

## **26th RJMEC Plenary Meeting**

### **Statement by Mr. Nicholas Haysom**

**Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of UNMISS**

**26 January 2023**

[as delivered]

**RJMEC Chair,**

**Excellencies and Distinguished Guests,**

1. Thank you for the opportunity to address the first meeting of RJMEC for 2023.
2. As we start a new year, I'd like to focus my remarks on priority objectives in this critical phase of implementation of the Revitalized Peace Agreement.
3. 2023 is a “make or break” year for the world’s youngest nation, and a moment of truth for all parties to the peace agreement.
4. We believe there are five key hurdles that the parties must clear in order to successfully position themselves for the final leg of the transitional phase – not just themselves but the country as such.
5. First, are preparations for peaceful, inclusive, and credible elections. I can confirm that, this week, the United Nations received a formal invitation from the Government to assist in this process. This is significant because it authorizes the United Nations to advise and assist on best practice for the technical preparations for elections. Let me

reiterate that this will not be a UN run process, but a South Sudanese administered election with UN support.

6. There is a need to fast-track all preparatory work now. Most critically, this includes the finalization of the legal framework and the reconstitution of the National Elections Commission. It can not be shelved until 2024. Not with the logistical challenges which preparation for elections in South Sudan will face.
7. Second, is the drafting of a new constitution. This is a critical opportunity to define what it means to be South Sudanese. We want to support an inclusive process that gives a dignified voice to all South Sudanese, but especially IDPs and refugees, women, youth, persons with disabilities and other marginalized communities.
8. UNMISS joins RJMEC in raising a warning at the slippage of key benchmarks related to these processes. Let me reaffirm the support of UNMISS, including through the IGAD-UN-AU Trilateral Taskforce, to the parties in seeking to recover these missed Roadmap timelines.
9. The third priority is the expansion of civic and political space. This will be a defining legacy of the transitional period, as it constitutes the ultimate criteria by which the credibility and legitimacy of the electoral process will be judged, and will set the foundation for a stable democracy.
10. The fourth hurdle is the consolidation, strengthening, and deployment of the Necessary Unified Forces to better enable the protection of civilians, from north to south of the country, east to west, and to create a safe space for political and democratic debate. I welcome completion of Phase One of graduations, and encourage the parties to finalise a formula for rank structures and harmonization, proper equipment and deployment of the

NUF and the other requirements which will make such deployments possible.

11. Fifth and most essential, is the need to tackle sub-national violence that is manifesting itself through the five hotspots simmering across the country. These are: Upper Nile, Jonglei and the Greater Pibor Administrative Area, the adjacent areas to Abyei, the legacy of the conflict in Tambura, and further the cattle-related violence in the Equatorias. All of these conflicts increasingly present an ethnic or tribal dimension and they certainly threaten to unravel hard-won peace gains achieved so far.
12. UNMISS is doing its part to address these fundamental security concerns. We continue to deploy temporary operating bases to project our protective presence in areas of greatest need. Most pressing in Jonglei and in Kodok, we have deployed peacekeepers i to protect tens of thousands of internally displaced people and facilitate the delivery of humanitarian assistance. We're working with the Government on the possibility of a new peace dialogue to bring all communities together. We reiterate that the barbaric practice of abductions has to stop. Against this backdrop, UNMISS has provided logistical support to the graduations of the Necessary Unified Forces so that the Government can more readily take up the task of protecting civilians.
13. I have conveyed the above five priorities in my meetings with the President, First Vice President and a range of other officials. From our vantage point, they are mutually reinforcing objectives which require the continued support also of the international community. But, as I have said before, this requires the demonstration of political will, dedicated resources on part of the Transitional Government, to demonstrate that it is a dedicated partner for peace. Lackluster efforts would be tantamount to cosmetic surgery on a patient that continues to bleed internally.

14. That's why we call on South Sudan's leaders to view this as a year of peace consolidation and nation-building. For UNMISS, we believe the common destiny the South Sudanese share is greater than all the issues which divides them.
15. I welcome the imminent visit of His Holiness Pope Francis, which is as meaningful sign as any of the will and intent of the international community to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with the people of South Sudan. I extend that welcome the other religious leaders taking part in the visit.
16. I look forward to the continued and active engagement of the region, including through a planned visit of the African Union Peace and Security Council possibly in February and the potential of an IGAD Summit on South Sudan. We place some hope in the resuscitation of the African Union High-Level Ad Hoc Committee for South Sudan (C5) as a means to deepen the continent's capacity to leverage helpful outcomes in South Sudan.
17. In closing, I want to reflect that this year will truly require an all hands on deck approach. And that end, we deeply value our continued partnerships with RJMEC, with the region, the international community, and with the Government and people of South Sudan.

I thank you.