

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Ms. Nyachangkuoth Rambang Tai
Statement to the UN Security Council
16 September 2020

Mr. President, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Good morning,

My name is Nyachangkuoth Rambang Tai. It is an honor for me to sit before you today as a feminist and peace activist. I work for Assistance Mission for Africa, a faith-based organization that promotes peace, transitional justice, gender equality and sustainable livelihoods.

Like many South Sudanese, my parents were displaced during the war with Sudan. We returned home when South Sudan gained independence in 2011, unaware that two years later, violent conflict would begin again. In between the bullets and destruction, I got married and had two children. I do not want my children to face the same insecurity that I, and my parents before me, have faced. For more than three generations now, we have been denied real peace.

I thank the Security Council for supporting implementation of the Revitalized Agreement. On this second anniversary of the Agreement, my remarks will focus on addressing the ongoing intercommunal conflicts and ensuring women meaningfully participate in governance and peacebuilding.

Unfortunately, both intercommunal conflict and fighting among political actors have increased, especially over the past six months in Jonglei, Lakes, Unity, Western Bahr el-Ghazal, Central Equatoria, and Warrap States, as well as the Greater Pibor Administrative Area – that is most of the country. This increase in fighting has taken place despite the call for a ceasefire by the Secretary-General and the subsequent adoption of Resolution 2532 (2020) by the Security Council. Meanwhile, flooding, locusts and the COVID-19 pandemic have already strained resources and humanitarian access. Hundreds of people have been killed and women and girls are increasingly targeted for sexual violence.

The political violence has resulted in widespread poverty, hunger and loss of livelihoods. This, combined with the availability of weapons among civilians, has contributed to the increase in intercommunal conflict. Communities now see opportunity in cattle raiding to afford bride price, feed their families and gain status in society. Years of conflict have also reinforced tribalism, which inspires people to kill easily. The absence of accountability leaves communities to take justice into their own hands and contributes to revenge attacks in cycles of violence.

Local human rights and peace organizations, including particularly women's groups, play a vital role in preventing and managing intercommunal conflict. Over the past seven years, my organization has overseen a range of peace initiatives to resolve conflicts between neighboring communities in Lakes and Unity States. We have facilitated multiple peace conferences, resulting in a network of local peace committees that monitor potential violence and serve as mediators.

Through my experiences engaging with communities in conflict, I have seen that empowered communities can build peace from the bottom up. Too often, people say that the South Sudanese don't have the capacity to deliver change, but my fellow citizens and I know the potential of national organizations to end conflict. As my sister Angelina Nyajima shared in her briefing to the Council in March 2019, "we understand the complexities of what troubles our communities...because we live there." I request Member States and UN agencies present here today to urgently provide more funding to local organizations, particularly women-led civil society, to continue

important local peacebuilding initiatives. This funding should be long-term and flexible to enable us to respond to changing dynamics and sustain any progress.

Another way to help address the cycle of violence is to ensure transitional justice is made a priority. We cannot expect citizens whose loved ones have been killed to forgive and move on without healing and accountability. This is unrealistic and will only encourage conflict. Instead we need the three transitional justice mechanisms provided for in Chapter Five of the Revitalized Agreement—especially the Hybrid Court. I echo my sisters who have briefed the Council in the past in urging you to work closely with the Government, the African Union and IGAD to fully implement all peace agreement provisions, particularly those related to transitional justice.

Given the ongoing conflict and lack of justice, I would like to emphasize UNMISS' important role in ensuring strong protection for civilians. The withdrawal from protection of civilians (POC) sites feels at odds with UNMISS' mandate. In Bor, the withdrawal took place without proper notice or preparation, leaving families feeling vulnerable to attack. IDPs in Wau, Bentiu and Juba POC sites fear that they too will be abandoned and wonder how their safety will be guaranteed. Simon, an IDP in Juba, stressed that the consequences of withdrawing the protection of peacekeepers will be dire. It would be better, he said, for the UN to first consider safe returns.

For residents in the POC sites, the threat of violence is still real. Let me remind you that weapons are widely available and intercommunal attacks continue. Implementation of the peace agreement is slow. The parliament is not yet in place, and the security arrangements are yet to be completed.

I urge the Council to hold UNMISS accountable for its mandate to protect civilians. UNMISS should consult with communities in POC sites; inform them of specific timelines and alternative arrangements for their security; and partner with local organizations to ensure that any return, relocation or integration efforts are safe, dignified and voluntary.

Before I conclude, I want to emphasize that gender equality and an end to sexual violence must be realized for sustainable peace in South Sudan. Women are raising their voices to achieve this. Recently on social media under the hashtag #SouthSudanesesurvivor, many young women and girls shared their experiences of gender-based violence. For too long, survivors have been silenced, with perpetrators able to target women and girls with a sense of impunity. I applaud their courage in drawing attention to these violations.

Women are also campaigning for their full, equal and meaningful participation in all levels of decision-making in South Sudan. I, along with other women leaders, am challenging gender norms to collectively convince all South Sudanese that women are 'Born to Lead'. Unfortunately, parties to the peace agreement continue to deny women the space and platform they deserve. The Transitional Government of National Unity should be 35% women. Yet today only 26% of Ministers, 10% of Deputy Ministers and one out of ten governors are women.

This is unacceptable and a violation of the Revitalized Agreement. We want a South Sudan where women and girls' opinions and concerns are valued, and where their right to participate in governance is respected. I urge the Council to continue to demand the 35% quota for women's participation in all South Sudan's government institutions is met.

Finally, I want to thank the ten brave South Sudanese sisters who came before me to brief the Security Council over the last six years. Unfortunately, many of their recommendations remain unaddressed, so in closing, I also urge the Council to revisit their statements and ensure implementation on the ground.

Thank you.