



SECURITY COUNCIL INFORMAL EXPERTS GROUP ON WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY

Summary of the meeting on South Sudan held on October 17th, 2019

On 17 October 2019, the Informal Experts Group on Women, Peace and Security convened a meeting on the situation in South Sudan. The members were briefed by the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) and colleagues from the mission and the UN country team.

Ahead of the Security Council mission to South Sudan, Council members were interested in the types of messages that they could convey to the government to enhance women's participation in the political process and the transition, especially on non-compliance with the quota, and asked whether the measures to address conflict-related sexual violence, such as the use of sanctions or the issuance of action plans by the South Sudanese Police Defense Force (SSNPS) and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-in-Opposition (SPLA-IO) have any deterrence effect on perpetrators. Other questions from Council members ranged from the functioning, coverage, and impact of mobile courts, the cantonment of troops close to populated areas, and the increase of conflict-related sexual violence over the previous year in spite of a decline of other kinds of violence. Council Members also asked about whether other gender provisions in the Revitalized Agreement are being implemented and whether international partners supporting the peace process and the transition are also trying to ensure that women are at least 35 percent of participants in their own delegations.

Below are the main points raised during the meeting:

- There are concerns with regards to the commitment of the parties to meet the 35 per cent quota for women's representation in the transitional government, as provided for in the Revitalized Agreement. Only two institutions of the Agreement, the Ceasefire and Transitional Security Arrangements Monitoring Mechanism and the Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission, have met the quota. UN Women deployed gender advisors in the Intergovernmental Authority on Development and the Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission. During a recent reshuffle of the cabinet, the number of women members was reduced from five to four. Thanks to ongoing advocacy by women's organizations, the political parties pledged to uphold the 35 percent quota that is included in the Revitalized Agreement, and the Minister of Gender wrote a letter to the political parties reminding them of the need to implement this commitment.
- Women have been active participants in the more than 140 peacebuilding meetings held across the country with support from the United Nations, ranging from meetings of several hundred people to small groups. The UN tries to ensure that at least 35 percent of the participants in any of these meetings are women, and there are also many events and consultations that are led by women's groups and target women specifically.
- Women's groups have raised protection concerns about the prolonged cantonment of troops near populated areas. UNMISS is monitoring the situation closely and stands ready to intervene if necessary. The Civil Affairs section of the mission analyzes how gender norms and gender issues intersect with the dynamics of the conflict at the local and national section.

- Women and girls in South Sudan continue to be affected by various forms of sexual and gender-based violence, including rape, gang-rape, forced marriage, sexual mutilation and abduction for sexual slavery. 2018 had seen the highest number of recorded sexual violence incidents in recent years. Data on sexual violence is only indicative, as cases of sexual violence remain largely underreported due to a lack of service coverage and fear of stigma. Numbers of reports are currently trending downwards, but it is not clear whether this is because there are fewer incidents or fewer reports.
- UNMISS is working on a mission-wide strategy to address sexual and gender-based violence and the mission's Human Rights Department has organized six dialogue forums on conflict-related sexual violence, with 85 members of civil society and almost 200 SSNPS members attending. Furthermore, UNMISS is conducting patrols with a particular focus on the protection of women and organized a two-day workshop for female members of the SSNPS.
- The listing of several parties in the annex of the report of the Secretary-General on conflict-related sexual violence catalyzed the issuance of commitments and action plans from the parties, and these constitute entry points for command responsibility and productive engagement with them on this matter. The SSNPS and the SPLA-IO launched action plans to strengthen accountability for conflict-related sexual violence, and this has made it easier for the United Nations to work with them on these issues. The SPLA-IO plan has been disseminated in the cantonment sites and women reported to UNMISS that they noticed a change in behavior although the lack of a strong chain of command makes it harder to generalize any observations about progress. SPLA-IO head Dr. Riek Machar also issued orders to release women and girls from Western Equatoria who continue to be held against their will. The release is complicated by the logistically complex environment, the need for shelter to receive the women and girls as well as the need for safeguards for reintegration and protection. Non-signatory parties also took steps to stop the perpetration of sexual violence by their members. For example, General Thomas Cirillo Swaka of the National Salvation Front, issued a nine-point directive in October prohibiting sexual violence to all military units and members, following engagements with the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict and the UNMISS' Senior Women Protection Advisor.
- Mobile courts have been established in three different locations. They are staffed with South Sudanese judiciary personnel and UNMISS, together with UNDP and NGOs, is providing logistical support. Women appear to be increasingly willing to testify in cases related to sexual violence. A special court in Juba to adjudicate cases of sexual and gender-based violence, violence against children and other serious violations is due to be inaugurated in the week following the meeting of the Informal Experts Group. However, criminal prosecution is only one pathway and a complicated one. Other aspects of transitional justice included in the Revitalized Agreement, including reparations, have seen even less progress.
- The introduction of sexual violence as a standalone listing criterion in the South Sudan sanctions regime is an important political signal. The threat of sanctions is used as one of the key pressure points in the discussions with the SPLA-IO about the release of the women and girls that are held in Western Equatoria.

The following recommendations were made by UN Women, as the secretariat of the Informal Experts Group, and the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict:

- The upcoming visit to South Sudan must include a meeting with women’s organizations, preferably towards the beginning of the agenda so that it can inform other meetings with the government and international partners. During their meetings with representatives of the government of South Sudan and of the United Nations Council members should consider asking questions related to women, peace and security, as proposed in the background note prepared for this meeting, and with special emphasis on the implementation of the gender provisions of the Revitalized Agreement, including the 35 percent quota for women across relevant institutions and committees.
- Council members should commend the role of women’s civil society organizations in South Sudan and urge the government and the United Nations to ensure that they are regularly consulted on all matters related to peace and security and that mechanisms and protocols for their protection are in place.
- Council members should stress the critical importance of investing in local level women-led peacebuilding and mediation efforts towards the consolidation of peace and security, including through intercommunal dialogue, community violence reduction, social norms change, livelihood support, and funding for NGO-run services for women and girls, many of which require urgent resources to survive and more flexible, multi-year funding channeled directly to local and grassroots organizations to build peace at the community level.
- Council members should stress the importance of mainstreaming a gender perspective in the cantonment process and urge the Government to ensure that all uniformed personnel are screened and vetted.
- Council members should urge the Government of South Sudan and parties to the conflict to rigorously and expeditiously investigate all incidents of sexual violence and hold perpetrators accountable regardless of rank or seniority, to ensure that crimes of sexual violence are not amnestied, to provide comprehensive services to survivors, especially medical and psychosocial care, grant unhindered access to humanitarian organizations assisting victims and displaced civilians, ensure that victims receive reparations and livelihood support, and establish the transitional justice mechanisms outlined in the Revitalized Agreement, including the Hybrid Court, truth commission, and reparations programme, without delay.
- Council members should urge the full and effective implementation of the SSNPS and SPLA-IO implementation plans on prevention and response to conflict-related sexual violence and call for the adoption of the SSNPS action plan.
- Council members should call for the immediate release of the women and girls abducted by SPLA-IO forces during military operations in Western Equatoria, and further call for the Government and SPLA-IO to continue working closely with the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict to ensure compliance with the Security Council resolutions on conflict-related sexual violence (1820, 1888, 1960, 2106 and 2467).

The Co-Chairs closed the meeting, thanking the briefers for their participation and committed to follow-up on the important issues raised at the meeting.