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Mr. President, excellencies and distinguished delegates,

I thank you for the invitation to address the Council and touch on some critical issues in South Sudan. I will provide a brief update on the situation in the country, as well as United Nations efforts to protect civilians and build durable peace as per our mandate.

As we approach the end of the rainy season, South Sudan remains beset by social, economic and humanitarian challenges. The Government appears emboldened by its recent military gains, including in some key strongholds of the SPLA in Opposition loyal to Riek Machar. Deep mistrust of the Government by the population in these areas persists, exacerbated by human rights abuses that fuel their flight into neighbouring countries. Across the country, the opposition remains deeply fractured and has suffered significant military setbacks in recent months.

At the same time, the economic crisis is further fuelling public frustration and undermines the Government's capacity to deliver governance and services to its people. In many cases, civil servants have not been paid for over four months and salaries to security forces are in addition also delayed.

Localized conflicts continue to flare, their impact greatly magnified by automatic weapons, and affecting areas outside of the central conflict. Now, there is growing discussion around moving swiftly to elections. I continue to stress to my Government counterparts that elections must be inclusive, credible and fair, but should also represent the consolidation of a genuine peace process.

Mr President,

With others here today, I remain deeply concerned by the humanitarian situation. UN agencies assess the total number of people in need of aid in South Sudan has risen to 7.6 million. The burden that humanitarians and donors shoulder to support these people with food, health care and education is enormous. The recent humanitarian response plan is budgeted at USD 1.64 billion. So far 66 per cent of that funding has been received. I must underscore that without this humanitarian support, thousands of people would simply not survive.

The number of people displaced in South Sudan rose to nearly four million during the first half of this year. Of these, two million have fled to neighbouring countries – Uganda, Sudan, Ethiopia, Kenya and the Democratic Republic of Congo. I would like to express my appreciation to those countries for shouldering that burden. This is a clear reminder that the region, too, has a stake in South Sudan's future.

I continue to applaud the efforts being made on the ground by our humanitarian partners, who continue to reach millions and the most vulnerable people in the country. However, in critical areas, often at critical times, communities could not be reached, because access has been denied. These include areas of the Greater Upper Nile region, parts of the Equatorias, and areas south and west of Wau, where active government military operations against the SPLA in Opposition continue. Humanitarian partners were only in the past month able to reach the vulnerable populations in Baggari, outside of Wau, after being denied for almost one year. Sustained, regular access is what is needed.

The splintering of opposition forces also has a negative consequence for humanitarian efforts. For example, the World Food Programme's regular convoys to Yambio – two days travel from Juba – now requires 13 separate permissions from armed groups along its route. Increasingly, combatants are shifting into criminality along major roadways, with civilian and aid convoys being a target. Just two weeks ago, a driver for the International Committee of the Red Cross was killed when his relief convoy was attacked in Western Equatoria. His death brings to 18 the number of aid workers who have been killed in South Sudan just this year.

Government officials need to take a more positive attitude towards humanitarian partners, whom it blames for creating a negative international perception of the country. Removing numerous bureaucratic impediments including additional taxes and fees on humanitarian organizations would set a better tone and acknowledge the valuable work they carry out on behalf of South Sudan.

As UNMISS, we are working hard to support our humanitarian colleagues. Our modus operandi is to be robust, nimble and proactive. We have provided surge support to help protect key humanitarian facilities such as in Bunj, in the north of the country. But sadly, our missions have also included evacuating humanitarian personnel due to active fighting. I anticipate that, while we respect each other's mandates, this collaboration will intensify if security trends continue.

Members of the Council,

We are far from the conditions for safe return in most areas, but we are continuously looking to seize opportunities to support communities in returning to their homes where this is possible. UNMISS will soon open a permanent presence in Yei and reinforce our presence in Torit and Yambio to project a presence to deter violence and human rights abuses, building confidence for

people to safely return to their homes. The small Melut protection site in the north of the country is closing in coming weeks in line with the intention of people there to return to their homes. Further downsizing of protection sites in Wau and possibly even Bor are also being considered. We are working with humanitarian partners to align our efforts so that people have a real choice to return home. The quality of services inside the POCs and in the outside community needs to be looked at. Having a first-class medical facility inside the POC site and no medical support outside clearly deters people from voluntarily leaving the sites. These efforts will also coincide with UNMISS efforts to increasingly project our peacekeeping forces from static duties out into communities where they are most needed.

But ultimately, this movement critically depends on how the government and opposition forces behave. Where there is discipline, the results have been encouraging. But where those forces continue to prey on civilians, the POC will remain a necessary refuge.

Meanwhile efforts are being made to identify malign and criminal elements within the sites. Targeted measures of dealing with identified perpetrators, coordinating with the Government security organs as appropriate, will be used to maintain and reinforce the civilian character of the sites.

Mr President,

I must address briefly the deployment of the Regional Protection Force (RPF). While the Government has officially repeated its acceptance of the RPF, and UNMISS has closely adhered to the Government's clearances and protocols, the positioning of the RPF in relation to the Juba airport – including at the adjacent Mission's Topping base – remains a vexed issue. The RPF mandate is clearly and unambiguously set out in resolutions passed by this Council.

Together with my Force Commander, I am engaging the Government in discussions over unresolved issues and will reach out to IGAD and the AU to have a meeting with the Chiefs of Defence Staff from RPF troop contributors and the TGoNU in Juba as soon as possible

We must also remember that the situation on the ground has changed significantly from a year ago, when two separate armies were positioned in Juba. Today, security threats in Juba are more likely to come from civil unrest sparked by potential economic collapse. However, the intensity of fighting in the Equatorias was not present a year ago. As a consequence of that fighting the bolstering of UNMISS forces with the RPF, as it gradually arrives, will enable UNMISS to further project with its protection of civilians mandate into these areas.

Mr President,

Allow me to make a few observations about the current political situation. The space I believe for compromise over the 2015 Peace Agreement is narrow. The parties have shown little interest in engaging in serious negotiations on the way forward, despite the various initiatives aimed at finding a political solution to the conflict. The central conflict resolution strategy must be political mediation via the IGAD High Level Revitalization Forum.

The UN will continue to support the National Dialogue with caution, and conditional on it remaining a transparent and inclusive. I acknowledge that the process might appear partisan to an increasingly disillusioned and fractured opposition, but in past months, it has provided a useful platform for open and highly critical discussion. By engaging, we hope to encourage a process aligned with best practices while still nationally driven.

Members of the Council,

There is both a humanitarian and political urgency to our meeting here. There are only a few months remaining in the transitional period stipulated under the peace agreement. External momentum to support peace is not keeping pace with developments in the country. In the past week there has been renewed enthusiasm and solidarity for the revitalisation process. It is critical now that the international community shows a unity of purpose to support an implementable peace process that leads to credible elections in due course, but only after a period of transition marked by inclusivity and stability.

I am committed to continued engagement. Together, with the Special Envoy for Sudan and South Sudan, we will continue our good offices to engage all parties to meaningfully participate in the political process. We will continue to engage the AU High Representative Alpha Oumar Konaré and support IGAD and its Special Envoy Ishmael Wais together with Festus Mogae to hasten preparations and convene the High Level Revitalization Forum to bring the parties together. We will bolster collaboration between the region – AU and IGAD – and the UN, to prevent forum shopping by parties.

In all of this, South Sudan needs the unified efforts and attention of the Security Council, building on the AU Peace and Security Council collaboration and its communique of a few days ago. We are all aware that it risks remaining a source of continued regional instability and a drain on international resources. The wider region has a critical role to play in convincing the parties of the need to compromise and find peaceful solutions. We – collectively – will need to deliver a clear and unified message to the parties on the way forward. The consultations of the past few days here in New York, have been encouraging but we are backing a process to which we still need to add substance, and this needs urgent consideration. I count on your continued support and finally I would like to thank you for your continued support of UNMISS.

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