

**Briefing to the Security Council on the Situation in  
South Sudan**

**by Special Representative of the Secretary-General  
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**[As delivered]**

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Mr. President,

Members of the Council,

1. Thank you for the opportunity to brief the Council on the situation in South Sudan and the deployment of the Regional Protection Force.

2. It may seem unusual to start my briefing with a weather report, but it is important to announce that the rains have arrived in South Sudan. These seasonal rains dictate almost every aspect of life in the country – including the cycle of conflict. Across the country, we are seeing the last push to position forces before roads become impassable for the next four months. And with that, the nature of conflict changes.

3. Significant military moves have been most evident in the north, on the west bank of the Nile River in Shilluk tribal areas, and in northern Jonglei in the eastern part of the country, inhabited mainly by Nuer. In both areas, the Government's Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) has captured former SPLA in Opposition strongholds and reinforced their positions.

4. In the former Unity State, in the centre of the country, the SPLA continues low-intensity battles. Declared a famine zone just last February, the area remains highly volatile with many displaced. On 3 May, an UNMISS base

located just 500 metres from Leer town came under direct fire. Ghanaian peacekeepers responded robustly, returning fire and repelled the attack. An internal investigation is underway to determine who carried out the attack and why. Sadly, it prompted some humanitarian organizations working alongside UNMISS to downsize their presence at a time when their efforts are desperately needed. These are brave individuals, but they should never be a target. For that reason alone, I condemn in the strongest terms this callous attack.

5. Inter-communal conflicts persist across the country. The longstanding tension between the Dinka Bor and Murle the communities in Jonglei escalated dangerously to threaten hundreds of lives in the last few weeks. UNMISS has persisted with mediation efforts, and over the past two weeks, supported the visits of a delegation led by First Vice-President Taban Deng Gai shuttling between the various communities. Yesterday, these efforts culminated in the signing of a joint cessation of hostilities agreement. It's a start. But I am encouraged by the willingness of both sides to progress with further talks on substance which of course we will continue to support.

6. In Greater Bahr el Ghazal, in the west, clashes between the SPLA and SPLA in Opposition have continued with 22,000 people arriving in Wau from surrounding areas to seek refuge with the UN and churches. The government has consistently prevented access outside of Wau. But recently an UNMISS Bangladeshi infantry patrol was able to reach areas south-west of Wau previously off-limits – only to find the area completely abandoned and the evidence of armed activity all around.

7. In the south, in the Equatorias, clashes between the SPLA and allied militias persist, with Yei town once again in focus. Violence in Yei has been

unrelenting as the joint report on the Human rights abuses with the UN Office of the High Commissioner documented in relation to the violence between July 2016 and January this year. The report documents 114 killings by pro-Government forces. The extent of the abuses by opposition groups remains unclear because our access was impeded. Satellite imagery also corroborated field observations of the widespread burning of homes and of villages.

8. Since January UNMISS has deployed almost continuous long-duration patrols to Yei. The latest reached the area this week – despite warning shots being fired at them. Its presence enables human rights violations to be investigated, engagement to occur with stakeholders on the conflict – and most importantly, to reassure civilians who feel most vulnerable. Follows-up missions are planned.

Mr. President,

9. The rains may bring a respite to large-scale military manoeuvres, but they greatly complicate the humanitarian response and bring the inevitable spectre of cholera – 7,700 cases have been reported to date. Over 60 per cent of the country will be impossible to access by road or via dirt airstrips. Humanitarian efforts will rely on air and barge transport.

10. A focus of humanitarian responders this past month has been supporting more than 20,000 civilians who fled the small village of Aburoc in Upper Nile, after being displaced by SPLA and Opposition fighting. Most arrived in a weak state – the perfect conditions for cholera to tear through their numbers.

11. UNMISS helicoptered in a detachment of Rwandan peacekeepers to Aburoc in early May for a short-term deployment that gave then confidence

for humanitarians to deploy immediately after. Cholera has broken out in the town, but improved water supplies and the presence of a strong medical response from agencies there contained its spread, saving many lives. This more nimble approach of our peacekeepers working with others is a formula we can replicate – along with the improved robustness I reported in my last briefing.

12. I applaud the humanitarians here. Their efforts in one of the world's toughest and operationally difficult environments – and in the most remote places – have saved countless lives. I wish to particularly acknowledge the World Food Programme, which has pre-positioned over 90 per cent of its food aid for the coming rainy season. Yes, we face problems to access some areas, these are mostly by local actors, particularly where fighting is ongoing. However, I condemn the unacceptable levels of violence that continue to be directed towards aid workers, which include detention, threats, arrests, assault and even murder.

Mr. President,

13. As the Secretary-General's 30-day report details, deployment of the first wave of the Regional Protection Force vanguard has begun. To date, all 60 members of the Bangladesh Construction Engineering Company advance party have arrived in Juba with their equipment, and the advance team of the Nepalese High Readiness Company will be on the ground by the end of the month. The main bodies of these contingents are on track to arrive by July. Pending the final tax exemptions for the Rwandan advance infantry company, it should deploy in late June or July. I understand the equipment for the Ethiopian infantry company is being refurbished. It should deploy by August.

Members of the Council,

14. With the arrival of the rains, the focus of the conflict tends to shift from the battlefield to the political arena. Already, we are seeing signs of some political shifts. As you know, on 9 May, President Salva Kiir dismissed SPLA Chief of General Staff Paul Malong. After briefly leaving the capital and heading west to his home town of Aweil, Malong returned to Juba and the situation seemed to calm. The President recently announced several changes to the structure and appointments of the SPLA and replaced also the Aweil Governor. Most expect further changes and a possible reshuffling of some cabinet posts.

15. The President has also moved ahead with the National Dialogue with a formal launch on Monday this week in Juba, attended by Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni. He again declared a unilateral ceasefire and pledged to review the cases of political prisoners. These announcements are very welcome. There will be close scrutiny however on the number of prisoners who are actually released, and whether CTSAMM, the organization established by the Peace Agreement to monitor ceasefire violations and supported by UNMISS, can move freely to perform its ceasefire monitoring tasks. The proof of the pudding, as they say, is in the eating.

16. While the National Dialogue should bring a welcome focus on reconciliation, for it to be credible, as said before, it will need the genuine participation of opposition constituencies. Meanwhile, opposition groups have come together around a common position and jointly denounced the National Dialogue.

Members of the Council,

17. As many of you have acknowledged, states in the region hold significant influence on the political process. Yesterday, I met with JMEC Chair President Festus Mogae in Juba, who updated on his engagements with regional actors over the past months. President Museveni speaking at Monday's National Dialogue launch, called for a review of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement, but made no mention of the Peace Agreement. In my recent meeting with him and UN Special Envoy Haysom, he also reiterated his outreach to opposition leaders and ultimately for elections. At the same time, there are reports that Kenya is engaging with opposition figures based outside of the country. I am encouraged to see member states of the region stepping up their engagement. It remains critical, however, that a coherent and unified regional position approach on South Sudan is forthcoming.

Mr. President,

18. As I mentioned last month, now more than ever, it is imperative the Council also unites on a common strategy to advance the political process in South Sudan. We acknowledge and thank both individually and collectively for your support of UNMISS and the humanitarian community, who are overcoming immense difficulties to make a real difference to people's lives. But unity of purpose will send the best signal to South Sudan's political leaders to focus first and foremost on the plight of their citizens.

Thank you.