



## **Report of the visit by members of the Security Council's Informal Expert Group on Women, Peace and Security to South Sudan**

### **Summary by the co-chairs**

#### **1. Overview and programme of the visit:**

Members of the Security Council's Informal Expert Group on Women, Peace and Security (IEG WPS) visited South Sudan from 11 to 14 December 2023. The delegation consisted of representatives of France, Gabon, Malta, Mozambique, the Russian Federation, Switzerland, the United Arab Emirates, and the United Kingdom, accompanied by UN Women as the secretariat of the IEG. In addition, representatives of the local embassies of Japan, the United Kingdom, and the United States joined several meetings. The purpose of the mission was to learn about the situation of women and girls in the current political context and the implementation of the gender-related provisions of the peace agreement, and to understand the tangible implications of the women, peace and security language in the mandate of the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) and the resolutions on South Sudan adopted by the Security Council on the ground.

The delegation met with representatives of the government, the United Nations (UN), and civil society, and visited both South Sudan's capital Juba and Wau, the capital of Western Bahr el Ghazal State. Among South Sudanese authorities, the members of the IEG met with Vice President Rebecca Nyandeng de Mabior, one of South Sudan's five vice presidents and only woman, the Speaker of Parliament, Ms. Nunu Jemma Khumba, the Minister of Gender, Child, and Social Welfare, Ms. Aya Benjamin Warille, South Sudan's only woman Governor, Ms. Sarah Cleto Hassan, as part of a visit to Wau, and several women parliamentarians in both Juba and Wau. The delegation met with the leadership of UNMISS, including the Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) and head of UNMISS, the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General (Political), the acting Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator, the Force Commander, the Police Commissioner, and other members of the UN team, including the Gender Affairs Unit of the peacekeeping mission, the senior women protection advisor, UN Women, and UNMISS representatives in Wau. The delegation visited a demining site managed by the UN Mine Action Service (UNMAS) to learn about the contribution of women deminers to South Sudan's success in clearing landmines over the past decade. Members of the IEG also met with representatives of nearly 20 civil society organizations, in both Juba and Wau, including the Council of Churches and several women-led organizations.

One of the main concerns expressed by all stakeholders was the danger of South Sudan slipping off the agenda of international partners amid many other competing conflicts and complex emergencies, at a time when the war in Sudan and the mass influx of refugees and returnees are compounding an already dire situation, and as the transition enters a crucial second year, culminating with elections planned for the end of 2024. This message was relayed to partners in the African Union (AU) and UN Women in Addis Ababa, as representatives of Malta, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom spent a day in Ethiopia to meet with several representatives of AU Member States and UN colleagues to discuss how to activate regional or sub-

regional mechanisms in support of the implementation of the gender provisions of the peace agreement in South Sudan, such as the implementation of the 35 percent quota in transitional institutions and in the elections. In particular, there were discussions about proposals to establish a 30 percent quota for women in AU-led mediation teams, election observer teams, and peacebuilding initiatives, including using established platforms like FemWise and the African Women Leaders Network.

## **2. Main issues raised during the visit:**

### **a. The United Nations' work on women, peace and security (WPS):**

Participants had the opportunity to hear about the wide range of WPS-focused interventions led by UNMISS or the UN Country Team. SRSG Haysom, for example, meets with diverse women's organizations on a monthly basis, and has identified WPS as a key priority for the UN in South Sudan. The UN interventions range from directly assisting hundreds of women released from abduction and children born of rape, to the deployment of mobile courts resulting in convictions for cases of gender-based violence in places where no statutory courts had heard cases in many years, to increasing the participation of women in local peace initiatives from 30 percent in 2021 to 41 percent in 2022, or the establishment of six women's networks in the security sector and a platform to interact with civil society organizations. Many of these interventions are focused on the implementation of the gender-related provisions of the revitalized peace agreement, and especially the 35 percent quota for women, including through the formation of women-led coalitions and a comprehensive gender analysis of 27 laws to contribute to legislative reforms, among many others. The implementation of a 70-million-dollar grant from the World Bank to boost women's social and economic empowerment is ongoing. This programme will expand the availability of women's empowerment centers and safe houses throughout the country. The existence of a WPS Group bringing together several UN entities and the main donors contributing to WPS interventions, with UN Women as the secretariat, has enhanced coordination and effectiveness.<sup>1</sup>

The visitors were able to witness two of these activities while in South Sudan: a Political Parties Forum focused on women's political participation, and a demonstration by UNMAS of the contribution of women to demining activities in South Sudan. South Sudan has approximately 170 women out of 900 deminers, not including women medics and community liaison officers, where their representation is higher. Globally, UNMAS has seen a significant increase in the number of women in technical positions, which have historically been male-dominated roles, rising from 3 percent in 2017 to 19 percent only three years later. As women in some communities report feeling more comfortable receiving risk education or disclosing the presence of explosive ordnance when they can engage with other women, the contribution of women in demining has been essential to UNMAS' success in making thousands of kilometers of roads, schools, and water points safe for the population in the last few years.

The government, in cooperation with the UN and civil society, has developed the second National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security, which is awaiting final adoption. The previous National Action Plan had lapsed in 2020, and the delegation had many questions about ensuring stronger implementation than in the past, and the political will and resources needed for its effectiveness and impact. A preliminary and draft budget costs the five-year plan at over 35 million dollars.

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<sup>1</sup> The South Sudan WPS Group brings together ten donors (Canada, Germany, Japan, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, the United States, and the EU delegation), UN entities (UN Women, UNMISS, UNICEF, UNFPA, UNDP), the Revitalized Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission (R-JMEC), the African Union Mission in South Sudan (AUMISS), and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD). The group will be chaired by Canada and the United Kingdom in 2024.

## **b. Implementation of the Revitalized Peace Agreement:**

One clear finding from the interactions with stakeholders was the visibility and importance of the 35 percent quota for women stipulated in the revitalized peace agreement, even if unmet in most instances. The fact that women's representation in peace negotiations had increased from 15 to 25 percent in the latest peace negotiations, and that the agreed quota for women had also been raised from 25 to 35 percent was a welcome development and a source of pride. The representation of women in parliament is close to 35 percent, but women's representation is much lower at the county or state level. Only one of ten governors is a woman. Not even 1 percent of county commissioners or local chiefs are women. Most transitional institutions fall short of the quota too. For example, women's representation in three security-related committees set up to implement the peace agreement ranges from 11 to 17 percent. In previous years, these percentages have been tracked by different civil society organizations in South Sudan, typically supported by UN Women. This information should be shared periodically with international partners, including the Security Council, and could be part of the regular reports by the R-JMEC. The same should apply for any institutions set up in the future, such as the Truth, Reconciliation and Healing Commission, the Judicial Reform Committee, or the Compensation and Reparations Authority, as well as any mechanisms that count with the participation of the UN or regional organizations, such as the government-trilateral taskforce (the UN, the AU, and IGAD) on elections and the constitutional review. Similarly, there seem to be no women participating formally in the talks taking place intermittently in Rome facilitated by the Community of Saint-Egidio with armed groups that have not yet signed the peace agreement. The few women that have attended have had a facilitating or observer role. The absence of women from this process should be clearly signaled and communicated to the Security Council.

The percentage of women in the most recently established institutions is as follows: 32 percent in the National Constitutional Review Committee (19 out of 58 members), 22 percent in the National Elections Commission (2 of 9 members), and 40 percent in the Political Parties Council (4 out of 10, although the initial announcement had indicated that there would be parity). However, there were significant concerns among stakeholders about the likelihood that the constitutional review would be completed ahead of the elections, as agreed in the peace agreement. The stakeholders were also concerned that the main conditions for the elections to proceed as planned would be met and that the quota for women would be respected. As the elections approach and parties compete for power, there could be rising levels of subnational and intercommunal violence. The harassment of politically active women is expected to increase. While the recently adopted amendments to the National Elections Act incorporate provisions on the inclusion and participation of women and the responsibility to guarantee their protection as voters and candidates, it is unclear how this will be operationalized, especially in a context in which the parliament is expected to reduce the number of existing seats in the transitional legislative assembly. This is compounded by the usual challenges to women's participation in politics: from violence against women in public life, to lack of access to the financial resources needed, to the under-representation of women in political parties, compared to other sectors, such as civil society or academia.

Recent positive steps include the appointment of women to some high-level political and decision-making posts, and the signing in 2023 of the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, also known as the Maputo Protocol. This should have a positive effect on legislation favorable to women, as many bills await discussion and adoption, including the anti-GBV bill, the family law bill, the women's empowerment bill, and a bill for the establishment of the Women's Enterprise Fund, which is another gender-related provision of the peace agreement that has not been implemented yet.

## **c. Women's participation in local conflict prevention and resolution:**

Participants also heard of examples of women-led conflict prevention initiatives at the local and sub-national level. For example, a local peace agreement in Jonglei in 2021 featured three women's representatives as signatories on behalf of their communities, and detailed gender-related provisions were included in the agreement. Many local conflict women mediators have been trained and supported as part of the AU's FemWise Network. As part of consultations in South Sudan and neighboring countries with internally displaced people (IDPs), refugees, and returnees led by UNMISS, UNHCR, UNDP, and UN Women, many women called not just for women's equal representation in the constitutional review or the elections, but for the government to implement an ambitious disarmament programme throughout the country. The UN has also supported initiatives to enhance conflict prevention at the Kabarize Center in Pibor, as Kabarize women have in the past successfully collected small weapons from young men and boys and are recognized by men in the community as peace actors. In Western Equatoria, similar initiatives led to traditional leaders adhering to the 35 percent quota for women in local structures, and women were at least 35 percent of the beneficiaries of a community violence reduction project in Wau to integrate hundreds of young men and women associated with armed groups back into civilian lives. UN Women also shared further examples of grassroots women successfully mediating local conflicts, from Dinka and Nuer women jointly intervening to stop cattle raids in Aweil, to women mediators resolving conflicts between cattle-herders and farmers in Eastern Equatoria or helping with land disputes in Jonglei.

**d. Women in the Security Sector:**

The delegation met with representatives of the Executive Board of the Security Sector National Women's Network, headed by their Director, Lieutenant Colonel Harriet Fauzia, and heard positive feedback regarding this network throughout the visit. However, it was also clear that the material and logistical needs of both the women's networks in Juba and the women in the armed forces in cantonment sites are still vast. In the process of graduation of the Necessary Unified Forces, six of 11 training centers reported graduating some women, ranging from only a few dozen women in some centers to 35 percent of all graduates in Western and Northern Bahr el-Ghazal States. There is, however, no verified percentage of women in the armed forces as a whole. Many of the women in the training centers have not been issued uniforms, and there is a significant lack of food, medicines, and hygiene and sanitary products in cantonment sites. Adequate vetting of alleged perpetrators of human rights violations remains a gap, and the women's networks are not part of any formal vetting processes. In a positive development, the chair of the national women's network regularly attends the meetings of the Strategic Defense and Review Board, but only 5 women out of 40 participants attended a key workshop organized by UNMISS and the R-JMEC with the Strategic Defense and Review Board to shape the long-term framework for security sector transformation.

**e. Conflict-related sexual violence and gender-based violence:**

Many other questions and points of discussion revolved around gender-based violence, conflict-related sexual violence, harmful social norms, and the protection of women human rights defenders. More than half of women are married before they turned 18, and bride price is one of the main drivers of violence at the community level. Despite commitments to treat conflict-related sexual violence as an international crime, the current legal framework relies on common crime statutes. Other gaps include the denial of nationality to children born of rape. Terminating a pregnancy is only legally permitted if the mother's health is at risk. At the time of the visit, the UN had verified 37 incidents of conflict-related sexual violence affecting 50 victims from April to September 2023, a significant decrease compared to the same period in 2022, although with most cases attributed to signatories to the peace agreement and community-based militias. As always, cases of conflict-related sexual violence are believed to be vastly under-reported. Abductions are still common. While the UN has worked a lot on trying to secure the release of abducted women and girls, this is accompanied by significant challenges: harassment of the actors that facilitate their release, challenges to support them and their children (often born of rape) after release, and even the return of many of them to

the military bases of these armed groups. While there has been notable progress in the deployment of military courts, mobile courts, and the operationalization of a court in Juba specialized on gender-based violence, justice efforts mainly involve low-ranked soldiers and members of armed groups and there is a need for a much stronger investment in the whole chain of rule-of-law actors. There is a similar need for expansion of multi-sectoral services for survivors, including safe houses and shelters and one-stop-centers, and the lack of support for trauma healing and psychosocial support, not just for survivors of gender-based violence but also for members of the armed forces, was raised in several meetings. Services for clinical management of rape are available in only 34 percent of 253 health facilities. There are only two shelters for survivors in the whole country.

**f. Women in civil society:**

Several stakeholders also shared a sense that women activists in civil society, whose strength and courage were praised by many, are seeing their work restricted by lack of funding and a shrinking civic space, including arbitrary detentions, threats, surveillance, and onerous administrative rules. The stakeholders also expressed that many women activists in the civil society are exhausted, as there are only few while the needs are great. The UN is working to expand networks of women human rights defenders (WHRDs) and strengthen its support to individuals at immediate risk and seeking protection. The delegation visited the largest women's association in Wau, the second largest city of South Sudan, and learned that they had not received external funding for several years, and similar news were shared by other civil society organizations in Wau and Juba. The Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund, for example, supports five women-led and women's rights organizations in South Sudan, but it is clear that the lack of funding for civil society in South Sudan is a serious problem.

**g. Humanitarian situation in South Sudan:**

One of the issues most raised by stakeholders was the scale of the humanitarian emergency in South Sudan, deepened by the influx of refugees and returnees from Sudan, climate-related shocks, and the continued political and economic crisis. In South Sudan, women are four times less likely to hold waged employment, have 30 percent less access to financing, are over-represented among the displaced population, and face higher risks during disasters, as much of the country is affected by either floods or droughts. Increasing opportunities for women to engage in productive economic activities was identified as a priority by many interlocutors, including through greater investments in education, financial literacy, and large-scale campaigns to ensure that women in rural areas have access to identity papers and documentation and bank accounts, as women are over-represented in rural areas and under-represented in urban centers. While a Women's Enterprise Fund has not yet been established due to lack of government funding or pledges from donors, it is hoped that recent investment from the World Bank will help pilot a model for its operationalization.

The UN estimates that 9 million people will require humanitarian assistance in 2024, including more than 7 million experiencing acute food insecurity or worse, particularly during the lean season from April to July. If South Sudan continues to experience a shortfall in foreign currency reserves and international aid, as donors pay attention to the many crises proliferating throughout the world, and the oil infrastructure used by South Sudan to export all of its oil is disrupted by the conflict in Sudan, the humanitarian crisis will get much worse.

**3. Recommendations:**

Both the UN mission and the sanctions committee in South Sudan have one of the strongest mandates on women, peace and security, as articulated in Security Council resolutions on South Sudan over the years,

and this has been reflected in its prioritization by the UN mission and the country team. However, this mandate needs to be matched with adequate funding, resources, and expertise.

In **upcoming negotiations to renew the mandate of UNMISS**, the Security Council should retain the strong provisions on women, peace and security already contained in resolution 2677 (2023), which remain relevant in the current context. In addition:

- Operative paragraphs dealing with the planned elections can retain existing references to women's full, equal, and meaningful participation, and add more specific language stressing the importance of taking proactive measures to **prevent hate speech and violence against women in politics**, conduct outreach targeting rural women and displaced and refugee women, and implement legislative and policy measures to ensure that political parties abide by established quotas.
- Operative paragraph 14 calling on parties to ensure women's full, effective, and meaningful participation and involvement of women in all spheres and levels of political leadership, the peace process, the transitional government, and ongoing reform processes under the peace agreement could: make a specific reference to the **constitution-making process and the security sector transformation process** and the importance of promoting **women's inclusion in the Necessary Unified Forces**, including in leadership positions, call on the government to prioritize **adoption of pending legislation** that will strengthen the protection of women's rights and their participation and the domestication of the Maputo Protocol, and update the reference to the low participation of women in the **transition roadmap** to regret the **continued under-representation** of women in transitional institutions, with some exceptions.
- Operative paragraph 27 already calls on the international community to scale up gender-sensitive humanitarian response, but could explicitly call for **adequate consultation and involvement of women and women-led organizations in humanitarian delivery** or due consideration to their **leadership in camp management**.

In addition, the Security Council should:

- Together with other Member States, match the high number of demands and the scale of needs on the ground with **commensurate resources** in budget negotiations in the 5<sup>th</sup> committee, especially in light of the critical nature of the coming months and the significant impact of the crisis in Sudan, compounding South Sudan's already complex humanitarian emergency.
- Amplify recommendations to strengthen implementation of the **action plans of the armed forces** (which expired at the end of 2023) **and the police to address conflict-related sexual violence**, as well as the access of survivors to justice and multi-sectoral services, and improved vetting throughout the security sector. Apart from the expansion of interventions that have shown results, such as mobile courts or one-stop centers, there is a need for a much larger investment in the whole rule-of-law chain, including greater participation of women in law enforcement and the judicial sector.
- Encourage the UN to **report on the protection of women-led organizations and women peacebuilders from threats and reprisals** and on providing a safe environment to enable them to carry out their work freely aspect via using the most appropriate channels, as called for in the Resolution 2677 (2023).

UN and development partners in South Sudan are encouraged to:

- Regularly **publish the percentage of women in all transitional institutions and commissions established to implement the revitalized peace agreement**. In the past, several women's organizations have monitored these, but it is not clear whether these efforts have been sustained or

why this information is not reaching international partners regularly. Monitoring compliance with the 35 percent quota every quarter or every six months across as many institutions as possible, and sharing these numbers with the international community, would enhance accountability and identify gaps in need of additional support or investment. This could be undertaken by R-JMEC or the UN.

- Share regular **updates on women's participation** (or the lack of) **in the talks facilitated by the Community of Sant'Egidio** with non-signatories to the Security Council and international partners. Anecdotally, it appears that women are completely absent among the delegates in these talks, but this should be communicated clearly to the Security Council and other international partners.
- Share more **information on the state of funding for gender equality initiatives in the country** to international partners. For example, communicating the budget and funding gaps of the second National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security should be a priority for the government and its UN partners. Another key gender-related provision of the peace agreement that has not been implemented is the **establishment of a fund to provide subsidies and credit to women-led businesses** and enterprises, and lack of funding is one of the reasons cited for the delay. During the visit, it was clear that many women's organizations have not received external support for many years, and more **information about the under-funding of women's organizations** in South Sudan would be beneficial.

Finally, the IEG co-chairs could:

- Consider conducting **another visit by members of the IEG on WPS in 2024**, with an emphasis on contexts that are impacted by the recent or imminent withdrawal of UN peacekeeping or special political missions.
- **Share this summary with the AU's Peace and Security Council and its presidency**, ahead of a planned visit to South Sudan, partner with the AU and IGAD to **promote joint messaging in support of women's participation** in the peace process and public decision-making and the promotion of gender equality and human rights, **enhance coordination and information-sharing** on all relevant IEG discussions or initiatives concerning the region, and express **support to proposals in the African Union to establish a 30 percent quota for women** in AU-led mediation teams, election observer teams, and peacebuilding initiatives.

## **Annex:**

### **Terms of reference**

#### **Visit to South Sudan by members of the Security Council's Informal Expert Group on Women, Peace and Security (December 11<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> 2023)**

#### **Overview:**

In October 2015, the Security Council adopted resolution 2242 and called for an Informal Expert Group (IEG) on Women, Peace and Security (WPS). This mechanism is intended to enable the Security Council to receive more detailed and nuanced information and analysis related to WPS in specific countries affected by conflict and on how the UN is implementing its WPS mandate on the ground. The IEG began its work in 2016 and holds periodic meetings via video conference with the UN in several countries. This year, this group is co-chaired by Switzerland and the United Arab Emirates, in conjunction with the United Kingdom as the Council's penholder on women, peace and security. The IEG guidelines ([S/2016/1106](#)) provide a list of options for the Group that includes a field visit at the expert level. The first such visit by members of the IEG was to Lebanon on 28-30 June 2022 ([S/2022/593](#)).

The IEG has met to discuss the situation in South Sudan in February 2019 ([S/2019/232](#)), October 2019, February 2021 ([S/2021/166](#)), and February 2022 ([S/2023/266](#)). As follow-up to this last meeting, and ahead of Security Council negotiations before the expiration of the current mandate of UNMISS on March 15<sup>th</sup> 2024, the co-chairs are proposing an expert-level field visit to South Sudan by members of the IEG. The opportunity to visit South is timely, as the country is approaching the mid-point of the two-year extension of its transition roadmap, still working on implementing key provisions of the Revitalized Agreement of the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan, undertaking a constitutional review process, and preparing for elections. The government of South Sudan has made several commitments in line with the women, peace and security agenda, whether in the form of its national action plan on this matter (2023-2027), or the gender-related provisions of the peace agreement, including the 35 percent quota for women, as well as public pronouncements by the country's leadership, including at this year's international conference on women's transformational leadership. In addition, Security Council resolutions on South Sudan, including for the mandates of both the peacekeeping mission and the sanctions regime, have included many elements on women, peace and security, and it would be important for the members of the IEG to understand the implications that these decisions have on the ground and how they are implemented.

#### **Objectives:**

1. To better understand the situation of women and girls in South Sudan, including in relation to:
  - Women's meaningful participation in the implementation of the Revitalized Peace Agreement and in the transition roadmap, and progress towards achieving the 35 percent quota for women;
  - Women's participation and influence in public and political life, including in relation to the upcoming elections and the constitution-making process;
  - The security and humanitarian situation and their consequences for women and girls, including sexual and gender-based violence, conflict-related sexual violence, and violence or threats against women voters and candidates or civil society;
  - The situation of internally displaced women, women refugees and other women in situations of vulnerability and from marginalized groups;

- The implementation of the national action plan on women, peace and security, and the role of civil society in these efforts.
  - The role of women in conflict prevention, peacebuilding and mediation efforts at all levels.
2. To learn about the implementation of all pillars of the women and peace and security agenda by UNMISS and the UN Country Team.
  3. To familiarize the Security Council membership with the tangible implications on the ground of language on women and peace and security in mandates, and to reflect on any gaps.

**Format:**

The objectives will be achieved by meeting with some of the following stakeholders in Juba, as well as undertaking a one-day visit outside of Juba:

- South Sudan’s Government representatives responsible for implementation of the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (R-ARCSS);
- UNMISS leadership and representatives of the UN Country Team involved in the implementation of women, peace and security policies and programmes;
- Representatives of the Women, Peace and Security Group in South Sudan (including international partners and donors).
- Women political leaders, representatives from the Women Parliamentarians’ Caucus, and representatives of Women’s Security Sector Network in South Sudan;
- Women’s civil society organizations and women human rights defenders, as well as other relevant civil society representatives.

A one-day visit to Western Bar el Ghazal will be considered if logistically feasible. After three full days, the delegation would use the first half of the fourth day to debrief, and the rest of the day to travel.

**Timing:**

The total time commitment is expected to be three and a half days plus travel. The agenda will tentatively start on Monday December 11<sup>th</sup> in the morning, and the delegation is expected to be fully engaged in activities through mid-day Thursday December 14<sup>th</sup>. Participants will be encouraged to arrive during the previous weekend.

**Participation**

The full membership of the Informal Expert Group is invited to participate at the expert level. This includes experts covering women, peace and security and covering South Sudan. Representatives from UN Women, as the secretariat of the Informal Expert Group, the Department of Peace Operations, and the Office of the SRSG on Sexual Violence in Conflict, will be invited to accompany the delegation.

**Cost**

Each participant is expected to source its own funding to cover the costs.