



United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS)

Media & Spokesperson Unit
Communications & Public Information Office

PRESS RELEASE

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UNMISS Statement on Incidents of Sexual Violence in the July 2016 conflict in Juba South Sudan

Over the last few weeks, the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) has received deeply disturbing reports of widespread sexual violence, including rape and gang rape, of women and young girls, by soldiers in uniform and also by unidentified armed groups of men in plainclothes. These incidents have been reported from a number of locations, including areas in the vicinity of the Protection of Civilians sites near UN House, and also in other neighborhoods of Juba. These acts have been committed since the start of the fighting which erupted in Juba on Friday 8 July, and despite calls to all parties to cease from this kind of inhumane behavior, the United Nations continues to receive reports of their occurrence.

The United Nations condemns unequivocally these actions, and reminds all combatants and parties to the conflict, their commanders, and responsible leaders, that these acts constitute grave violations of international human rights law and may be regarded as war crimes as well as crimes against humanity.

Protection of civilians – including the most vulnerable – remains the core priority of UNMISS. Currently, UNMISS is engaged in the active protection of approximately 200,000 civilians in various locations throughout the country. During and immediately following the conflict, the Mission's uniformed personnel in Juba were committed to providing security for the POC sites and other UN facilities citywide. In order to improve the security of vulnerable communities and groups such as women and children residing in the UNMISS Protection of Civilians sites, UNMISS has intensified its patrols in and around the protection sites, as well as in the wider Juba city area. As an enhanced protection measure, UNMISS is working with community leaders and protection partners to coordinate peacekeeper escorts of women and young girls leaving protection sites to collect food and non-food items at scheduled times of the day.

There have been media allegations concerning the conduct of UNMISS peacekeeping personnel as to whether enough was done to protect women and minors who were victims of sexual violence. The UN takes very seriously the allegations that peacekeepers may not have rendered aid to civilians in distress. The UNMISS Force Headquarters is looking into the specific allegations, in line with its established protocols. UNMISS has reinforced the message to all peacekeepers that if these incidents of abuse should be committed in areas for which they have security responsibility, then they have an individual and joint duty to act, to prevent harm to innocent civilians.

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UNMISS continues to deploy its best efforts to fulfill our mandate to protect civilians in imminent threat across the country, within our limited capability, resources, and despite severe restrictions on our movements.

UNMISS has also engaged directly with the leadership of South Sudan's security forces, urging them to take up their own primary responsibility for the protection of civilians and to take effective steps to ensure accountability for any crimes committed by security forces. UNMISS notes the commitment given by military leadership to bring alleged perpetrators to account for their actions and it will continue its engagement to see that these commitments are upheld.

Meanwhile, UNMISS Human Rights and Women Protection Advisers are continuing to document these and other human rights violations and have so far noted over 100 separate cases of sexual violence and rape against unarmed innocent civilians, including gang rapes and sexual abuse of minors since the outbreak of conflict on 8 July. When completed, these reports will be forwarded to the United Nations Secretary-General, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), as well as the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, for appropriate follow-on action.

UNFPA, as the lead UN agency on sexual and gender-based violence, is coordinating the response to ongoing sexual violence. The referral system in the Protection of Civilians sites as well as clinical management of rape services are in place. UNFPA has also supported the provision of post-rape kits and an additional 7100 'dignity kits' to be distributed among the most vulnerable women and girls. Training sessions on clinical management of rape continue to be conducted to ensure uninterrupted professional delivery of services.

UNMISS continues to call on all the parties to take personal responsibility for the immediate sanctioning of their men, in and out of uniform, who were and are responsible for these abuses and unspeakable acts of violence against civilians, and will continue to monitor closely to see that steps are being taken to bring the perpetrators to justice and put a stop to such heinous acts of inhumanity.

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