

8th Governors' Forum
“Forging Sustainable Peace: Committed Action in the Extended R-ARCSS Transition”

Remarks by Mr. Nicholas Haysom
Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of UNMISS
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Your Excellency, President Salva Kiir Mayardit,
Excellency First Vice President of the Republic and all the Vice-Presidents
Rt. Honourable Speaker and Deputy Speakers,
Honourable Governors and Chief Administrators
Honourable Ministers and Deputy Ministers,
Honourable Members of the Parliament and the Council of States,
Excellencies and distinguished guests,
All protocols observed.

I am honoured to address the opening of the 8th Annual Governors' Forum. This forum continues to serve as a vital platform for national leaders and state governors to renew their commitment to advancing the implementation of the peace agreement.

Although the parties' recent consensual decision to extend the transitional period by two years was regrettable, it was inevitable due to the lack of progress on key deliverables in the peace agreement. What is needed now is a clear, realistic, harmonised work plan for the next two years. I, therefore, reiterate our call for the parties to employ a sense of urgency in fulfilling the promises they made to the people of South Sudan. This will require an unwavering spirit of solidarity, bold decision-making, and a clear and actionable implementation plan.

Excellencies and distinguished guests,

As I noted during my recent briefing to the Security Council, UNMISS has identified six immediate action points that are critical for demonstrating political will and a collective commitment to implementing the peace agreement.

These actions include: First, deploying the Necessary Unified Forces (NUF), starting Phase II of their joint training, and agreeing on the middle command structure; Second, making a start on civic education; Third, commencing preparatory work for voter registration; Fourth, amending the National Security Services Bill, to expand civic and political space; Fifth, developing a code of conduct between political parties, civil society and the media, and; Sixth, clarifying responsibility-sharing for electoral security. These are applicable at both the national and sub-national level.

The United Nations family has been supporting key national institutions and state governments to create conditions conducive to a democratic transition in South Sudan. I thank the governors for your leadership in the ongoing political forums which have brought together diverse stakeholders across political parties, civil society, women and youth networks, persons with disabilities, security agencies, faith-based groups, and others, to engage in meaningful discussions.

These forums create an opportunity for open and honest exchange on what a democratic society means to the people of South Sudan and how its citizens can work together to achieve this vision. Governors play a vital role in expanding the environment of trust and security in which these conversations can take place. We particularly commend the state governments which have issued decrees to support a more open civic and political space – this leadership is commendable, and the international community looks forward to working with you as you deliver on these commitments.

As the rainy season comes to an end, we are already witnessing a troubling rise in subnational violence. The alarming number of civilian casualties in Upper Nile, Central Equatoria, and Warrap states underscores the ongoing human cost of unresolved conflicts. These challenges are further compounded by the impact of climate change and the ongoing conflict in Sudan, all of which require a whole-of-government response and approach.

While UNMISS continues to fulfil its protection of civilians' mandate within the scope of its resources, I urge South Sudan's leaders to accelerate the deployment of the Necessary Unified Forces from Phase I and expedite the training and deployment of forces under Phase II.

I want to acknowledge His Excellency President Salva Kiir's commitment to addressing violence in various hotspots through dialogue and reconciliation initiatives. It is important to highlight the indispensable role of governors and chief administrators in these efforts. I would also emphasize that more decisive action is needed to strengthen accountability, uphold the rule of law, and ensure justice as part of the response to subnational violence.

It is clear from my conversations with the South Sudanese people and its leaders that there is a deep desire to graduate this country's status from one of continual conflict to a more forward-looking vision of post-conflict peacebuilding and resilience. The United Nations family recognizes and commends these aspirations. But to do this requires your collective commitment to tackling the root causes of conflict in your constituencies: this starts with delivering basic services to the population, underwritten by a public financial management system that facilitates effective and accountable governance at both national and state level. We remain of the view that this pathway has a solid footing in, and provides a platform for, the effective implementation of the peace agreement.

The alternate pathway is that festering conflict and subnational violence continues to cause tragic loss of life and only worsens humanitarian needs across South Sudan.

Governors are on the front lines in many of these scenarios. We think that stronger partnerships are possible between national and state actors, the United Nations, and other multilateral organizations and partners to support actions that mitigate the environmental threats posed by climate change, in particular.

One area where strong collaboration between the United Nations and government can be recognized is in taking preemptive actions to manage flood-related challenges and, across the country, governors have been in the lead in developing mitigation strategies and coordinating adaptation efforts. This collaboration has expanded to the integration of conflict sensitivity analysis into flood preparedness and response plans and conducting sensitization and awareness campaigns to help communities prepare for possible relocation to higher ground. One key achievement has been mapping 243 high grounds across 64 counties nationwide to assist in managing and responding to civilian displacements.

It is in that spirit that I reaffirm our commitment to supporting governors and chief administrators in fostering peace, harmony, reconciliation, and peaceful coexistence among South Sudan's diverse communities. We'll continue to count on you for your leadership and support in facilitating access for peacekeepers and humanitarians, so that we can prevent and respond to crises in a mutually supportive way.

At the end of the day, we are all working towards a common objective. That is, to ensure that the peace this country fought so long and hard for does not backtrack, but rather forges into a united, prosperous, and democratic South Sudan.

Thank you, and I wish you fruitful deliberations.