



CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

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Statement to the UN Security Council
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Thank you, Mr. President.

Mr. President, Excellencies, Civil Society colleagues, Ladies, and Gentlemen,

Good Morning,

It is a particular honor to be invited to brief the Security Council on International Women's Day. I want to dedicate my remarks today to the women all around the world who continue to fight for the rights of women and girls, and work daily to restore peace in their communities.

I speak to you today as the founder and executive director of Hope Restoration South Sudan, an organization that works for the protection of people with special needs and provides much needed services for women and girls who have suffered gender-based violence. I also represent a broader community of humanitarian NGOs in South Sudan, and am a member of the South Sudan Women's Coalition, which was a representative at the peace talks in 2015 and 2018.

I want to focus my remarks today on civil society in South Sudan, particularly women-led organizations, who I believe play a crucial role in building peace and security in our country.

The mass rape in Bentiu last November was a symptom of a much deeper problem affecting women and girls in South Sudan, which suffers from some of the highest rates of gender-based violence in the world.

It is in this context that civil society and women-led organizations across South Sudan work tirelessly to deliver some of the most critical lifesaving services. They respond to gender-based violence, protect people with special needs, and create women-friendly spaces that offer services like psycho-social support and income-generating activities. Because we employ local staff, we can operate in the parts of the country that are hardest to reach. We work throughout the rainy season. We stay and deliver to our communities even when the fighting is going on around us. And we will still be there when UNMISS has left.

However, we struggle to operate when we lack the necessary resources to carry out our work and to continue to provide these life-saving services to our communities, who have suffered from decades of conflict. In South Sudan today, there is intense competition between international and national NGOs for humanitarian resources. The bulk of the funding goes to UN agencies and INGOs, and the smallest portion to national NGOs. Within national civil society, by far the smallest portion of funding goes to women-led organizations.

We cannot build a strong and vibrant civil society in South Sudan with these constraints. And without us, our community's hopes for a lasting peace will fade.

Take my own organization – Hope Restoration South Sudan. In September 2018, we received a grant from the South Sudan Humanitarian Fund to open a women and girl-friendly space in Leer where we provided programs for survivors of gender-based violence. Within months of opening, we were surprised by the number of women who began visiting this space. As they started building trusted relationships with our case workers and counsellors, many of them began to open up about their own stories. We were even more surprised when we found that nearly half of these women were survivors of gender-based violence; some had suffered multiple rapes.

We started providing medical and psycho-social services that most of these women had never had access to. For me, this was our goal: helping our community heal.

But then, in early 2019, we lost our funding.

You can imagine what it was like for our staff to have to tell these women in Leer that the space would close on 1st March, just six months after opening. How do you tell someone who has been subjected to horrific acts of violence that you can no longer help them?

It is very disheartening. But we cannot afford to give up hope. We can't — because we know these women depend on us to keep fighting for them.

I take heart that this year's Humanitarian Response Plan has prioritized GBV programming, and this should give local women-led organizations like mine more resources to provide essential services.

It's also encouraging that Mark Lowcock, the Head of OCHA, recently announced that he will review the UN Pooled Funds to make sure that more money is allocated to women-led local organizations. It shows that more leaders across the UN system value the work that we do — that is, filling some of the biggest gaps in humanitarian response and doing so with cost-effective programs that are making a real difference in our communities. We are the best value operators in town!

So, what does this mean for the Security Council, as you consider next steps in South Sudan and the renewal of the UNMISS mandate?

Firstly, it means including South Sudanese local NGOs, especially women-led organizations, in the UNMISS mandate. We are not there and this needs to change.

There needs to be urgent recognition that we can't meet humanitarian needs, rebuild institutions, or craft a new government without addressing the deep-rooted gender inequality in South Sudanese society. Women must be involved in discussions about our country's future.

We have talented, determined, visionary women in South Sudan. We are ready to fill the 35% quota in the peace agreement. But in order to do so, we need the backing of the international community and this Council.

The Women, Peace and Security agenda is much more than just getting women to the peace table. It is about women being central players in all aspects of peace and security — including at the onset of an emergency, throughout the crisis, and when rebuilding their communities after conflict has ended.

To truly make a difference and address the scale and severity of the needs across South Sudan, local NGOs, particularly women-led NGOs, need greater financial support to operate on a more sustainable basis and to scale up our work. There are no short-term fixes if you are serious about ending violence against women and girls. We need long-term funding, and we must be able to provide services where they are most needed — as you know, most people are not in PoC sites.

We know that “one-stop centers” work in South Sudan. We need to be able to offer more of them to our communities. By this, I mean a place where a woman can come for medical care, legal services, and develop skills so she can earn an income. Being able to do all this in one place works.

In the UNMISS mandate renewal next week, I urge the Security Council to make a direct request to international donors and humanitarian actors to work with South Sudanese local NGOs. We need the Mission and international NGOs to support us to take on a much greater share of the humanitarian work. It is critical that we scale up the

work local NGOs do to help resolve disputes in and between their own communities in ways that don't involve violence, raiding each other's cattle, or abducting women and girls. These grassroots efforts are critical if we are to build safer communities and sustain peace across the country.

To me, this kind of partnership between local NGOs, donors, UNMISS and the international humanitarian community has been one of the critical missing pieces in South Sudan. I think this partnership will work better if we have a clearer understanding of the challenges women and girls face and what their needs are.

This brings me to my final recommendation, and another key element missing in South Sudan — effective engagement with South Sudanese communities.

We need not just to be consulted, but to be heard. When we raise concerns about tensions mounting or the need for services, we speak from an informed position of local knowledge — these are our communities. We understand the complexities of what troubles our communities, whether they are historical tribal grievances or more recent disputes over land or cattle, because we live there.

In closing, I want to leave one very clear message with this Council. Within communities and local NGOs in South Sudan there is a wealth of untapped potential. The key to unlocking that potential is finding better ways to work together. As local NGOs we stand ready to work with the soon-to-be established Transitional Government of National Unity, with UNMISS, with the international humanitarian community, and with donors. I look forward to building these partnerships and working with men and women across the country to build a peaceful South Sudan.

Thank you.