

33rd R-JMEC Plenary
Statement by Mr. Musa Gassama,
On behalf of Mr. Nicholas Haysom,
Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of UNMISS
9 November 2023
[As delivered]

RJMEC Chair,

Excellencies and distinguished guests,

Thank you for the opportunity to address the plenary and reflect on the status of implementation of the Revitalized Peace Agreement.

Let me start by welcoming the recent reconstitution of the National Elections Commission, Political Parties Council and National Constitutional Review Commission. However, the credibility of these bodies begins with establishing public trust and confidence in these institutions from their inception. I encourage the Government to urgently and amicably address the concerns raised by different parties related to the reconstitution. This includes ensuring the buy in of all the parties on the way forward. Additionally, the limited participation of women must be addressed and a clear plan should be developed to expedite their operationalization so as to ensure these institutions are adequately resourced and have the required capabilities to deliver on their critical mandates. With the electoral architecture beginning to take shape, technical, legal and operational decisions are urgently needed to enable the elections to take place in December 2024. As part of the Trilateral mechanism – which brings together and leverages the combined comparative advantages of the UN, IGAD and AU – the UN is ready to provide technical assistance to these critical processes.

Since our last meeting, I had constructive engagements in South Africa, and Kenya to encourage regional actors to support South Sudan's peace process. I also had the opportunity to discuss the implementation of the Revitalized Peace Agreement with First Vice President Machar. During our engagement I reiterated the need to demonstrate progress in the implementation of the Agreement to ensure the transition period culminates, as scheduled, with free, fair and peaceful elections. This is a message that I have carried to all interlocutors and partners, including President Kiir.

Excellencies,

Free, fair and credible elections require a safe and secure environment. It is with increasing concern that I note the delays in the finalization of the Transitional Security Arrangements. It is essential to expedite the deployment of the first batch of the graduated forces and the commencement of Phase II. Security sector reform must receive adequate logistical and political support, and in this regard, I recognize the progress made in the Strategic Defense and Security Review and urge the parties to convene in order to validate these important documents. I further recall the request of this forum for the government to commence a comprehensive national program of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration without delay.

We should not lose sight of the security and political tensions that continue to simmer across the country, which may intensify as the electoral date draws closer. I would like to caution that military defections are a toxic practice that continues to undermine the spirit and intent of the Revitalized Peace Agreement and fuel mistrust among the parties.

Excellencies,

As of 6 November, over 363,000 individuals have arrived in South Sudan due to the conflict in Sudan. I commend the support offered by President Kiir and his government to the signatories of the Juba Peace Agreement and in the regional efforts to initiate a political process that will lead to a way out of the current conflict.

While I also commend South Sudan's efforts in welcoming arrivals, I am concerned about the impact of the country's dire humanitarian situation on the 9.4 million South Sudanese that currently require humanitarian assistance. I note that in Akobo, the returnee population from Gambella of about 17 000 individuals has added additional strain on host communities. South Sudan requires support from international donors to tackle the impact of multiple emergencies, however, the Government also needs to allocate adequate funding to help meet its own humanitarian and public service responsibilities.

I would like to draw your attention to the alarming surge in reports documenting the recruitment and use of children by armed forces and groups, specifically in Western Equatoria State. I urge the parties to adhere to their obligations to protect children during armed conflict, especially refraining from recruitment and use of children amongst their ranks in the lead-up to the redeployment of unified forces and the upcoming elections.

Excellencies,

The clock has not stopped ticking. With 13 months until December 2024, the parties must engage in frank dialogue to reach a consensus on the way forward, which will require political and procedural compromises. I urge the parties to demonstrate political will, pragmatism and leadership by increasing their efforts to regain the trust of citizens and to encourage the international community's goodwill to invest in the South Sudanese peace project.

UNMISS and the international community stands ready to advance the peace process in concert with the AU, IGAD and RJMEC.

I thank you.

--- *End* ---