

**UNISFA****United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei**

قوة الأمم المتحدة المؤقتة فى ابىي

Office of the Spokesperson

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UNISFA expresses grave concern over the development in JBVMM's Sector one.

Abyei, 4 September 2021 - The United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA) has expressed grave concern over the recent developments in some areas in the Northern Bahr el Ghazal's Aweil North and Aweil East counties leading to the forced relocation of UN troops and closure of the Kiir Adem and War Abar team sites

On 11 August 2021, petitioners demanding the withdrawal of UNISFA troops gathered outside Sector 1 HQ in Gok Machar and forcibly entered the camp. This resulted in the destruction and looting of UN assets. On 13 August, petitioners with identical demands gathered outside War Abar (TS 12) team site. To prevent an escalation of the situation, UNISFA was forced to relocate from TS 11 and TS 12 to Sector HQ in Gok Machar. On 30 August, the local community of Aweil North County demanded in writing the complete withdrawal of UNISFA/JBVMM from Sector HQ in Gok Machar "within 48 hours".

Difficulties operating in Aweil North and Aweil East counties are longstanding. Since May 2021, UNISFA/JBVMM have experienced denial of clearance for its ground and aerial monitoring missions. On 12 June 2021, Traditional Chiefs demanded through a letter to Sector HQ at Gok Machar, the withdrawal of UNISFA/JBVMM from TS 11 and TS 12 and their immediate closure. The Chiefs threatened violence against UNISFA/JBVMM and denial of UNISFA/JBVMM patrols. Local communities also accused UNISFA of "biased patrolling" in the SBDZ and siding with Sudan "to annex part of their territory."

It should be recalled that in September 2012, Sudan and South Sudan agreed to the establishment of the Safe De-militarized Border Zone (SBDZ) to be monitored by the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism (JBVMM). During a Joint Political and Security Mechanism meeting held in Addis Ababa on 24 September 2018, Sudan and South Sudan decided that South Sudan would establish a high-level Team in coordination with the Ad-hoc Committee of the 14 Mile Area, to sensitize the communities to enable the full establishment of Team Sites in both Kiir Adem and War Abar. Consequently, on 2 November 2018, the then Governor of Lol state, led a team to undertake the sensitization programme. As a result, on 11 Nov 2018 the County Commissioner met with the local authority who agreed to release land for the establishment of the TS 11. Again, on 7 December 2018, JBVMM held a meeting with Aweil East Deputy Governor and other state officials and community leaders, where there was unanimous

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agreement on the release of land for the establishment of TS 12. The collaboration between UNISFA/JBVMM and local South Sudan officials on this matter was further enhanced, when UNISFA Leadership led a team to Gok Machar and jointly confirmed the suitability of the selected sites with the community leadership.

UNISFA has regularly engaged with the Government of South Sudan on this matter and requested the latter again to sensitize local authorities and communities on JBVMM's mandate and the rationale for its presence in the team sites. This engagement was either through face-to-face meetings with Government representatives on 28 July and on 11 August 2021, or through formal written communications on 23 July and 11, 15, 19 and 23 August 2021.

While engagement on this particular matter did not bear fruit, UNISFA looks forward to continued engagement with Juba on other JBVMM-related matters.

The Mission has duly informed UN Headquarters of these developments and requested that UN Security Council be kept abreast of this unfortunate situation. It also apprised the Sudanese authorities on the matter since both Parties had given prior approval on the location of the Sector HQ and the two Team Sites. The Mission also believes that it is urgent that a JPSM meeting be organized so that both Parties can engage expeditiously on this and other JBVMM-related matters.

In the meantime, despite the significant drawback caused by the forced relocation of troops and equipment from both team sites, acting HoM reiterates that UNISFA will continue to carry out its mandated activities where it is present.

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