

Briefing to the UN Security Council by the Secretary-General's Special Representative for South Sudan, Nicholas Haysom

21 June 2021

[as delivered]

Mr. President,

Thank you for the opportunity to brief the Council today on the situation in South Sudan.

On 9 July, the Republic of South Sudan will mark its tenth anniversary as an independent state. Council members will recollect the jubilation ten years ago when we welcomed South Sudan to the family of independent nations. The international community pledged its support to South Sudan then. This commitment remains as important and as urgent today as the world's youngest nation strives to deliver peace and security to its citizens.

Mr. President,

I am pleased to report some progress in the implementation of the revitalized peace agreement since our last report in March. Allow me to highlight three notable achievements.

First, on 10 May, the revitalized government established a taskforce to oversee and coordinate transitional justice and other judicial reforms.

Second, on 11 May, President Salva Kiir reconstituted the national legislature and appointed 550 new members to that legislative. This too was a distinct step forward.

Third, on 25 May, President Kiir, with Sudan's Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok in attendance, officially launched the permanent constitution-making process in Juba. Drafting a national constitution is a quintessential act of sovereignty. It expresses the highest aspirations of a nation and its most cherished values. An inclusive national conversation will lay a foundation for a social contract between the citizens of the country. An engaged and inclusive process will increase the probability of a durable peace.

Mr. President,

In addition to these achievements, I would like to inform the Council that on 17 March, the Bentiu Protection of Civilians site was re-designated to an IDP camp. The freed-up peacekeepers are now deploying to more remote locations such as Koch and Mayom, enhancing confidence and stability in areas of IDP returns. Concurrently, UNMISS's efforts are ongoing to support the Government of South Sudan in protecting displaced populations. The last PoC site in Malakal retains its protective status owing to protracted

insecurity in and around the area. UNMISS will continue to dedicate physical protection, as required.

I'm also pleased to report that a needs assessment mission – as commissioned by this Council – for the conduct of free and fair elections was conducted from 6 to 26 May. A detailed report will shortly be submitted to this Council. UNMISS is firmly committed to supporting these elections. However, our work must be aligned with South Sudanese stakeholders and institutions and in partnership with the international community, especially the African Union and IGAD.

Mr. President,

Notwithstanding these markers of progress, the overall implementation of the revitalized agreement is progressing slowly. The formation of the legislature remains incomplete. The constitution of the Council of States and the nomination of the legislative assembly speaker are pending. UNMISS continues to encourage the Government to continue with these processes while ensuring adequate representation of women and youth at all levels.

Similarly, Transitional Security Arrangements remain behind schedule. The formation and graduation of the Unified Forces is a critical element of South Sudan's transition intended to prevent the intractable relapse into conflict. Troops continue to suffer in cantonment and training sites without adequate shelter, healthcare, and food. It is therefore important that the precondition of a coherent command and control structure is finalized, followed by the graduation of the Forces.

The recent announcement by the Presidency – that's both the President and the Vice President – in support of rapid implementation of Chapter 2 of the agreement, including expedited graduation of the new Unified Forces, is encouraging. And it is our hope that the commitments so publicly made will be duly delivered on.

Mr. President

I would like to highlight the pervasive insecurity, in particular intercommunal violence, which continues to obstruct the realization of a durable and sustainable peace in South Sudan. This year, more than 80 percent of civilian casualties were attributed to intercommunal violence and community-based militias.

UNMISS Force continues to interrogate its own impact – or the impact of its own response to these threats – and its commitment to being a highly mobile force and in a highly mobile posture. Deploying, often preemptively, to conflict hotspots, the UNMISS Force has maintained a presence in strategic areas during the rainy season, enduring extreme weather conditions. These initiatives, among others, have contributed to some reduction in violence compared to the previous year.

Nevertheless, weak or absent state governance institutions throughout South Sudan have enabled spoilers to exploit perennial communal and ethnic cleavages. Entrenched

insecurity has hindered the cultivation of crops and has contributed to a vicious cycle of livestock raiding. Many communities are dangerously short of food supplies in places such as Warrap, Lakes, and Jonglei, to name but a few. Meanwhile, in the Equatorias, the National Salvation Front and the South Sudan People's Defense Forces remain engaged in intermittent armed conflict.

I recently led a delegation of representatives from the AU, IGAD, R-JMEC, and the African diplomatic community based in Juba on a visit to Pibor. We all share a deep concern over the resumption of violence between communities in the Greater Pibor district. While recognizing the importance for Government to take concrete steps to address root causes of the conflict, UNMISS is collaborating with local authorities and communities in Jonglei to promote reconciliation; to secure the release of abducted women and children; and facilitate the delivery of humanitarian assistance.

Worryingly, weakened rule of law institutions and economic deterioration have led to increased criminality and targeting of humanitarian workers. This year alone, four humanitarian workers have been killed, and millions of dollars of humanitarian supplies looted or destroyed. The callous and indiscriminate killing of humanitarian workers is deplorable. UNMISS recognizes its own important contribution to creating a safe environment for humanitarian partners. And the Mission will continue to take the lead in promoting and advocating for safe conditions for the delivery of life-saving services.

At the international level, UNMISS continues to support the efforts of the Sant'Egidio Community to facilitate dialogue and calls on the Transitional Unity Government and the South Sudan Opposition Movements to build on the Declaration of Principles reached in Naivasha, Kenya, earlier this year.

Upon my arrival in Juba, I had the opportunity to meet with the President, senior government officials, but also travelled to all ten states to hear directly from the South Sudanese people. What has emerged from those engagements is that local authorities want assistance in tackling subnational conflict and the widespread presence of firearms. They require support and infrastructure.

The lack of infrastructure and extreme flooding make access to many parts of the country challenging. In other parts of South Sudan, long spells of drought have compounded existing vulnerabilities. In this regard, the Mission is committed – with UNDP – to addressing climate-related security concerns in South Sudan.

Mr. President,

In the current mandate, the Council recognized the imperative of peacebuilding and directed UNMISS to advance a three-year strategic vision around that imperative. In this regard, please allow me to share some thoughts on five key tracks of this vision.

First, South Sudan is fortunate in having concluded a multistakeholder peace agreement to guide its transitional path. Making irreversible progress towards peace

requires tangible gains on implementing the agreed upon transitional benchmarks. These benchmarks include significant markers regarding an enduring national accommodation and a lasting peace in the form of elections, a new constitution, and the establishment of democratic institutions.

Second, we commit to making optimal use of one of our distinctive assets – our uniformed personnel. Through their assistance, the Mission intends to enhance general security, contributing to a safe and secure environment for political progress, but one which would also allow for the urgent and necessary delivery of humanitarian assistance along with the conditions necessary for refugees and IDPs to return and earn a livelihood.

Third, as critical as is the contribution of uniformed personnel are the civil and political engagements at the grassroots level. They enable conditions and arrangements under which neighbouring communities can live together. Our widespread engagement throughout the country has increased in scale and importance in this area.

This also highlights the significance of the fourth component – existing rule of law institutions. A strong and well-developed justice chain is integral to breaking the cycle of violence and holding peace spoilers accountable.

And finally, UNMISS is keenly aware that all of these endeavors cannot be accomplished alone. Therefore, the Mission intends to enhance collaboration and promote greater coherence between international partners, including the IGAD, AU, EU, Troika, neighbouring states, and the diplomatic community in general.

Enhanced engagements with the Transitional Government will also be key going forward. And in this regard, the recent establishment of a high-level coordination forum with the Government to deal with movement restrictions and operational challenges is an important step.

Mr. President,

In conclusion, I would like to share that we are well placed to execute our mandate more effectively. I take this opportunity to recognize the efforts of our uniformed and civilian personnel. As is the case for all peacekeeping missions, working in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic has been seriously challenging. I am proud of our personnel who have risen to this challenge and continue to work away from their families and often in austere and uncertain conditions.

And on this note, I thank also the Council members for their support, the support we have received and will continue to receive. Thank you.