

Around 50 killed in south Sudan fighting this week: UN

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FIGHTING in Sudan's key southern city of Malakal this week has killed some 50 people and left another 100 wounded, a UN official says.

"According to our estimates, drawn from on-the-ground observations and different sources, the violence has resulted in about 50 deaths and 100 wounded" among both combatants and the civilian population, the official said.

Fighting erupted on Tuesday between former rebels of the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), which now runs south Sudan, and supporters of Gabriel Tang, a former militia leader who fought alongside the Sudanese army in the 1983-2005 civil war.

The clashes lasted a day, and an official said the situation was "fairly quiet" today.

Tang supporters, or Tangginyang, have been incorporated into Khartoum's regular forces, joining a mixed north-south unit patrolling areas that are still sensitive four years after the end of a war that caused two million deaths.

Tang has been based in Khartoum since 2006, after clashes between his men and the former SPLA soldiers left more than 100 dead in Malakal.

He returned this week to the town near the border between the northern and southern regions of Sudan.

An official of semi-autonomous south Sudan on Wednesday accused the national army of seeking to provoke "a new civil war," following the Malakal clashes.

But in a Khartoum news conference on Wednesday, Tang denied the south Sudan allegations.

He said that after he arrived in Malakal UN peacekeepers asked him to leave because the SPLA did not want him there. He then said he was attacked by the SPLA and that Sudanese soldiers defended him.

Malakal has had one of the more fragile security situations since the 2005 peace deal ended the civil war between the Arab and Muslim-dominated north and the mainly Christian or animist, non-Arab south.

Nine people were killed around the town in inter-ethnic clashes on January 9.

The fighting comes as the world awaits a decision from the International Criminal Court (ICC) next week on whether to seek the arrest of Sudanese President Omar al-Beshir for alleged war crimes in Darfur.