

**Remarks by Mr. Nicholas Haysom**

**Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS)**

**United Nations Security Council**

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**Near Verbatim**

Mr. President,

Thank you for the opportunity to brief on the situation in South Sudan as outlined in the Security-General's report submitted to this Council.

Since my last briefing, there has been a sharp deterioration in the political and security situation, which threatens to unravel the peace gains made in recent years. All our efforts are now focused on preventing a relapse into widespread conflict and refocusing attention on the implementation of the Revitalized Peace Agreement.

During my last update, I warned of an emerging standoff between the two pre-eminent parties to the Agreement. This has now degenerated into direct military confrontation and escalated tensions across the country.

The trigger can be traced back to events beginning in Upper Nile State since the beginning of March, when the White Army overran the Nasir-based garrison from the South Sudan People's Defence Forces. Subsequent airstrikes on Nasir, allegedly involving devices containing incendiary fuel, have caused significant casualties and horrible injuries, including to women and children. Humanitarians estimate that over 80,000 people have been displaced.

The series of events in Nasir culminated on 7 March, in an attack on a United Nations helicopter in Nasir resulting in the death of an UNMISS crew member and numerous South Sudanese military personnel. The extraction operation, during which this occurred, had been conducted at

the request of all parties and with assurances of safe passage from national, state and local authorities.

Since then, and in the context of a deplorable downward spiral, we are receiving reports of further mobilisation, respectively, of the White Army and the SSPDF in Upper Nile, allegedly including the forced recruitment of children into their respective ranks of the armed formations. The deployment of Ugandan foreign forces at the request of the South Sudan government has further stoked public anxiety.

Senior SPLM-IO civilian and military actors have been removed from official posts, detained, or gone into hiding. The arrest of First Vice President, Riek Machar, reflects a new low in trust between the principal parties.

Misinformation, disinformation and hate speech is fuelling political and ethnic tensions – particularly on social media.

These conditions are darkly reminiscent of the 2013 and 2016 conflicts, which took over 400,000 lives.

Mr. President,

This situation underscores the urgent need for a collective effort by national and international stakeholders to secure a cessation of hostilities, preserve the integrity of the Revitalized Agreement, and ensure necessary steps are taken to end the continuous cycles of incomplete transitions.

UNMISS is engaged in intensive diplomatic efforts to broker a peaceful solution alongside many stakeholders, including, but not limited to, the African Union Peace and Security Council, its Panel of the Wise, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development, the Reconstituted Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission, His Holiness Pope Francis, the United Nations Secretary-General and this Council itself.

The message from peace partners is clear and consistent: the parties must resolve tensions through dialogue, build trust and confidence, refocus on the peace agreement and consensus-based decision-making, and assure the people of their steadfast commitment not to return to war.

We need look no further than across the northern border to Sudan for a stark reminder of how quickly a country can descend into catastrophic conflict. The region cannot afford another crisis that could further destabilize an already fragile landscape. To avoid this outcome, I must underscore the critical role of neighbouring states, as guarantors of the Agreement, in restoring peace and stability in South Sudan.

With this in mind, I seek the support of this Council to:

- a. Firstly, immediately address the Nasir tensions through dialogue rather than further military confrontation, which risks tipping the country into a broader conflict. The situation in Nasir is, above all, the result of political deadlocks and disagreements that have escalated into violent clashes.
- b. Secondly, echo the recent communiqués of the AU Peace and Security Council and the IGAD extraordinary summit, by urging all parties to adhere to the ceasefire and the peace agreement, including reinvigorating the functioning of its relevant mechanisms.
- c. Thirdly, call for the release of detained military and civilian officials or their treatment in accordance with legal process.
- d. Lastly, encourage the two principals to exercise restraint, address their differences constructively and through public dialogue, and manifestly put the interests of the people first.

To help secure these outcomes, UNMISS is committed to leaving no stone unturned.

Mr. President,

South Sudan faces one of the worst humanitarian outlooks since independence – driven by escalating subnational violence, the spillover from the Sudan conflict, deepening economic collapse, extreme weather, and a sharp decline in international aid. Regional volatility is also fuelling instability in South Sudan. Around 9.3 million people – three quarters of the population – need assistance and 7.7 million are suffering acute food insecurity. A cholera outbreak

continues amid a crippled health system, with 47,000 cases and 877 deaths so far. Humanitarians are doing all they can to stretch scarce resources to also support 1.1 million returnees and refugees who have fled the war in Sudan. But funding cuts are dismantling lifesaving services. Let me underscore there are no quick fixes to this crisis and there is a need for strategic alignment between peacebuilding, humanitarian, and development efforts – particularly around food security, climate resilience, basic services, and governance.

In this volatile environment, and as emphasized in the Secretary-General’s report, the protection of civilians, in particular women and children, must be a priority. While it is the primary responsibility of the Government of South Sudan to protect its civilians, the rapidly evolving situation underlines that UNMISS’ protection of civilians mandate is more important than ever.

UNMISS is increasing its protection of civilians measures, including reinforcing our posture at IDP sites in Juba, which are locations of particular risk. UNMISS Force has responded proactively to the situation by increasing its patrols and enhancing security at its bases, with the Quick Reaction Forces on standby to address unexpected situations. These measures underscore the Mission’s preparedness to face deteriorating conditions and its important role in protecting civilians. This is in the context of our overarching protection of civilians strategy, which is based on projecting our physical presence to areas of priority need; flexible basing arrangements and robust troop-deployments; enhanced patrolling; and procuring capabilities as well as equipment that are fit-for-purpose in the climate-affected terrain in which we operate. All these efforts are being carried out in close coordination and through enhanced engagement with the national authorities, to ensure a shared approach to civilian protection and conflict mitigation.

These efforts complement our longer-term protection and political strategy, which is to foster a protective environment that supports South Sudanese in conducting their own political and societal transformation, through the completion of the nation’s long-promised democratic transition. This requires nurturing the essential enabling conditions and, democratic environment – such as the civic and political space and strengthening the rule of law – which will endure beyond a single electoral event. It is precisely because these conditions are grounded in universal principles, rights and fundamental institutions that they will prevail long after we, as a mission, leave South Sudan. It is in this context that I note the recent launch of the civic education

campaign and public consultations on the constitution. This marks the beginning of the constitution-making process.

I must note that UNMISS faces operational limitations in all these tasks, especially in the face of this broader conflict. Our peacekeepers continue to face access denials on the ground. If the current trend continues, we are looking at a shift in conflict dynamics from sub-national and community-based violence to a more complex picture involving signatory parties and foreign actors. We are already prioritizing resources accordingly, but UNMISS is a peacekeeping mission, not an army, and cannot be everywhere, all at once.

In this context, the four pillars of the UNMISS mandate remain as important as ever. This includes protection of civilians; facilitating the delivery of humanitarian assistance; supporting the implementation of the peace agreement; and monitoring and reporting on human rights. We seek the support of this Council to ensure mandate continuity during the crisis.

South Sudan has asked for comprehensive electoral assistance from the United Nations. We are positioning ourselves, as One UN, to support all phases of the electoral cycle; however, this task is made difficult without a level of serious commitment, decision-making and action from this country's political leadership.

Meanwhile, discussions continue with our host government on the status of the UNMISS Tomping base. Despite receiving an initial ultimatum to vacate the site, our approach has been to conduct a constructive negotiation towards a phased relocation that maintains the Mission's critical functions at the site. We welcome the opportunity to continue our engagement with the Government on that basis, readily making available land and facilities as these become available and free for transfer.

Excellencies,

Let me underscore, once again, that there is a serious and growing risk that conflict dynamics may steer South Sudan dangerously off track. The Revitalized Peace Agreement remains the only viable framework to break this cycle of violence in South Sudan. The overriding imperative now is to urgently avert a relapse into full-scale conflict, refocus efforts on accelerating the

implementation of the Agreement, and advance the transition towards South Sudan's first democratic elections.

Another war is a risk South Sudan simply cannot afford, and nor can the wider region.

I thank this Council for its continued support.