



PRESS RELEASE

Statement to the 16th RJMEC Meeting

Special Representative of the Secretary-General

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Chair, Excellencies, Friends and Colleagues.

It is a pleasure to be with you today. I hope you managed to have a rest with family and friends over the holiday period.

We are fast approaching one year since the establishment of the transitional government. Looking back, we should first acknowledge the positive progress made. The formation of the transitional government, the presidency, and Council of Ministers as well as the recent appointment of the Upper Nile State Governor and Deputy which means there is now a full complement of state-level leaders in place – these are significant steps forward.

But we would all agree the pace of implementation has been too slow. That has heightened doubt and frustration. It has also opened opportunities for spoilers to exploit local tensions and fuel conflicts. It's essential that the state and county government is established quickly. The Council of States is yet to be finalized and the Transitional National Assembly remains in abeyance.

The constitution-making process, which is a critical precursor to elections, also continues to stagnate.

Most countries that emerged from civil strife like South Sudan went on to embrace all fighters in a single military then, over time, shaped it into a loyal state military force. Look at Uganda or South Africa, for example.

That is the intent of the unification of forces in South Sudan, but it is, so far, stalled.

The government announcement this week to graduate and deploy the Necessary Unified Forces is welcome.

It follows previous promises, yet thousands of troops fester in cantonment sites without adequate shelter, health care, food and water. Action now needs to follow these good intentions.

Our fear is that the slow pace of reform, as set out in the Peace Agreement, will further enable national actors to meddle and fuel local-level violence. We have seen this in the past few days in Maban, increasingly in Warrap, and across Jonglei last year.

I congratulate the Government for hosting the Jonglei conference last week. The UN is following up with peace initiatives bringing local youth and church leaders together.

Across the country, UNMISS is working hard to protect and support South Sudanese in need. I want to touch on a couple of areas. First, UN military engineers from seven different countries are taking advantage of the dry season to build and improve 3,200 kilometers of roads across the country, including improving the Bor to Pibor road that is important to enhance peace between Murle, Dinka and Nuer communities. And work is starting on a road that will link the Sudan border to Bentiu and south to Rumbek, aimed at increasing trade and prosperity for citizens in the impoverished areas that it passes through.

I am also pleased to inform you that Protection of Civilians sites in Bor, Wau and Juba have successfully transitioned to conventional IDP camps under the sovereign responsibility of the Government.

In Bentiu, transition discussions are well advanced, involving the Governor, local security forces from all sides, including a joint police force – the first in the country – and the displaced community.

You will be aware of the Independent Strategic Review of UNMISS carried out at the request of the Security Council. In fact, many of you participated in the process and I thank you for that.

The review and the upcoming mandate renewal provide an opportunity to ensure that we are fit for purpose – so that our priorities match the evolving political and security situation in South Sudan.

In this regard, we are already looking at prioritizing technical support for Security Sector Reform and preparations for elections.

We have increased engagement with the SSNPS to build its capacity to prevent and respond to crime. A more professional and better equipped police force, together with associated support for the broader justice system will be hugely beneficial to reduce crime and end impunity, particularly for perpetrators of sexual crimes.

UN peacekeepers previously involved with the POC sites are also being redeployed to potential conflict hotspots to provide opportunities for reconciliation and trust-building before violent erupts.

These are just a few examples of the work that we are doing to support the Government and the people of this country. Of course, we are not alone in our efforts and are working actively in partnership with RJMEC, IGAD and the AU who we commend for their ever-continuing commitment to progressing peace.

Humanitarian concerns remain, particularly in the areas where sub-national fighting and seasonal flooding is creating critical conditions for people in Jonglei and Warrap. More positively, the latest FAO assessment shows a year-on-year increase in cereal production and a marked improvement in land cultivated, bringing total numbers up to those of 2016.

So, in summary and – in line with the recommendations of RJMEC – in the coming weeks. We must work to:

- Form state and county institutions.
- Reconstitute the Transitional National Legislature (that is the, TNLA and Council of States).
- Provide the necessary resources to graduate the unified forces.
- Progress the constitution-making process, and
- Achieve the 35% quota for women as well as meaningful participation of youth.

We welcome the announcement of the Presidency to accelerate implementation and look forward to seeing concrete progress. If this occurs, it will provide a conducive environment for displaced people to return home and pursue their livelihoods in time for the rainy season.

Please be assured that you have the full support of UNMISS and the UN family in your efforts to achieve these outcomes.

Thank you.