

KINGDOM OF BELGIUM

Intervention of

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Belgium to the United Nations

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

New York, 23/6/2020

Madame President, dear colleagues,

Let me start by thanking SRSR Shearer for his insightful briefing and Mr. Edmund Yakani for his perspective on the human rights situation.

I would like to address three issues today: first, recent political developments; second, the impact of COVID19; and third, sexual violence and children and armed conflict.

Madame President,

Last week's announcement on a long awaited political agreement on the allocation of states is indicative of the challenges that the political process continues to face. The apparent rejection of the agreement by the South Sudan Opposition Alliance and by the Other Political Parties is a reason for concern.

The leadership vacuum at state and substate level needs to be urgently addressed in an inclusive manner. It is at least partially responsible for the recent increase in intercommunal violence and other violent clashes, causing hundreds of casualties and serious human rights violations.

The risk of spillover, destabilization and an erosion of recent peace gains is real. We encourage all parties to further implement all provisions of the Peace Agreement, including the Transitional Security Arrangements.

Madame President,

The impact of COVID19 in South Sudan is serious but the Government deserves praise for the way it is trying to tackle the pandemic. Still, we remain concerned about challenges facing testing; the impact on the South Sudanese health care system as a whole; and worrying reports about the stigmatization of COVID patients.

Belgium strongly condemns the instances of hate speech, incitements to violence and disinformation targeting foreign nationals, including UN staff. We are alarmed by the SG's report about restrictive measures taken in the context of COVID impeding UNMISS to fulfill its mandate - including the protection of civilians and facilitating humanitarian assistance.

The recent SOFA violations are unacceptable. Belgium is particularly dismayed by reports about the obstruction of medical evacuation flights. We call upon the Government of South Sudan to ensure unhindered access to the UN for its operations and humanitarian activities.

As a third and final point I would like to address the ongoing, horrific problems of sexual violence and grave violations against children in South Sudan. The data in the recent SG reports on South Sudan, conflict-related sexual violence and children and armed conflict are shocking: in 2019 there were 270 documented grave violations against children and 224 documented cases of conflict-related sexual violence. The most recent reporting period of this year shows a similar picture: a 40% increase of grave violations against children; 39 verified incidents of conflict-related sexual violence, including gang rape; and large scale abductions of women and girls including for the purpose of sexual slavery.

The reports are clear: all parties in South Sudan commit these crimes, and they all use them as a tactic of war and terror, deliberately targeting the civilian population.

Madame President,

We have a common responsibility to fight sexual violence and violations against children, to stand up for the rights of women, men, boys and girls that are victims of these crimes, to ensure accountability for the survivors, and to promote justice.

In this regard Belgium welcomes the recent renewal by the UN Human Rights Council of the mandate of the Commission on Human Rights (CoHR) in South Sudan. Indeed, continued monitoring and efforts to promote accountability, including for sexual and gender-based violence and children's rights, remain part and parcel of a sustainable solution to South Sudan's conflict.

This Council, too, has the power to address these issues - a few weeks ago we adopted resolution 2521 renewing the UN sanctions regime for South Sudan, including targeted sanctions. Sexual and gender based violence and the use or recruitment of children are among the criteria that can lead to such targeted sanctions.

There is no room for politics when it comes to these most serious crimes. It is time for this Council to use the tools at its disposal.

I thank you.