

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Statement by Ms. Jackline Nasiwa UN Security Council Briefing on South Sudan 16 April 2025

President, Excellencies,

Thank you for this opportunity to brief the Security Council on the situation in South Sudan, where escalating violence threatens a relapse into civil war. I am Jackline Nasiwa, Founder and Executive Director of the Center for Inclusive Governance, Peace and Justice (CIGPJ), an organization advancing human rights, justice, women's empowerment and civic engagement in South Sudan.

My briefing today will focus on:

- The urgency of finding a political solution to the persistent conflict in South Sudan;
- Shrinking political and civic space; and
- The important role of the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS).

South Sudan is confronting a political crisis that is tearing the country apart. It is also putting the lives of civilians at risk, including through indiscriminate aerial bombardment.¹ This crisis is jeopardizing everything we hoped to gain during the transitional period, such as justice, judicial reform, a citizen-driven constitution making process, security sector reform and preparations towards democratic elections in 2026. The people of South Sudan can no longer wait to vote for leaders who are accountable to them.

The current conflict is exacerbating the already dire humanitarian situation,² widespread food insecurity³ and displacement.⁴ It has also had a devastating impact on women and girls. According to UNMISS, 65% of women and girls in South Sudan face some form of gender-based violence during their lifetimes, one of the highest rates in the region.⁵ Through our work with survivors of sexual violence in Juba, Bentiu, Yei, Mundri, Bor and at Protection of Civilians (PoC) camps, my organization has witnessed first-hand the stigma afflicting survivors, who desperately need life-saving services, such as sexual and reproductive health and psychosocial care, and recognition and support for children born as a result of conflict-related sexual violence.

Excellencies: The people of South Sudan are tired and traumatized, and cannot heal in an environment of unending violence and political uncertainty. The immediate needs on the ground are for civilian protection and unobstructed aid delivery. While I commend the recent efforts by UNMISS to increase safety measures around the PoC site in Juba,⁶ these efforts should be expanded to areas such as Nasir, Malakal and Ruweng among others, which are also in dire need. Civil society and survivors have also time and again called for accountability, nationwide disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR), training and professionalization of the national army on human rights and PoC as essential to breaking the cycle of violence and ending impunity in South Sudan. In addition, humanitarian workers, who face violence and bureaucratic impediments,⁷ must be allowed to safely reach those in need, especially women, children, and the elderly.

The international community and UNMISS must prioritize an immediate ceasefire and long-term peace. Despite its slow implementation, the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS) remains the only viable option for the people of South Sudan to transition to democracy, yet today, it is on the brink of collapse. As civil society, we urge the Council to pressure the parties to jointly declare an immediate cessation of hostilities and recommit themselves to the R-ARCSS. In addition, I strongly recommend that the Security Council call for a resumption of the Tumaini Peace Initiative which would not only bring in holdout groups that did not sign the R-ARCSS, but also provide an opportunity to address the challenges of nation building. And finally, it is also critical that the international community urgently support grassroots peacebuilding and devise mechanisms for early warning and atrocity prevention to de-escalate violence.

The current crisis has further eroded the already shrinking civic and political space,⁸ with arbitrary arrests and detention of politicians⁹ and journalists¹⁰ without due process of the law. This has restricted civic engagement, weakened democratic processes, and undercut regional peace efforts by the Inter-Governmental Authorities on Development (IGAD),¹¹ the African Union (AU),¹² the Troika¹³ and the European Union (EU)¹⁴ to de-escalate the current crisis, enhance mediation efforts for dialogue, and support the full implementation of the R-ARCSS. Such an environment denies citizens their fundamental rights to freedom of expression, assembly, association and access to information, and puts the lives of human rights defenders at risk in South Sudan and in the region.¹⁵

For a young democracy like South Sudan, dissent must be tolerated to foster a culture of dialogue and transparency, and inculcate core values of respect for human rights. I therefore urge the Security Council to call for the release of political detainees and opening up civic and political space. All parties must ensure an environment that is conducive to safe, peaceful and democratic elections.

Any political and peace processes must be inclusive of women, faith-based leaders and civil society. While the percentage of women in the Presidency has increased to 40% with the recent appointment of a second female Vice President,¹⁶ generally there has been a lack of adherence to the 35% quota for women's participation.¹⁷ Regrettably, the National Elections Commission comprises only 2 women out of 9 Commissioners¹⁸ and zero women at the State High Committees.¹⁹ UNMISS should deploy experts and intensify their support to the transitional governance institutions and civil society to fast track women's participation beyond the 35% quota at all levels of government.

Finally, as this Council deliberates on UNMISS' mandate renewal, I must underline how essential the UN is for South Sudan at this particular moment. UNMISS can play an important role in de-escalating the current crisis and preventing violence, protecting civilians, including against gender-based violence, and monitoring violations of international humanitarian and human rights law to ensure South Sudan meets its international obligations. UNMISS should increase efforts to better support peaceful, free and fair elections, assist parties in executing key benchmarks for a process to draft a permanent constitution, and create conditions for the protection of civic and political space. Further, given the risks to women and girls I have described in my statement today, it is essential to prioritize gender across implementation of UNMISS' mandate. I urge all Council members to work together to preserve and renew this mandate in full at this perilous moment for my people.

Excellencies, the people of South Sudan cannot afford another senseless and destructive war, nor any form of politically motivated communal violence. We as women's rights groups and civil society remain committed in our pursuit for a lasting peace. Today, we need your support more than ever. Thank you.

¹ "Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in South Sudan," ¶99, 7 April 2025, undocs.org/s/2025/211; Human Rights Watch, "South Sudan: Incendiary Bombs Kill, Burn Civilians," 9 April 2025, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/04/09/south-sudan-incendiary-bombs-kill-burn-civilians>.

² "Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in South Sudan," ¶31, 33-35, 7 April 2025, undocs.org/s/2025/211; OCHA, "South Sudan: Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan 2025," December 2024, <https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/south-sudan/south-sudan-humanitarian-needs-and-response-plan-2025-december-2024>.

³ Integrated Food Security Phase Classification, "South Sudan: Acute Food Insecurity Situation for September - November 2024 and Projections for December 2024 - March 2025 and for April - July 2025," 18 November 2024, <https://www.ipcinfo.org/ipc-country-analysis/details-map/en/c/1158829?iso3=SSD>.

⁴ OCHA, "South Sudan: Humanitarian Snapshot (March 2025)," 9 April 2025, <https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/south-sudan/south-sudan-humanitarian-snapshot-march-2025>.

⁵ UNMISS, "By Us, For Us': South Sudan Launches First Ever National Taskforce to Combat Gender-Based Violence and Conflict-Related Sexual Violence," 2 December 2024, <https://unmiss.unmissions.org/%E2%80%9Cus-us%E2%80%9D-south-sudan-launches-first-ever-national-taskforce-combat-gender-based-and-conflict-related>; Global Protection Cluster, "South Sudan: Protection Analysis Update," pp. 4-5, June 2024, https://globalprotectioncluster.org/sites/default/files/2024-07/protection_cluster_south_sudan_-_protection_analysis_update_june_2024.pdf.

⁶ UNMISS, "UN Intensifies Peacekeeping Patrols at Displacement Camps Amidst Rising Tensions and Conflict in South Sudan," 4 April 2025, <https://unmiss.unmissions.org/un-intensifies-peacekeeping-patrols-displacement-camps-amidst-rising-tensions-and-conflict-south-0>.

⁷ "Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in South Sudan," ¶36, 7 April 2025, undocs.org/s/2025/211; OCHA, "South Sudan: Humanitarian Access Snapshot (February 2025)," 20 March 2025, <https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/south-sudan-humanitarian-access-snapshot-february-2025>; "Situation in South Sudan: Report of the Secretary-General," ¶36, 24 January 2025, undocs.org/s/2025/54.

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- ⁸ “Situation in South Sudan: Report of the Secretary-General,” ¶76, 101, 24 January 2025, undocs.org/s/2025/54; Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan, “Statement to the UN General Assembly Third Committee,” 30 October 2024, <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/hrcouncil/ffm-sudan/20241030-CHRSS-Remarks-for-the-GA.pdf>.
- ⁹ Human Rights Watch, “South Sudan: Opposition Leaders, Others Detained,” 13 March 2025, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/03/13/south-sudan-opposition-leaders-others-detained>.
- ¹⁰ See Committee to Protect Journalists, “South Sudan editor Emmanuel Monychol Akop detained without charge by intelligence agents,” 19 December 2024, <https://cpj.org/2024/12/south-sudan-editor-emmanuel-monychol-akop-detained-without-charge-by-intelligence-agents/>.
- ¹¹ IGAD, “Communiqué of the 43rd Extraordinary Summit of IGAD Heads of State and Government on the Situation in the Republic of South Sudan,” 12 March 2025, <https://igad.int/communique-of-the-43rd-extraordinary-summit-of-igad-heads-of-state-and-government-on-the-situation-in-the-republic-of-south-sudan/>.
- ¹² African Union Commission, “AU Commission Chairperson to Deploy Panel of the Wise for South Sudan Mediation,” 31 March 2025, <https://au.int/en/pressreleases/20250331/au-commission-chairperson-deploy-panel-wise-south-sudan-mediation>.
- ¹³ US Embassy in South Sudan, “Troika Statement,” 30 October 2024, <https://ss.usembassy.gov/troikastate-103024/>.
- ¹⁴ Delegation of the European Union to South Sudan, “Press statement on the visit of European Union Special Representative Dr. Annette Weber to Juba,” 11 April 2025, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/south-sudan/press-statement-visit-european-union-special-representative-dr-annette-weber-juba-0_en.
- ¹⁵ “Report of the Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan,” ¶83-88, 13 March 2024, <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/55/26>.
- ¹⁶ Radio Tamazuj, “Civil society upbeat after Kiir names woman vice-president,” 11 February 2025, <https://www.radiotamazuj.org/en/news/article/civil-society-upbeat-after-kiir-names-woman-vice-president>.
- ¹⁷ For example, women make up only 32.4% of the membership of the Transitional National Legislative Assembly. IPU Parline Database, “South Sudan,” accessed 8 April 2025, <https://data.ipu.org/parliament/SS/SS-LC01/>. In addition, only one of the 56 most senior judges in South Sudan is a woman. “Report of the Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan,” ¶78, 21 February 2025, <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/hrcouncil/sessions-regular/session58/advance-version/a-hrc-58-27-aev.pdf>.
- ¹⁸ Republic of South Sudan National Elections Commission, “Commissioners,” accessed 8 April 2025, <https://nec.gov.ss/commissioners/>.
- ¹⁹ Radio Tamazuj, “States election chiefs sworn in amid dispute” 11 July 2024, <https://www.radiotamazuj.org/en/news/article/states-election-chiefs-sworn-in-amid-dispute>.