

**31st RJMEC Plenary
Statement by Mr. Guang Cong,
Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General/Political
10 August 2023**

[As delivered]

RJMEC Chair,
Excellencies and Distinguished Guests,

I thank the RJMEC for the opportunity to brief you today. Since our last meeting, President Kiir in his statement on Martyrs' Day acknowledged that the country is at a critical phase in the consolidation of peace. I welcome the President's emphasis on the parties to work together to complete the transitional period through elections in 2024; on time and without further extensions of the Revitalised Peace Agreement.

I acknowledge the multi-party discussions on the draft national budget, including the budget for the elections. I also note the increased internal preparations and engagements by the political parties and recent contingency planning for electoral security arrangements by the national police.

I also note the recent activities of the Government-Trilateral Joint Task Force for the Implementation of the Constitution-Making and Electoral Processes. On 27 July, the AU, IGAD, and UNMISS presented to the Joint Task Force a list of priority issues related to elections that need the parties' immediate consideration and decision.

Excellencies,

Despite the growing calls for elections in the public domain, we are concerned about the lack of progress in key electoral and constitutional benchmarks. As it stands, the conditions for South Sudan to hold elections are not in place yet. There is an urgent need for the adoption of the National Elections Act by the RTNLA, the reconstitution of the National Constitutional Review Commission, the National Elections Commission, and the Political Parties Council. 2023 is a critical 'make or break' year for free, fair, and credible elections in 2024.

With less than four months left in 2023, all parties to the Peace Agreement are therefore urgently requested to demonstrate their political will by expediting the

implementation of key outstanding benchmarks of the Roadmap. Political will, pragmatism, and leadership are paramount.

The Transitional Security Arrangements are behind schedule and the latest call by the Presidency directing the immediate deployment of the Necessary Unified Forces and the commencement of Phase II is a welcome development. It goes without saying that the security of the country before, during, and after the elections is non-negotiable.

The Agreement mechanisms continue to face funding constraints. We encourage the transitional government to implement its commitments and provide the required funding to allow these mechanisms to complete their tasks.

Excellencies,

Let me commend South Sudan for its positive stance on welcoming returnees and refugees fleeing from the conflict in Sudan. The prolongation of this crisis and its repercussions on South Sudan is concerning - with the latest count of over 213,000 arrivals.

Early this month the humanitarian community noted the urgent need for US\$26.4 million to provide onward transportation from Renk and other crossing points until the end of the year for the tens of thousands of returnees coming in from Sudan. The congestion and increased competition over scarce resources in the border areas, if not duly addressed, could exacerbate tensions between the returnees and host communities.

UNMISS has intensified its patrols and reinforced its presence in Renk to work with the Government to mitigate and prevent any potential outbreak of violence. We acknowledge the effective cooperation we have with the Government of Upper Nile, the South Sudan People's Defense Forces, the South Sudan National Police Service, and the National Security Service. Furthermore, we continue to call for national and international funding to ensure support for people fleeing the conflict.

I also wish to highlight the economic implications of the Sudan conflict and its effects on pre-existing humanitarian needs. Increased inflation, particularly the rise in food and commodity prices, as well as the depreciation of the South Sudanese Pound have affected the local economy and livelihoods. As a result, the number of South Sudan's vulnerable population continues to grow increasing the financial requirements for humanitarian responses.

Excellencies,

It has been one year since the adoption of the Roadmap. May this anniversary be a sober reminder of the urgency required to finalise the outstanding tasks. Building the necessary foundation to end the transitional period through free, fair, and credible elections by December 2024 depends on the urgent, joint efforts of all the parties today.

More than ever, rhetoric needs to be matched by tangible action. We appreciate the support and engagement of the international community, partners and friends of South Sudan and reiterate that now is not the time to take our eyes off the ball in South Sudan.

UNMISS stands ready to collaborate with the Government, RJMEC, the AU, IGAD, and the rest of the international community to help take the peace process forward.

I thank you.

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Contact: UNMISS Spokesperson at unmiss-spokesperson@un.org