

Madam President,

I would like to thank Mr David Shearer for his briefing and his exceptional work under difficult conditions, and Ms Jial for her touching testimony.

Today I would like to address three aspects: (1) the peace agreement and its implementation; (2) the security and humanitarian situation; and (3) the mandate of UNMISS.

The political landscape and conflict in South Sudan have changed dramatically since the last mandate renewal in March 2018. Belgium would particularly like to congratulate the parties and IGAD on **the signing of the Revitalised Agreement** on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (R-ARCSS) in September 2018. Progress has been made on the ground since then, including the reduction of large-scale political violence.

However, problems remain in the implementation of the agreement, including delays in the approval of the security provisions. It is essential that the parties agree on a joint vision for the future of the security sector in order to avoid further large-scale violence. The success of this process will depend on the meaningful participation of women in all areas of the peace process, in particular the committees established in accordance with the peace agreement. Belgium would like to stress to all parties to the conflict, signatories and non-signatories alike, that this agreement represents the window of opportunity for achieving lasting peace in the country.

Madam President,

We are alarmed by the SG's report that armed groups continue to target civilians and that a disproportionate humanitarian crisis is affecting the entire country, with one in three South Sudanese displaced. Although political violence has reduced, inter-community violence has intensified in recent months. More than 500 people have lost their lives in this type of violence since the beginning of the year. A better understanding of the root causes of this type of violence is essential if we are to address them more effectively.

Madam President,

Women and girls in South Sudan are not yet reaping the benefits of peace, as demonstrated by Ms Jial. Quite the contrary. **Sexual violence** against women has even increased since last year. No lasting solution to the conflict in South Sudan can be found without urgently and effectively addressing this type of violence, which mainly targets women and girls, but also men and boys. The terrible mass

rapes committed in Bentiu at the end of 2018 are a sad example and revealed gaps in the detection and prevention of and the response to incidents of sexual violence. Nine other women and girls were horrifically gang-raped in another incident near Bentiu a few weeks ago.

There is a real need for justice for these women and we encourage UNMISS and the international community to support the fight against impunity for these acts by every possible means.

Madam President,

In a few days' time, we will be around this table to adopt the resolution renewing the mandate of UNMISS. The **protection of civilians** must remain the priority for UNMISS and must be a priority in all decisions relating to the mission's use of resources.

The reconfiguration of civilian protection sites, which is sometimes mentioned, is only possible under certain conditions:

- 1) the conditions in the return areas must be truly favourable;
- 2) a long-term strategy must be put in place that defines durable solutions for all displaced persons (including refugees);
- 3) each displaced person can only return to their village or town of origin if their resettlement is voluntary, well-informed, safe and dignified;
- 4) return efforts must be supported by gender-sensitive planning, in coordination with humanitarian actors.

UNMISS must continue to provide protection and security at the sites until these conditions are met. We would also like UNMISS to increase off-site patrols. In addition to physical protection, we encourage UNMISS to use the full range of unarmed civilian protection mechanisms, including community engagement, local mediation, community policing, human rights monitoring and information analysis.

Thank you, Madam President.