



## PRESS RELEASE

8 March 2013

### Educate girls and women to develop the nation

Juba, 8 March 2013 – The United Nations family is proud to join South Sudan in marking International Women’s Day under the national theme: “Gender agenda: educate girls and women.”

“The full participation and empowerment of women in society is necessary if South Sudan is to achieve development and sustainable peace,” said Hilde F. Johnson, Special Representative of the Secretary-General in South Sudan and Head of United NMISS.

Supporting the gender agenda of equality between women and men is a cross-cutting objective for the United Nations in South Sudan, where women and girls remain among the most vulnerable groups.

Life possibilities for women and girls in South Sudan remain constrained by social-cultural practices and laws that place women in a situation where maternity is the only social power open to them. According to last year’s Household Survey for South Sudan, less than one third of all South Sudanese aged 15 or older can read and write. The literacy rate among women is even lower – 19%. Although girls’ education has improved since the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2005, these figures show that much work lies ahead.

In South Sudan, girls continue to be marginalized and denied access to education, with only 37.1% of eligible girls enrolled in primary school and just 1.3% enrolled in secondary level education. SRSJ Johnson has also noted that “child marriage remains a deterrent to education; it affects thousands of girls and young women, depriving them of the ability to achieve their full potential and to fully contribute to the building of this new nation”.

The United Nations continues to work closely with the Ministry of Gender, Child and Social Welfare and all relevant institutions to empower women, close the gender gap, and get more girls into schools.

“Girls and women that are educated are empowered are able to make informed decisions about their lives and the lives of their children,” according to UN Women Representative Ms. Izeduwa Derex-Briggs. The link between education and ending violence against women and girls is well documented, and Ms. Derex-Briggs has stressed that “if we educate the girls and women of South Sudan, we will equip half of the population to contribute to a society in which all--girls, boys, women and men—can enjoy a life of peace”.

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