



## KINGDOM OF BELGIUM

Intervention of

H.E. Karen VAN VLIERBERGE, Deputy Permanent Representative of  
Belgium to the United Nations

### **Open VTC on the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) at the Security Council**

New York, 16/09/2020

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Mr. President, dear colleagues,

Let me start by thanking SRSG Shearer, USG Lowcock and Ms. Tai for their insightful briefings.

I will address three issues: first, the deteriorating security situation; second, the problem of impunity and the need for transitional justice; and third, the Protection of Civilian sites.

Mr. President,

At our last meeting in June, SRSG Shearer expressed alarm about the overall increase in violence. He added that the violence could no longer be pigeonholed as “intercommunal”. As we just heard from the SRSG, this trend has clearly continued in large parts of the country.

Belgium is deeply concerned about this violence, and we are alarmed by the political and ethnic dimensions it has taken on.

We urge the Government to step up its efforts for dialogue and we ask UNMISS to support initiatives that can lower the tensions. We encourage the Mission to continue protecting civilians, including through the establishment of temporary operating bases.

Mr. President,

All too often we receive reports about unspeakable human rights violations, widespread sexual violence, grave violations against children and other atrocities in South Sudan.

Our first, collective concern should be to create the conditions to prevent these crimes. Yet the persistent failure to address violations and abuses – past and ongoing – and a

profound lack of political will to hold individuals and groups accountable, perpetuate the violence.

Some positive steps have been taken. Most recently, there were convictions by the District Court Martial in Yei of a number of soldiers, including on rape charges. This is commendable.

Still, the lack of accountability often remains, quite frankly, shocking. The SG's report illustrates this in a particularly painful way: in June senior military commanders of the South Sudanese army were promoted, despite having been identified by UNMISS as involved in serious human rights violations. Two of them are even on the UN Sanctions list. In July, at least two individuals allegedly involved in serious human rights violations, including sexual slavery, were appointed to state governorship positions.

With regard to sexual violence, we have not forgotten SRSG Patten's words of last July: *"We must keep these crimes and their perpetrators in the spotlight of international scrutiny. As the well-known legal maxim reminds us: Justice must be done and be seen to be done. Survivors must be seen by their societies as the holders of rights that will, ultimately, be respected and enforced."*

In South Sudan, as in other places, transitional justice is indispensable to achieve sustainable peace, national reconciliation and healing, and the Rule of Law. An entire chapter of the 2018 Peace Agreement is dedicated to transitional justice. It needs urgent implementation, including through the establishment of the AU Hybrid Court for South Sudan. We urge the Government to finally make justice a priority.

Mr. President,

As a final point, Belgium takes note of the announcement by UNMISS of the gradual re-designation of the Protection of Civilians sites in Wau and Bor. It is imperative that any return or relocation of IDPs happens on a safe, voluntary and dignified basis.

The protection of civilians remains at the core of UNMISS' mandate so mitigating measures should be put in place. Pending meaningful progress on security sector reform, there is reason to act very prudently when handing over UN control of the PoC sites to sovereign actors. In all scenarios, close coordination between UNMISS and all relevant actors, including humanitarian organizations, will remain crucial. This is even more important in light of the increasing humanitarian risks signaled in the OCHA "white note" of 4 September.

Mr. President,

It is clear now that the positive developments of the start of this year have not lead to a sustainable improvement of the situation in South Sudan. It is high time for all parties to return to the spirit of compromise and to reaffirm their commitment to the Peace Agreement. The people of South Sudan deserve peace and stability.

I thank you.