



# United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS)

Media & Spokesperson Unit

Communications & Public Information Office

## PRESS RELEASE

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### PROTECT THE WOMEN AND GIRLS OF SOUTH SUDAN

As we commemorate International Women's Day, 8 March, the women and girls of South Sudan need to be at the centre of our attention. The crisis that has engulfed large parts of the country is hitting women and children the hardest. They are suffering from horrendous acts of violence and rape, forcing them to flee for their lives.

Not only are women and children caught in the cross-fire, they have often been targeted. Incidents of sexual violence have affected far too many girls and women. These acts have reportedly been perpetrated by both sides of the conflict. Information received and published in United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS)' Interim Human Rights Report suggests that sexual violence has been a consistent characteristic of the crisis in all the affected areas.

*"This is unacceptable. Women and girls should not face the double burden of fleeing for their lives, and face a second threat of being subject to sexual violence. The women and girls of South Sudan deserve to be protected and to be safe,"* says Hilde F. Johnson, Special Representative of the UN Secretary General to South Sudan.

Rape, forced abortion, sexual harassment and abduction have occurred at a far higher rate during the conflict than during times of peace. Vulnerability increases when women and girls collect water or firewood, live in camps or areas of internal displacement, or, worst, in areas overrun by fighting. The women and children that are making up the majority of the more than the 700 000 displaced in South Sudan, of whom more than 70 000 in UNMISS-bases, are facing these challenges.

UNMISS has a team of Women Protection Advisors dedicated to investigate allegations, enhancing assistance and responding. Within our Protection areas, where women and girls also face such threats, UNMISS is working to prevent sexual violence and offer immediate response to survivors. It is our obligation to do our utmost to protect the women and girls of South Sudan.

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No society can prosper if it does not protect its mothers, wives and daughters. Women are the engine of development. Empowering women is the smartest investment a country can make. Even more so during times of conflict, in which women can play a pivotal role in fostering peace in their respective communities and throughout the country.