



PRESS RELEASE

Statement by Mr. Nicholas Haysom
Special Representative of the Secretary-General
18th RJMEC Meeting
[As delivered]

Juba, 22 July 2021: It is a pleasure to be with you here today at my first RJMEC plenary meeting. At the outset, I would like to congratulate South Sudan on its tenth anniversary as an independent state. A decade ago, the international community pledged its support to South Sudan. That commitment remains as important and as urgent today as the world's youngest nation strives to deliver peace and security to its citizens.

As we look back with disappointment on aspirations not realized, we can also look forward with hope. The permanent ceasefire continues to hold. Political violence has decreased, and the parties remain committed to the Revitalized Agreement. These are important achievements.

We must, however, acknowledge the increased vulnerability across the country. Unprecedented levels of subnational conflict, economic decline, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the effects of climate change, continue to have a devastating impact on food security and livelihoods.

Even today, emerging insecurity in Tambura is of grave concern. Equally worrisome is the vicious cycle of localized violence in Tonj between armed youth from Paliang and Marial-Lou and its detrimental impact on civilians. As the two groups clashed, a WFP warehouse was overrun. The four-month food supply intended for 41,000 food-insecure people was looted or destroyed. Furthermore, government institutions, INGO offices, churches, schools, and the humanitarian hub hall in Marial-Lou were also looted, damaged, or destroyed.

In May, more than one million dollars' worth of humanitarian supplies and assets were looted and destroyed during armed attacks in Gumuruk, impacting the delivery of assistance to an estimated 130,000 people.

South Sudan is increasingly becoming one of the most dangerous places to operate for humanitarian workers. This year alone, four humanitarian workers have been killed in the line of duty.

These acts of criminality must stop. The support of donor partners and the hard work of our humanitarian partners cannot be taken for granted. Those who perpetrate violence and loot should be brought to justice.

UNMISS will continue to support the Government and authorities to respond to these situations to protect displaced communities as well as provide protection to humanitarian personnel and supplies. Already, UNMISS has increased the number of patrols in affected areas, deploying temporary bases in key hotspots. This increased flexibility in the use of our peacekeeping assets is possible due to the re-designation of four POC sites to IDP camps. I should also update you that currently there is no plan to re-designate the POC site in Malakal.

On my arrival in Juba, I had the opportunity to meet with the President, and senior government officials. I also travelled to all ten states to hear directly from the South Sudanese people. What has emerged from those engagements is that local authorities want assistance in tackling subnational conflict and to stem the proliferation of firearms.

Bearing this in mind, I recently shared the key aspects of UNMISS' strategic vision with the Security Council. Please allow me to share some thoughts on the five tracks for implementing our mandate.

First, South Sudan is fortunate in having concluded a multistakeholder peace agreement to guide its transitional path. Making irreversible progress towards peace requires tangible gains on implementing the agreed upon transitional benchmarks. These benchmarks include significant markers regarding an enduring national accommodation and a lasting peace in the form of a new constitution, elections, and the establishment of democratic institutions.

Second, UNMISS is committed to making optimal use of its uniformed personnel to contribute to a safe and secure environment for political progress, but one which would also allow for the urgent and necessary delivery of humanitarian assistance along with the conditions necessary for refugees and IDPs to return and earn a livelihood.

Third, as critical as is the contribution of uniformed personnel are the civil and political engagements at the grassroots level. They enable conditions and arrangements under which neighbouring communities can live together. UNMISS' widespread engagement throughout the country has increased in scale and importance in this area.

This also highlights the significance of the fourth track – existing rule of law institutions. A strong and well-developed justice chain is integral to breaking the cycle of violence and holding peace spoilers accountable.

And finally, UNMISS is keenly aware that all of these endeavors cannot be accomplished by the UN alone. Therefore, the Mission intends to enhance collaboration and promote greater coherence between international partners, including the RJMEC, IGAD, AU and the diplomatic community in general.

Enhanced engagements with the Transitional Government will also be key going forward. And in this regard, the recent establishment of a high-level coordination forum with the Government to deal with movement restrictions and our other operational challenges is an important step that advances mandate implementation and our joint effort to deepen peace across the country.

I am also encouraged by recent progress including: the launch of the consultative process for the Commission for Truth, Reconciliation and Healing (CTRH), the establishment of a taskforce to oversee and coordinate transitional justice and judicial reforms, reconstitution of the national legislature, and the launch of the permanent constitution making process.

Related to this, in the UNMISS mandate, the Security Council requested an electoral needs assessment in support of elections at the end of the transitional period. The assessment team visited Juba and engaged with the government and a cross-section of stakeholders. They also consulted IGAD, the AU and the wider diplomatic community. Their findings have been submitted to the Security Council and should soon be published.

These developments indicate the continuing commitment of the Transitional Government and international partners to focus on making progress along the broad set of benchmarks needed to progress the transitional period.

Furthermore, the recent indication of a willingness of non-signatories to the peace agreement to enter the ceasefire framework at the Sant'Egidio talks is a welcome step forward. UNMISS will continue to support initiatives with the non-signatory parties.

In conclusion, while we must acknowledge progress recorded so far, we must also be cognizant that a lot more remains to be done to hold on to the peace gains and make them irreversible. The revitalized government needs to demonstrate the political will to progress implementation of the agreement.

In the immediate term, we want to see:

- A fully operational R-TNLA and Council of States.
- Complete formation of subnational governance structures, including state legislatures and in the three administrative areas, while ensuring the 35% gender requirement.
- Acceleration of the permanent constitutional-making process.
- Progress on harmonization of command of the armed forces so that the formation of the Necessary Unified Forces and other Transitional Security Arrangement provisions can progress.

I am convinced that by working together, we can accelerate implementation and maximize our impact in achieving R-ARCSS outcomes which, in turn, aims to anchor the social contract among South Sudanese and their government.

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