



## KINGDOM OF BELGIUM

Statement by

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Belgium to the United Nations

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

New York, 15/12/2020

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Mr President, Dear Colleagues,

Let me begin by thanking Special Representative Shearer [and Under-Secretary-General Lowcock?] for their very informative briefings.

I will address three issues: firstly, the political and security situation; secondly, the worrying increase in violations of the cooperation agreement with the Mission; and thirdly, the exploitation of natural resources.

Mr President,

In his latest report, the Secretary-General acknowledges gradual progress in the implementation of the Peace Agreement, but overall we have witnessed deadlock on many fronts. The latest monthly report by the Group of Experts confirms that security arrangements have continued to stagnate. The governor of Upper Nile State has yet to be appointed. We hope that the peace and reconciliation conference to be held in Juba from 16 to 19 December on "Peace, reconciliation, healing and unity among the people of the Upper Nile State" can contribute to progress in this regard.

Political momentum has eroded due to party fragmentation, political exclusion and defections. And very little progress has been made on accountability mechanisms. The Hybrid Court has still not been established.

This is very disappointing. But it is also deeply disturbing. In his report, the Secretary-General rightly states that there is a clear link between the delay in the implementation of the Peace Agreement and the violence in the country. The chapter on the security situation is once again long, due to many shocking incidents, despite the fact that major floods have reduced the level of violence. It is civilians who continue to pay the heavy price of violence. The continuing increase in the abduction of civilians, including women, girls and boys, especially by the NAS and other armed elements, is just one example. We urge all parties to recommit to the full and inclusive implementation of the Peace Agreement.

We encourage UNMISS to continue to support the implementation of the revitalised Agreement and the peace process. And we call on the Mission to continue to protect civilians, including through the creation of temporary operational bases.

Mr President,

Belgium is deeply concerned about the sharp increase in violations of the cooperation agreement between the authorities and the Mission. The denial of access to UNMISS patrols is totally unacceptable. We urge the Government of South Sudan to guarantee unhindered access to UNMISS so it can carry out all its mandated tasks in accordance with its international obligations.

In the same vein, we are extremely concerned by the continuing high levels of violence against humanitarian actors and the obstacles to humanitarian aid. Nine aid workers were murdered in 2020 alone. The Group of Experts has been able to determine that the South Sudan army and the National Security Service have regularly denied humanitarian access to conflict areas - for example, to Warrap in August of this year. This is unacceptable. The right to receive aid is a humanitarian imperative - an absolute right for all South Sudanese citizens.

Mr President,

In conclusion, I would like to speak briefly about the exploitation of natural resources in South Sudan. In its latest interim report, the Group of Experts considers that there is a high risk that the mining sector - which is increasingly mechanised - will become an attractive target for armed groups. The Group of Experts already reports armed groups blocking access to mining and gold panning sites. This lack of access makes it difficult to investigate the activities of the groups at these sites and the impact on the local community.

For that reason, Belgium supports the recommendation of the Group of Experts to ask UNMISS to report on areas of insecurity and investigate violent incidents against civilians related to the illegal exploitation of and trade in natural resources.

Thank you.