquito nets, buckets and jerrycans. Given the remote and inaccessible location of their village and the intensity of rainfall during the peak season, overcoming the odds will not be that easy for the people.

"So, what does the future hold for Lydia and her family, we ask. 'The future is in God's hands,' she says. 'But we're grateful to the ICRC for coming to our rescue when we were attacked. They gave us food, shelter and household essentials to keep us going.'"



Adebayo Olowo-Ake

I have been working for the ICRC since 2007. After four years of service in my own country, I worked in South Sudan from 2010 to 2011, before returning in 2014.

As ICRC delegates, my colleagues and I often work in areas at the heart of the violence. We try to be as close as possible to the victims in order to give them the best help. These people trust us and often tell us their stories.

I was particularly touched by Lydia's* story because, despite her experience, she found the courage to take the place of her injured husband and has begun to rebuild their lives, even if the conflict is far from over.