



Security Council

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Letter dated 7 February 2020 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council

I have the honour to refer to the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA), which was established by the Security Council in its resolution [1990 \(2011\)](#) and whose mandate was extended by resolution [2497 \(2019\)](#) until 15 May 2020.

In line with the provisions of Security Council resolution [2497 \(2019\)](#), I would like to report on the progress made in implementing the Mission's mandate, including the increase in police and the appointment of a civilian Deputy Head of Mission, and in achieving the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism benchmarks set out in resolution [2497 \(2019\)](#) (see annex).

I should be grateful if you would bring the present letter and its annex to the attention of the members of the Security Council.

(Signed) António **Guterres**



Progress report on Security Council resolution 2497 (2019)

Introduction

1. The present note is submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution 2497 (2019), by which the Council extended the mandate of the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA) until 15 May 2020 and requested me to inform it of progress in implementing the UNISFA mandate, in a note, no later than 31 January 2020 and report on progress with the increase in police, the appointment of a civilian Deputy Head of Mission, planning for the reduction of troops, usage of Athony airport and the issuance of visas to support the implementation of the mandate.

Conflict dynamics and security situation in Abyei

2. Since the issuance of my previous report (S/2019/817), the overall security situation in Abyei has remained fragile, with two major incidents taking place on 19 and 21 January 2020. Prior to that, only occasional armed attacks, mostly linked to criminality, as well as the periodic alleged presence of armed elements, were reported.

3. There were 19 incidents recorded during the period under review. These include cattle rustling, rape, kidnapping and incidents of killing, such as that of 24 November 2019 in Leu village (Sector South), which resulted in villagers fleeing the area. On 8 December 2019, a group of armed men, who were suspected to be Misseriya, attacked the same village (Leu) and burned down four houses, without any casualties. In addition to the aforementioned incidents, the movement of armed men reported by the local population remained a source of concern, as they enter Abyei, increasingly from the west, east and south-eastern flanks where UNISFA is not deployed, commit crimes, such as cattle rustling, murder and kidnapping, and subsequently exit Abyei.

4. On 19 January 2020, an attack that resulted in the death of three Misseriya took place in the Kolom area. Subsequently, UNISFA intensified patrols in the general areas of Dokura/Rumajak, Nainai, Bongak, Kolom, Makir, Noong and Alal, as well as on the route between Dokura/Rumajak and Amiet market. The Mission also reached out to local communities on 20 January to de-escalate tensions. It also maintained a presence in the area of Kolom throughout the night. On 21 January, an armed attack targeting the local Ngok Dinka community in Kolom was reportedly perpetrated by Misseriya armed elements just after the UNISFA patrol moved from the area. The latest casualty report has confirmed the number of deaths at 35 Ngok Dinka. Five Misseriya, suspected to be linked to the attack, were captured by UNISFA and handed over to the representatives of the Government of the Sudan. The Mission has intensified operational activities in the Abyei Area and an investigative team has been convened to investigate the incident.

5. UNISFA continues to contain the security situation with its rapid response mechanisms and presence in most sensitive areas. In order to enhance its security coverage and ensure the protection of civilians, UNISFA has reviewed its deployment concept in the dry season and is in the process of establishing three new temporary operating bases at Shegeg, Leu and Rumamier to address the threat from the east and south-eastern flanks.

6. UNISFA has also engaged with the United Nations Mission in South Sudan to establish a collaborative mechanism to address cross-border activities by armed groups. The plan to establish checkpoints to search for weapons and ammunition and

control the reported movements of armed elements within the Abyei Area has been discussed with the Governments of the Sudan and South Sudan and will soon be implemented. The full operationalization of the Joint Military Observer Committee and the joint military observer team mechanisms has also received the backing of the two Governments. Hence, joint ground monitoring missions of both South Sudanese and Sudanese national monitors in Abyei Area are expected to commence in due course.

Force reconfiguration

7. In line with Security Council resolution [2497 \(2019\)](#), the reduction of an additional 295 troops has been postponed until 15 May 2020. Retaining the troops has allowed UNISFA to maintain a sufficient footprint in the Abyei Area to initiate the establishment of three additional temporary operating bases. While the mission is planning for the repatriation of the 295 troops by May 2020, it remains concerned that its forces could be overstretched if no progress is made on the deployment of the proposed three formed police units to address the increase in criminal activities. In this regard, China and Ethiopia confirmed their readiness to conduct reconnaissance visits. The entry visas for the Sudan and travel permits in Abyei for the reconnaissance teams have been approved and the mission is coordinating their visits. It is expected that one formed police unit will be deployed by end of March and the second as soon as possible.

8. The Ethiopian medium utility helicopter unit was repatriated during the reporting period after being suspended temporarily for safety reasons. The process for the repatriation of the contingent-owned equipment is ongoing.

9. Following the military capability study of August 2019, the upgrading of UNISFA key enablers, such as the engineering and logistic units, is under way, with the objective of improving the Force's responsiveness and mobility for a more dynamic posture.

Engagement with the authorities of the Sudan and South Sudan

10. The United Nations Secretariat and the UNISFA leadership have continuously engaged with the Governments of the Sudan and South Sudan in order to facilitate the implementation of the pending aspects of their previous agreements and the UNISFA mandate. In this regard, the Acting Head of Mission visited Khartoum and Juba on several occasions in December 2019 and January 2020. He discussed with officials of the two Governments various issues pertaining to the implementation of the UNISFA mandate and ways to move the political process forward. During the visits, he underscored the need to facilitate the deployment of the authorized additional United Nations police, as well as to appoint a civilian Deputy Head of Mission and to operationalize the Athony airstrip to reduce UNISFA transport costs and logistical challenges.

11. The Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations addressed a letter to the Permanent Representative of the Sudan on 13 December 2019, raising concerns over the delays in the issuance of visas to UNISFA personnel, which constitutes one of the major impediments affecting the mission's capacity to deliver on its mandate. In the letter, he also raised the issues of the appointment of a civilian Deputy Head of Mission and the operationalization and use of the Athony airport.

12. As a result of these engagements, government officials from both sides agreed to meet at the level of Ministers of Defence and the Abyei Joint Oversight Committee Co-Chairs to discuss the peace process, as well as security concerns in Abyei and the Safe Demilitarized Border Zone. In this connection, a Joint Political and Security Mechanism meeting was held in Juba on 2 and 3 February. Furthermore, the Sudan

issued visas for 23 individual police officers who are expected to be deployed to the mission by 10 February 2020, as well as for the visit of the reconnaissance teams in preparation for the deployment of the Chinese and Ethiopian formed police units.

Progress on the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism benchmarks

13. Following continuous engagement with the Governments of the Sudan and South Sudan at different levels, the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism has made some progress on the benchmarks set out in Security Council resolution 2497 (2019). Since December 2019, the Mechanism has deployed troops in Abu Qussa, where the construction of the team site 22 is in progress. The Sudan People's Liberation Army in Opposition (SPLA-IO) elements have withdrawn 20 km south of the Safe Demilitarized Border Zone, leaving behind a few local police. The team site is expected to be operational in February 2020.

14. There were no restrictions on movement within the Safe Demilitarized Border Zone during the reporting period. Of the 59 planned ground monitoring missions, 47 were conducted and 12 were cancelled (79.6 per cent achievement), owing mostly to bad road conditions. Regarding the aerial monitoring missions, 19 were conducted out of the 26 planned (73 per cent achievement). Seven aerial monitoring missions were cancelled owing to flight recovery and other administrative challenges.

15. Following the twelfth meeting of the Joint Demarcation Committee, held in Addis Ababa from 20 to 23 November 2019, the Joint Border Commission and the Joint Demarcation Committee of the Sudan and South Sudan held their third meeting in Addis Ababa from 24 to 29 November 2019. At the end of the meeting, the two parties adopted a sensitization programme related to the border demarcation and tasked the Joint Demarcation Committee to prepare a comprehensive and detailed description of the agreed, disputed and claimed areas. The Joint Demarcation Committee is scheduled to meet twice in February in Juba and in Khartoum, respectively, followed by a joint meeting of the Joint Border Commission and the Joint Demarcation Committee in March in Addis Ababa.

16. The strength of national monitors from the Sudan and South Sudan in the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism is currently at 65 out of 68 officers, including 30 Sudanese Armed Forces officers and 35 South Sudan People's Defence Forces officers.

17. I wish to extend my sincere gratitude to the Acting Head of Mission and Force Commander, Major General Mehari Zewde Gebremariam; the Chief of the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism, Brigadier General Gebremichael Beyene Tedla; and all UNISFA staff for their dedication in the face of persisting challenges. I am grateful to the Government of Ethiopia for its tireless engagement in support of peace and stability in the Abyei Area and the Safe Demilitarized Border Zone.
