

Mr. President, Excellencies, civil society colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you for this invitation to brief the UN Security Council on the situation of women and girls in South Sudan. Today marks more than nine months since the signing of South Sudan's peace agreement, yet the fighting has yet to fully cease. While women and girls are affected disproportionately by years of conflict and the current humanitarian crisis, I want to speak not only of their despair, but of their resilience, and of what they need to rebuild their country.

My name is Lydia Minagano, and I speak in my capacity as a project manager of the Peace Implementation Monitoring Initiative (PIMI), a network of civil society organizations working to monitor progress and challenges in implementing South Sudan's peace agreement. I am member of the Strategic Defense and Security Review Board (SDSR-B), one of the mechanisms of the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS), and also a member of the South Sudan Women's Coalition, which participated in the peace talks in 2018.

My statement today will focus on four key areas:

- 1) The gendered nature of the conflict, especially its impact on women and girls
- 2) The need to strengthen women's meaningful participation in the implementation of the peace agreement, as well as in all decision-making processes that will impact the future of South Sudan
- 3) The critical need for security sector reform, and finally
- 4) The importance of consulting with civil society in South Sudan, particularly women-led organizations.

Gendered impact of the conflict

The conflict of the last five years is deeply rooted in gender inequality. This has resulted in widespread violations of the rights of women and girls, including a) sexual and gender-based violence, b) forced displacement, and c) denial of basic access to livelihoods.

a) SGBV. As you know, South Sudan has one of the highest rates of violence against women and girls in the world. Entrenched discrimination and harmful practices such as early and forced marriages and bride price have contributed to an environment where gender-based violence against women and girls is widespread.

As I address the Security Council today, over fifty civilian buildings/areas are still occupied by the military as per the Ceasefire Transitional Security Arrangements Monitoring and Verification Mechanism's (CTSAMVM) June 2019 report. Although the military has vacated some civilian areas, their continued presence in others puts women and girls at increased risk of sexual and other forms of gender-based violence. Without accountability for gender-based violence, and challenging those in our communities who permit such actions, we cannot move forward.

b) Displacement. The majority of those displaced by the conflict in South Sudan are women and children. I have listened to too many stories of women and girls who fled as refugees to Uganda or spent years stuck in the protection of civilian sites, where they are exposed to disease and lack access to basic services such as education for their children. One 14-year old girl in Uganda told me how she lost her mother in a refugee camp due to a simple fever. The pain and agony in the little girl's face still haunt me today. Nobody should die from easily treatable or preventable diseases.

c) Resources for women. Peace is more than just a signed agreement; its dividends must be felt in the daily lives of every man, woman, and child in South Sudan. In the ongoing political processes, priority should be given to enabling women and women-led organizations to heal themselves and their communities. This means ensuring equal access to livelihoods, reproductive health services, psychosocial support, and legal services.

Women's meaningful participation in implementing the peace agreement

South Sudanese women advocated tirelessly for a place at the table during the High-Level Revitalization Forum that led to the signing of the peace agreement. We also fought to secure a 35% quota for women's inclusion. However, this quota has not yet been implemented effectively during the nomination process to the pre-transitional arrangement bodies. Security Council Resolution 2459 in March 2019 calling on all parties to ensure full and meaningful participation of women in the peace process is an important step forward. However, this call must be backed by regular follow up and specific monitoring measures to ensure it is adhered to, and that there is accountability for lack of implementation.

Security sector reform

Security sector reform (SSR) is essential for long-term peace and stability. SSR must ensure that all security sector actors are competent, professional and responsive. Anti-corruption and human and women's rights training on an ongoing basis is essential, as are accountability standards for leadership. Further, diversity and inclusion must be central to reform efforts; the security sector must represent all the people of South Sudan—this means not only ensuring regional diversity but the representation of both women and men. The needs of women in the armed forces and in cantonment areas must be addressed.

An urgent outstanding issue is the slow progress on cantonment of all forces. This is an important aspect of transforming the security sector as it will allow for the professionalization of the army. I urge parties to the agreement to ensure that major milestones for security sector reforms are achieved. Delays in professionalizing the army mean delays in proper protection of women and girls.

Comprehensive security sector reform backed by economic recovery programs is necessary in order to win the trust of displaced women and girls, so that they can return home safely and voluntarily and start rebuilding their communities. This can only be achieved by ensuring that their rights are protected and that they have adequate support for reintegration when they do return.

Role of civil society organizations

As my colleague Angelina Nyajima Jial pointed out to the Security Council in March of this year, civil society in South Sudan plays a crucial role in building and maintaining peace and security. They are not only instrumental in the delivery of life-saving humanitarian services but are also key in implementing the peace agreement. In March, you responded to our call for UNMISS to work more closely with us by giving it a mandate to engage with women-led NGOs and civil society more generally—we now expect you to fulfil this mandate. Civil society must have a safe and enabling environment in order to carry out their work.

Mr. President, I would like to conclude by calling upon the Security Council to:

1. Ensure that the Government of South Sudan supports the implementation of the peace agreement with reliable and adequate financial resources.
2. Continue to call on parties to realize the 35% quota for women's representation, especially in the upcoming transitional government. The government of South Sudan must also ensure adequate support for the participation of women and youth across all sectors.

3. Encourage donors to support programs for local and national civil society organizations.
4. Encourage UNMISS to continue to engage with diverse women's groups, particularly those working to end sexual and gender-based violence in our communities, as a fundamental part of implementing its protection of civilians mandate. This should include creation of safe spaces, which are critical for survivors of SGBV.
5. Urge parties to the conflict to vacate armed forces from all civilian areas.
6. Ensure adequate protection of women and girls from all forms of SGBV, including psychosocial support. Support the security sector in developing gender expertise and require professional training, including in SGBV prevention and response that is tailored to the specific context of South Sudan.
7. Ensure that the DDR process engages youth and young women in their programming. The majority of those who carry guns are young people—and it is easier for young people to communicate with one another. Lastly, the DDR process should address the specific needs of female ex-combatants.

Women are a majority of my country's population, and South Sudan cannot afford to ignore us. Giving us the resources we need to participate in the future of our country will directly contribute to South Sudan's peace, stability, and development.

For generations of South Sudanese women and girls like myself who have never known anything other than conflict, we hope the agreement will deliver the peace we yearn to see.

Thank you.