

Mohammed, a Sudanese businessman in South Sudan



Portrait of Mohammed. © IOM/Mohammed 2016

Mohammed is at the United Nations protection of civilians (PoC) site in Bentiu, South Sudan, where more than 120,000 internally displaced persons are seeking safety from a brutal civil war.

Originally from Sudan's Southern Kordofan State, Mohammed traveled to South Sudan in pursuit of economic opportunity in 2008. He made his living as a store owner in Bentiu, the capital of South Sudan's Unity State. "A number of us from Sudan came here seven years ago to set up shops. I had a general store selling regular household items and the business was doing well in the beginning," says Mohammed.

This all changed when the civil war erupted in December 2013.

Recalling the early 2014 eruption of fighting in Bentiu, Mohammed says, "I didn't leave the town like the other Sudanese when the fighting started, but eventually the market place was being attacked and my shop got destroyed. After that, I had nothing left."

Forced to flee, Mohammed ran to the UN Mission in the South Sudan peacekeeping base in Bentiu, along with thousands of South Sudanese seeking protection.

“After arriving to the UN site, I found out that most of the Sudanese businessmen who had fled here had already managed to flee back home.” Left behind, Mohammed now lives in a shared shelter with other Sudanese nationals who were not able to find the means to make the journey back home. They are among the few non-South Sudanese living in the site.

“I’m not married and I don’t have a family here; it is not that I don’t want to, but I don’t have enough cattle to pay the dowry for a wedding. Even getting married is an expensive affair!” laughs Mohammed. Locally, as many as two dozen cattle can be asked for a dowry, with each one costing as much as 3,000 South Sudanese Pounds, equal to approximately USD 100.

Nevertheless, he remains optimistic about his future. “One day, as soon as I get the opportunity to do so, I would also like to go back home. Maybe I will set up a shop back home or find a new job.”

Credit: IOM South Sudan