



# Security Council

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## Situation in Abyei

### Report of the Secretary-General

#### I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to paragraph 5 of Security Council resolution [2660 \(2022\)](#), in which the Council requested to be informed of progress in implementing the mandate of the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA). It covers the period since the issuance of the previous report ([S/2022/760](#)), from 4 October 2022 to 18 April 2023. The report provides updates, inter alia, on political, security and rule-of-law developments, the potential impact of the outbreak of fighting in the Sudan, and the transition of UNISFA to a United Nations multinational peacekeeping force.

#### II. Abyei

##### Political developments

2. The reporting period was marked by high-level engagement between the Sudan and South Sudan aimed at enhancing cooperation on Abyei and border issues, and paving the way for discussion on its final status. While relations between the parties remain good and their engagement has created positive momentum with regard to discussions on Abyei issues, tangible progress on the ground remains elusive, and the Abyei Joint Oversight Committee did not reconvene during the period. In Khartoum on 24 October 2022, the chairpersons of the national committees established by both South Sudan and the Sudan – Tut Gatluak Manime, Presidential Adviser on National Security Affairs of South Sudan, and Mohammed Hamdan Dagalo, Deputy Chairperson of the Sovereign Council of the Sudan and Head of the Rapid Support Forces – met to discuss the final status of Abyei, which resulted in an agreement to enhance cooperation and address outstanding issues. The parties resolved to jointly expedite the provision of services to the communities in Abyei and to reactivate joint mechanisms to provide humanitarian assistance and create an environment conducive to peace in the area. They also discussed the issue of payments by the Sudan to South Sudan of arrears related to revenues generated by the oilfields in Abyei. While the impact of the outbreak of violence in the Sudan on 15 April 2023 remains unclear, it is highly likely to delay further steps towards dialogue on Abyei.

3. On 12 January 2023, at a bilateral meeting in Juba, both the President of South Sudan and the Chairperson of the Sovereign Council and Commander of the Armed



Forces of the Sudan discussed the situation in Abyei and potential measures to enhance border cooperation, including the formation of a joint security force along the common border. They also called for the existing mechanisms related to Abyei to reconvene.

4. In Juba on 18 January, the representatives of UNISFA and the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism attended a meeting of the Joint Political and Security Mechanism, where the parties reiterated their agreement to resume regular Abyei Joint Oversight Committee meetings. In addition, they again referred certain matters, such as Diffra oil protection and the operationalization of the Athony airstrip, to their respective presidencies.

5. Following months of heightened tensions between Ngok Dinka and Twic Dinka in the southern part of the Abyei Area and the northern part of Warrap State of South Sudan, the President of South Sudan issued a decree on 9 January, by which the Juba-appointed Chief Administrator Koul Diem Koul was removed and replaced with Chol Deng Alak, who had served in that capacity between 2015 and 2017. Prior to the issuance of the decree, an ad hoc committee of the transitional Council of States of South Sudan had visited Abyei, on 6 October 2022. The committee, which was tasked with analysing the causes of tension between Ngok Dinka and Twic Dinka, met with UNISFA, the Juba-appointed local administration and other key interlocutors. The mission also hosted the visit of the Archbishop of Yei, Elias Taban Parangi, from 15 to 17 November as part of efforts to defuse the tensions.

6. As tensions between Ngok Dinka and Twic Dinka continued, the President of South Sudan convened on 20 March the Governors of Warrap and Lakes States, the Juba-appointed Chief Administrator of Abyei and traditional Ngok Dinka and Twic Dinka leaders to discuss their disputes. The latter pledged to cease hostilities and agreed to the deployment of security forces in the disputed areas to create a buffer zone.

7. The high-level committee of the Sudan and South Sudan on Abyei, chaired by the Deputy Chairperson of the Sovereign Council of the Sudan and Head of the Rapid Support Forces and the Presidential Adviser on National Security Affairs of South Sudan, met for a second round of talks in Khartoum on 9 and 10 April to discuss the overall situation in Abyei and to advance discussions on the final status of Abyei, in the presence of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Horn of Africa, UNISFA, the African Union and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD). UNISFA gave a presentation on the security situation in Abyei. The parties reiterated their commitment to constructive engagement and agreed that the issue of the final status of Abyei would be discussed in the upcoming rounds of talks.

### **Conflict dynamics and the security situation**

8. The security situation in the Abyei Area remained tense, with sporadic killings, shootings, acts of sexual and gender-based violence, abductions and animal rustling. Furthermore, the period saw the positioning of South Sudan People's Defence Forces and South Sudan National Police in the southern part of Abyei and the Sudan National Police in the northern part of Abyei, in violation of the 2011 Agreement between the Government of the Republic of the Sudan and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement on temporary arrangements for the administration and security of the Abyei Area. The Diffra Oil police maintained a presence at the Diffra Oil installations. Furthermore, armed elements from inside and outside the Abyei Area continued to generate insecurity in Abyei, as did episodic clashes between Ngok Dinka and Twic Dinka communities and a few instances of violence between Misseriya and Ngok Dinka.

9. Overall, of the 51 arms-related incidents reported during the period, 37 were direct attacks against civilians, reportedly killing 39 and injuring 39. These incidents included six armed group attacks against other armed groups, two instances of armed groups firing weapons, eight shooting incidents by individuals and seven abductions. The period also witnessed the proliferation of weapons, especially in southern Abyei, where a local youth group known as Tit Baai formed as a defence force following the emergence of clashes between Ngok Dinka and Twic Dinka communities in early 2022. The mission recorded 16 instances of illegal possession of firearms and ammunition, and approximately 70 weapons and 9,301 ammunitions were confiscated by the Force and destroyed by the Mine Action Service. In that context, approximately 5 Ngok Dinka, 19 Nuer, and 12 Misseriya were apprehended and handed over to the relevant authorities.

10. The major challenge with regard to the protection of civilians was linked to intercommunal clashes between the Ngok Dinka and Twic Dinka, mostly of Warrap State in South Sudan, which started in February 2022 over a land dispute. Both communities signed a cessation of hostilities agreement on 4 April 2022, but it has since been violated. On 10 October, armed Twic Dinka attacked the Aneet market in the area of Agok in Sector South. While armed Ngok Dinka young people, reportedly Tit Baai, tried to repel the attack, the assailants seized the Aneet market, Joljuk and the Agok airstrip. Twelve Ngok Dinka sustained injuries and approximately 45 internally displaced persons relocated to the Agok team site for shelter and protection. UNISFA troops could not immediately respond to the attack, as roads were impassable owing to heavy flooding. On 2 January, Rumamier in Sector South was attacked by a 300-strong armed group reportedly consisting of Twic Dinka and Nuer. Although a UNISFA quick reaction force team was immediately dispatched, some 13 Ngok Dinka were killed and 5 injured, 37 houses were burned and 500 civilians were displaced. On 23 February, two suspected Twic Dinka attacked eight Ngok Dinka at Bony, Sector South, killing two. On 25 February, unknown armed men attacked five Ngok Dinka on the road to Rumamier, killing two.

11. On 16 October, approximately 500 contracted United Nations staff from the Ngok Dinka community protested within UNISFA headquarters, demanding the expulsion of Twic Dinka contracted staff. Another group of Ngok Dinka assembled outside the main gate, temporarily denying the mission freedom of movement. On 23 October, some 300 Ngok Dinka contracted staff protested again within UNISFA headquarters, threatening the approximately 15 Twic Dinka contracted staff there. Another 200 Ngok Dinka blocked the main gate. Approximately 100 protesters remained in the camp overnight. During that period, the Force provided physical security to the Twic Dinka contracted staff, and camp security was augmented with the deployment of quick reaction forces to secure key installations.

12. Intercommunal conflict between the Misseriya and Ngok Dinka decreased during the reporting period. However, tensions between the two communities were heightened following the abduction of two Misseriya traders on 31 December in the vicinity of Abyei town. Their mutilated bodies were recovered on 6 January by UNISFA and the community protection committee, with the Misseriya leadership blaming Ngok Dinka and demanding that UNISFA bring the perpetrators to justice. The mission formally notified the parties of the death of the traders and suggested, during the meeting of the Joint Political and Security Mechanism in January, the establishment of a joint investigation team.

13. Instances of cattle rustling also decreased during the reporting period. However, largely as a result of heightened tensions between the Ngok Dinka and Twic Dinka, the number of civilian homes destroyed more than doubled, to 340, leading to an uptick in internal displacement in Sector South.

14. In two related incidents on 25 November, three locally contracted United Nations personnel fell victim to a carjacking, and two women military staff officers of UNISFA were harassed by a dozen young people with knives in the vicinity of UNISFA headquarters. In both incidents, the staff escaped unhurt. Meanwhile, on 2 January, two aid workers were killed during an exchange of fire between Ngok Dinka and Twic Dinka communities in Rumamier, Sector South.

15. In mid-October, UNISFA was informed that South Sudan People's Defence Forces, with the agreement of their Sudanese counterparts, would use Agok airstrip temporarily to rotate troops in and out of Rumkor and Majak-Kol barracks, just south of the Abyei Area. Officers of the South Sudan National Police also established themselves in Agok, inside the Abyei Area. On 1 and 2 March, South Sudan People's Defence Forces deployed close to a medical structure staffed by an international non-governmental organization (NGO) in the area of Athony junction. On 13 March, a South Sudanese police chief restricted a UNISFA night patrol moving beyond the Agok area.

16. On 19 March, the acting Head of Mission and Force Commander of UNISFA met in Agok with the Deputy Head of the South Sudanese forces based there, which included, according to the latter, approximately 300 military, 100 intelligence and 100 police officers. UNISFA informed the Deputy Head that the South Sudanese forces were in Agok in violation of past and standing agreements, and added that they should vacate the administrative buildings and schools that they were occupying. Notes verbales on the subject were shared with the Government of South Sudan.

17. On 18 November, UNISFA observed the presence of approximately 50 Sudan National Police personnel in Farouk, in the northern part of Abyei, and requested in a note verbale that the Government of the Sudan remove them from the Abyei Area. In a separate development, two Sudanese Air Force officers led a patrol into northern Abyei on 26 December to quell a protest at the Diffra Oil refinery. UNISFA sent notes verbales to the Government of the Sudan in November and December on the topic.

18. To address imminent threats, UNISFA took pre-emptive physical deployment measures informed by its early warning system, which received information on cattle rustling, intercommunal and domestic violence, among other developments. During the reporting period, approximately 10,871 ground patrols and 13 air patrols were conducted in the Abyei Area in fulfilment of the protection of civilians mandate of UNISFA.

#### **Reconfiguration of the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei**

19. The reconfiguration of UNISFA, from a Force provided largely by a single troop-contributing country to a multinational Force provided by eight troop-contributing countries, is near completion. Troops from Bangladesh, China, Ghana, India, Nepal, Nigeria, Pakistan and Viet Nam have fully deployed. Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan and Viet Nam units deployed with 100 per cent contingent-owned equipment, whereas the Indian contingent deployed with 30.5 per cent contingent-owned equipment, the Ghanaian battalion deployed with 56 per cent and the Ghana level-II plus hospital personnel deployed with 65 per cent. Owing to operational exigencies in the mission area, Nigerian troops deployed without their contingent-owned equipment, and the mission is temporarily supporting the unit with United Nations-owned equipment. While arrangements had been made for all contingents to be at full capacity by the end of May 2023, the outbreak of violence in the Sudan in April is expected to cause delays in contingent-owned equipment deployments and a shortage of key supplies and to affect the timing of troop rotations.

20. During the reporting period, an all-woman platoon comprising 27 women, representing 4.73 per cent of the Indian battalion, was deployed to UNISFA. As at

30 March, women constituted 6.85 per cent of contingent troops and 23 per cent of military staff officers and military observers.

#### **Freedom of movement violations**

21. During the reporting period, four freedom of movement violations were recorded. In particular, local Misseriya members of the joint community peace committee restricted the movement of UNISFA-contracted vehicle convoys at illegal checkpoints along the main supply route of the Amiet market and demanded payment for passage. On 25 and 26 January, UNISFA national staff from the Ngok Dinka community were blocked by Misseriya men at the Amiet market and prevented from travelling north. On 1 February, UNISFA submitted a note verbale to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Sudan, in which it requested that these activities cease. Between 24 and 26 February, Misseriya members of the joint community peace committee prevented the passage of two UNISFA-contracted cement trucks at the Amiet market. The cement was destined for the UNISFA Dokura Camp Replacement Project, but the committee members alleged that it was intended to build projects in support of the Ngok Dinka. UNISFA, including the troop-contributing countries, engaged with the Khartoum-appointed local administration in Diffra and with Sudanese authorities to ensure that the blockade was rapidly lifted.

#### **Intercommunity dialogue**

22. UNISFA continued its engagements with Misseriya and Ngok Dinka local authorities, traditional leaders, civil society, young people, women and other key stakeholders to promote intercommunal dialogue, in particular ahead of the transhumance period. UNISFA organized a social cohesion activity on 16 November at the Amiet market to discuss security issues ahead of the transhumance period, an hour before which UNISFA was informed that representatives of the Ngok Dinka would not attend, at the request of the Juba-appointed Chief Administrator. Notwithstanding, 37 Misseriya community members, including representatives of the Misseriya community protection committee, joint protection committee, joint community peace committee and traditional court, as well as women and young people, participated and called for renewed dialogue.

23. In early 2023, UNISFA continued to engage, both in the capitals and locally, with key stakeholders to convene the seasonal peace conference, held in Todach, Abyei Area, from 20 to 23 March. Facilitated by UNISFA, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations), the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and Concordis International, the conference brought together the Ngok Dinka and Misseriya communities and resulted in the signing of an agreement, including on the cessation of hostilities, the freedom of movement, the need to reactivate the joint community peace committee and the continuation of the peace dialogue. In the aftermath of the conference, UNISFA ensured that the agreement was widely disseminated and explained at the grass-roots level throughout the Abyei Area. Despite this, five incidents of cattle rustling have occurred since the conference ended, most, allegedly, by Nuer people. Of particular note, in the area of Shegeg (Sector South) on 27 March, three Misseriya cattle herders were killed and their cattle were rustled, allegedly by Nuer. Also, on 6 April, approximately 10 Nuer attacked Misseriya herders north-west of Noong in Sector Centre. Despite the rapid intervention of UNISFA, two Misseriya were killed in the attack, along with three Nuers. UNISFA engaged immediately after the events with leaders from both communities to defuse tensions.

24. UNISFA continued to coordinate with the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) to aid efforts led by the Government of South Sudan in support of rapprochement between the Ngok Dinka and Twic Dinka communities. Four

coordination meetings involving South Sudanese authorities, UNMISS, UNISFA, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and IOM representatives were held between 15 October 2022 and 15 March 2023 to discuss ways to reduce tensions between the two communities. On 15 November, UNISFA facilitated the two-day visit of Archbishop Elias Taban Parangi, which led to a temporary reduction in violence. In addition, on 18 and 19 March, UNISFA facilitated transportation to Kwajok, Warrap State, for Ngok Dinka Chiefs, led by the Paramount Chief, Bulabek Deng Kuol, and for the Juba-appointed Chief Administrator, Chol Deng Alak, to discuss intercommunal tensions with the Governor of Warrap State, and Twic Dinka counterparts under the auspices of the President of South Sudan. From 28 to 31 October, a civil society-led intercommunal dialogue was held in Wau, South Sudan, facilitated by IOM and supported by UNISFA, UNMISS and Concordis International, between community members from Twic County and Abyei. The event concluded with a commitment to a cessation of hostilities and to continued engagement, issued in the form of a joint communiqué. Lastly, UNISFA provided support for approximately 46 Ngok Dinka representatives, including the Juba-appointed Chief Administrator, to engage Twic counterparts in Wau from 3 to 6 April. While that meeting concluded without the signing of an agreement, the representatives of both communities agreed in principle to certain issues, including a cessation of hostilities.

25. On 4 January, immediately following the attack in Rumamier on 2 January, UNISFA facilitated the visit of the nine Ngok Dinka traditional chiefs there to support those affected by the attack and instil confidence among community members. On 31 January, the acting Head of Mission and Force Commander also visited Rumamier, and a temporary operating base was re-established in the area. The 182 internally displaced persons who relocated from Rumamier to Abyei town have since returned.

#### **Rule of law**

26. No progress was made towards the establishment by South Sudan and the Sudan of the Abyei Police Service. The United Nations police continued to engage with traditional leaders, local authorities, young people and women to enhance their participation in rule-of-law-related matters and support the capacities of the community protection committees and the joint protection committee through co-location, mentoring and training. In terms of training, members of the community protection committee/joint protection committee (approximately 403 men and 162 women) were trained in basic policing and provided with portable rechargeable flashlights, raincoats, reflector jackets, T-shirts, caps and stationery.

27. The United Nations police renovated the joint protection committee detention facility in Amiet market and conducted 384 visits to the three detention facilities. They further constructed a new community protection committee station at Nynkwach market in Sector Centre. As a result, they profiled and vetted personnel nominated by traditional leaders to assume duties at 53 community protection committee stations (1,223 personnel, including 181 women) and 1 joint protection committee station (52 personnel, including 4 women), in close collaboration with traditional leadership and local administration. While community protection committees are growing in number and strength, the coordinator of the Ngok Dinka community protection committee was relocated outside Abyei Area in response to pressure from the Tit Baai armed youth group.

28. The United Nations police conducted 3,027 activities related to law and order with a specific focus on crime prevention and reduction and road safety. Activities included 315 campaigns to raise awareness on accountability for sexual and gender-based violence and on the protection of the rights of women and children. In addition,

campaigns targeting 277 pupils, including 127 girls, were carried out to prevent child abuse, including child marriage and female genital mutilation.

29. The United Nations police carried out 1,179 interactive community patrols to mobilize members of the public to participate in crime prevention. The community protection committees in Sectors Centre and South recorded 616 general crimes between 13 October and 31 March, representing a decrease of 400 cases compared with the previous period, which was due in part to those crime prevention efforts. The United Nations police also conducted 930 patrols, 284 independent security observation patrols and 4 air reconnaissance patrols with military observers and national monitors.

30. From 28 November to 8 March, the United Nations police benefited from the deployment of a corrections expert from the Justice and Corrections Standing Capacity to assist with developing guidance documents and capacity-building of community protection committee members carrying out detention functions. In addition, a standing police capacity expert was deployed to the mission from 9 December to 9 March to support the mission's efforts in building the capacities of the community protection committees and joint protection committee.

31. The United Nations police deployed two individual police officers to the Goli Team Site to strengthen its presence in the north of Abyei.

### **Human rights situation**

32. The human rights situation remains characterized by a lack of accountability for crimes and human-rights-related incidents, including cases of sexual and gender-based violence. During the period, UNISFA corrections experts continued to monitor detention facilities for possible human rights violations, including disproportionately long sentences for minor offences. Of the 638 people detained, 41 per cent were incarcerated for minor offences. In addition, in October, approximately 38 abandoned children were identified as being at risk of conflict with the law, including 11 girls. The mission also apprehended three young men under the age of majority possessing arms in the Abyei Area during the reporting period. UNISFA continued to sensitize interlocutors to the fact that the recruitment or use of minors to propagate violence constitutes a violation of international law.

33. The mission continued to provide the necessary capacity-building support and training on human rights to the local communities, mainly focusing on sexual and gender-based violence and including awareness campaigns on the rights of women and children, trainings for civil society and support for a referral mechanism to which survivors can report cases of gender-based violence, either in person or by telephone, through a 24-hour gender-based violence desk staffed by four women members of community protection committees. On 10 December, as part of the 16 days of activism against gender-based violence, UNISFA collaborated with local authorities, traditional leaders and local NGOs and trained and sensitized approximately 500 community members on human rights issues. At the same time, 23 human rights defenders were given awards. The mission continued to engage traditional leaders and community members on the issue of child marriage.

34. To ensure integration of human rights throughout the mission, three human rights and gender training courses were provided to 66 mission staff, including 26 women. In late March, UNISFA welcomed a liaison officer tasked with some human rights functions to improve its capacity to document human rights violations and abuses.

## Humanitarian situation

35. The humanitarian operating environment remained complex in the light of conflict and climate change considerations. As at January 2023, there were 5 United Nations system members and 14 NGOs providing humanitarian assistance to approximately 212,000 vulnerable people across Abyei. The lack of presence of humanitarian actors in northern Abyei, along with logistical hurdles, insecurity and political sensitivities, compounded the problem. UNISFA collaborated with IOM and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to facilitate the successful distribution of relief materials, including shelters and family kits, to 800 internally displaced person households.

36. Episodes of violence further affected humanitarian operations. In Abyei, six humanitarian organizations withdrew from Agok owing to the violence in February 2022, and their services in that area remain paused. Two aid workers died during the attack in Rumamier on 2 January 2023. Incidents of fire destroyed many homes and properties, affecting approximately 978 people. Furthermore, by March, approximately 30,000 people were internally displaced, of which approximately 2,500 lived in temporary internally displaced person sites in Abyei town. UNISFA continued to assist humanitarian organizations in helping the victims.

37. Flooding and heavy rains affected over 92,000 people in southern and central Abyei and 18,000 in northern Abyei and severely hampered the provision of humanitarian assistance. Nevertheless, UNISFA facilitated the movement of humanitarian personnel and cargo. Between October and December 2022, a disease outbreak killed large numbers of cattle. Over 1,500 carcasses were collected and incinerated by UNISFA in the vicinity of Abyei town. Food production remained inadequate to cover the needs of the people in the area, to the extent that the Abyei Area was projected under the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) to be in Phase 4 at the beginning of 2023.

38. The period also witnessed a significant influx of refugees. In October, 129 Eritrean nationals, including some who previously had refugee status in the Sudan or had been asylum-seekers in South Sudan and were temporarily sheltered in the Amiet market, sought to use Abyei as an exit route to Uganda and Kenya through South Sudan. With the support of UNHCR, these individuals received shelter and food assistance from humanitarian organizations and have since relocated of their own volition.

39. Access to basic services continued to be affected by limited or non-existent government services, including public health, water, sanitation, hygiene, education and protection, as well as farming and livestock technical assistance. For example, of the 36 health facilities in southern and central Abyei, only 16 are operational, with limited capacity and insufficient resources. In northern Abyei, five health facilities had not received medical supplies since 2017. Across the Abyei Area, the school infrastructure is dismal, teachers are not paid and educational materials are nearly non-existent.

40. The demand for basic services is noteworthy in northern Abyei. The population there lacked access to primary health-care services, with a critical gap in medicines, trained health-care workers and laboratories, and a limited referral system. The local communities, pastoralists and displaced people faced severe water shortages, and almost all communities lacked basic sanitation facilities. A lack of non-food items and substandard levels of housing further exposed families to additional health and protection risks.

41. Despite the acute challenges, humanitarian actors worked towards strengthening food security, nutrition, early warning information systems, agropastoral livelihood



diversification, livelihoods and market access, natural resources management and the fight against transboundary animal diseases.

### **Women and peace and security**

42. The mission continued to advocate the participation of women in Abyei peace and security processes. As a result, 87 women were recruited into the newly established community protection committees in northern Abyei, accounting for 25 per cent of all members. Similarly, in October, nine Ngok Dinka women participated in the civil-society-led conference in Wau, South Sudan, in which they engaged the Twic Dinka women who later jointly advocated unity and peace and the participation of women as agents of peace. Four women from the Ngok Dinka community and three from the Misseriya community participated in the Todach conference in March, accounting for 10 per cent of the conference participants. Women proposed on behalf of the communities recommendations which were welcomed by traditional leaders and informed the final agreement that resulted from the dialogue. Women leaders from both communities were also signatories to the agreement.

43. UNISFA revitalized consultative meetings on women and peace and security with the Abyei Women Association, comprising approximately 100 women representing Ngok Dinka and Nuer internally displaced persons, women with disabilities, widows, the gender-based violence desk of the Abyei community protection committee and traditional judges. UNISFA also engaged 80 Misseriya women on peace and justice matters. The UNISFA mixed engagement platoons conducted community engagement, including with local women in conflict-affected and sensitive villages, to strengthen situational awareness and enhance early warning linked to gender-responsive protection-of-civilian interventions.

44. On 27 November, UNISFA, led by the UNISFA Police Commissioner, established a joint women's peace committee in the Amiet area, comprising 32 Misseriya, Ngok Dinka and Twic Dinka women representatives. The committee met three times with the aim of providing support to vulnerable women and children in the Amiet area. Furthermore, UNISFA continued to support six gender focal points within the joint women's peace committee, who are running the gender desk in Amiet to address the concerns of women and children effectively.

45. During the reporting period, 11 cases of sexual and gender-based violence involving 7 women victims and 4 girl victims were reported to the gender-based violence desks. The cases included one rape case resulting in death of the victim, two cases of kidnapping and rape involving two girls, six cases of domestic violence involving six women victims, and one case of forced marriage involving a girl child.

46. The United Nations police continued to mentor the community protection committees to deal with such cases, resulting in the arrest of seven alleged perpetrators and two convictions. In addition, UNISFA conducted 223 campaigns and trained 274 women and 365 men in collaboration with the African Christian Ecumenical Alliance; agencies, funds and programmes; and international NGOs on issues related to violations of human rights, including sexual and gender-based violence. A positive impact of the training was the appointment of six gender-based violence desk officers by community members in Todach in October and a noted increase in the number of sexual and gender-based violence cases reported compared with the previous period.

47. With regard to integration of the women and peace and security agenda, UNISFA strengthened awareness of women and peace and security as central to the operational effectiveness of the mission and leveraged the mixed engagement

platoons to engage local women with a view to addressing their specific protection and security needs.

### **Youth and peace and security**

48. On 17 October, UNISFA facilitated a workshop on the early warning system in which 16 young people from sensitive areas in Sectors South and Centre participated. As a result, UNISFA received over five early warnings from the youth network, thus contributing to UNISFA situational awareness. UNISFA also organized two sensitization seminars for 35 university graduates from the Abyei Youth Union to discuss the impact of misinformation and disinformation on the Abyei situation, including the dangers of radicalization and the critical role that young people play as agents of peace. Youth also actively participated in the seasonal peace conference in Todach in March.

### **Operations of the Mine Action Service**

49. The Mine Action Service remained fully deployed at the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism headquarters in Kadugli and the two active team sites in sector 2, enabling 44 ground monitoring missions. The Service assessed approximately 408,573 square metres of land in the Abyei Area as safe for use by UNISFA, humanitarian actors and the local population. The land included UNISFA temporary operating bases and patrol routes to enhance Force mobility in accordance with the dry season deployment plan. It also included two areas suspected to be contaminated with landmines, Koladit and Luki, just north-west of Noong in Sector South. As a result of those activities, 66 explosive remnants of war were recovered and subsequently destroyed in controlled demolitions. Mine-clearing activities also contributed to the safe conduct of youth and civil society activities at the Abyei Vocational Training Centre, where subsurface clearance removed one explosive remnant of war and 187 units of 7.62 mm ammunition.

50. The Mine Action Service continued explosive ordnance risk education, with a total of 310 sessions delivered, reaching 3,358 community members (651 men, 752 women, 1,172 boys and 783 girls) living in the Abyei Area. Community members, including children, pastoralists and internally displaced persons, were given customized educational materials to raise awareness of the explosive remnants of war. In addition, 10 sessions on explosive remnants of war were delivered as part of UNISFA induction training sessions, raising the awareness of 214 UNISFA military and civilian personnel, including 13 women.

51. The Mine Action Service has continued to provide and maintain 16 mine-protected vehicles for UNISFA troops under a right-of-use agreement, extended to 31 May, until the expected arrival of contingent-owned equipment. The Service has directly supported the UNISFA Integrated Force Mobility Team, whose deployment model is directly derived from the Service's self-sufficient clearance team deployment concept.

### **Abyei joint programme of the United Nations country teams in the Sudan and South Sudan**

52. The United Nations country teams in South Sudan and the Sudan, with UNISFA, finalized the last internal administrative arrangements required towards joint implementation of the Abyei joint programme.

53. In the first stages of programme implementation, UNISFA collaborated closely with the Resident Coordinators in South Sudan and the Sudan and with implementing partners based in Juba and Khartoum from IOM, UNDP, the United Nations Population Fund and the World Food Programme (WFP). Among the projects being

implemented was the delivery of essential life-saving vaccines by IOM to health facilities and mobile clinics along the migration corridor, including Amiet market, Amethbek hospital, Dokura mobile clinic, Nyankwach internally displaced person site mobile clinic and Abyei civil hospital.

54. In addition, IOM is using the joint programme funds to continue to provide vocational training at the Abyei Vocational Training Centre, where 31 young women and 59 young men were being trained in masonry, computer skills and tailoring. IOM was also able to procure the requisite materials, such as start-up kits, for the trainees. Moreover, WFP established a nutrition centre in Amiet market through its implementing partner, Save the Children. The centre became operational on 17 April and will be able to treat approximately 79 children between the ages of 6 and 59 months old and 111 pregnant and lactating women with moderate and acute malnutrition per month.

### **III. Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism: progress on benchmarks**

55. The security situation in some areas within the Safe Demilitarized Border Zone was tense. In particular, the Sudan People's Liberation Army in Opposition (SPLA-IO) remained present in the areas of Tonga, Fanyikang and Abu Qussa/Wunkur in South Sudan. Armed clashes for control of the area between the Agwelek and Kit-Gwang factions of SPLA-IO occurred on three occasions between October 2022 and January 2023. The clashes led to approximately 238 internally displaced persons, including 165 women and 21 children, seeking protection and humanitarian assistance at team site 22 (Abu Qussa/Wunkur). In addition, in December, the Kit-Gwang faction demanded rent from the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism for use of the team site and threatened to use force if its demands were not met. The tensions have hindered Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism operations, including the deployment of national monitors from the South Sudan People's Defence Forces to the Abu Qussa/Wunkur team site. Furthermore, the presence of oil companies on both sides of the border and efforts to protect their pipelines often led to the restriction of Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism patrols in the area.

56. Notwithstanding, the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism conducted 90 per cent of the planned regular aerial and ground monitoring missions in one of the two Mechanism sectors of the Safe Demilitarized Border Zone and continued to raise awareness of its mandate, especially in the Panakuach area, on the outskirts of Tishwin. At the same time, South Sudan maintained a platoon-strength police presence at Tishwin within the Safe Demilitarized Border Zone, as did the Sudan, although their exact numbers are not known.

57. In the closing months of 2022, UNISFA and the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism developed a strategy for reoperationalizing sector 1, to be executed in phases. On the basis of that strategy, the Mechanism submitted in December a note verbale to South Sudanese authorities requesting clearance for and participation in a planned assessment of sector 1.

58. Owing to the situation in the Sudan, the airport near the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism headquarters in Kadugli, Sudan, was closed. The fighting has also resulted in access and resupply challenges at its team sites in Abu Qussa/Wunkur and Tishwin.

59. On 17 January, a meeting of the Joint Security Committee was held in Juba, followed on 18 January by a meeting of the Joint Political and Security Mechanism

co-chaired by the Ministers of Defence of the Sudan and South Sudan. At both meetings, UNISFA highlighted the challenging security situation along the Safe Demilitarized Border Zone. The collective vision of the parties was to operationalize the commitments made by the President of South Sudan and the Chairperson of the Sovereign Council of the Sudan and Head of the Sudanese Armed Forces during their meeting in Juba on 12 January, which focused on the strengthening of bilateral relations. Among other things, they emphasized the need to prioritize the reoperationalization of sector 1 of the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism and deploy national monitors at team site 22 (Abu Qussa/Wunkur).

60. The Joint Political and Security Mechanism committed to redeploying forces outside the Safe Demilitarized Border Zone. It also agreed to resume the preparations for reopening the Kost-Renk border-crossing corridors while calling for a strategy to sensitize the authorities and communities along the common border, including in Gok Machar, to facilitate the reoperationalization of sector 1. The Mechanism also directed the Chief of the Defence Forces of the Republic of South Sudan and the Chief of Staff of the Sudanese Armed Forces to, inter alia, form a committee to monitor the implementation of the redeployment of their respective forces outside the Safe and Demilitarized Border Zone. The next meeting of the Joint Political and Security Mechanism is scheduled to be held on 1 May.

61. The Joint Border Commission did not meet during the reporting period.

#### **IV. Administrative aspects and mission support**

62. As at 31 March, the number of civilian staff stood at 285, including 168 international staff, 32 United Nations Volunteers and 85 national staff, against an authorized total of 186 international staff, 37 United Nations Volunteers and 93 national staff. Women account for 24 per cent of the civilian component.

63. In line with the directive of the Secretary-General and guided by the gender implementation plan and the workplan for 2021–2023 focused on increasing the recruitment and retention of women staff, UNISFA remained committed to its efforts to increase the number of women serving in the mission and saw notable gains in national staff, which experienced a 5 per cent increase in women staff in the past year. Furthermore, within the substantive component, all four P-5 positions are encumbered by women, up from 25 per cent during the previous period.

64. The total number of military personnel in UNISFA as at 2 April was 3,047, comprising 233 women and 2,814 men. There were 118 United Nations Staff Officers and 114 United Nations military observers. The Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism accounted for 524 personnel, comprising 25 women and 499 men (480 troops, 13 staff officers and 23 military observers). Women represented 8 per cent of all military personnel. Of the 160 members of the Nigerian Base Defence Company now fully on the ground, 31 are women.

65. UNISFA continued to make progress on gender parity and representation among troops. Periodic interactive meetings on the issues that have an impact on the living conditions of women in the mission were initiated between women peacekeepers and the mission leadership and/or engineering teams, including on integrating elements of the Elsie Initiative into smart camp project management. The project aim is to increase the meaningful participation and representation of women in the mission through improved living conditions. Representatives of the Elsie project who visited the mission on 14 December met with women peacekeepers, and on 5 March, the Under-Secretary-General for Operational Support met with women peacekeepers at the project site.

66. As at 2 April, the United Nations police operated with 41 individual police officers, including 20 women officers. The Government of the Sudan had yet to issue visas to the additional 107 individual police officers to bring the total individual police officers to 148 as authorized by the Security Council in its resolution [2469 \(2019\)](#) and subsequent resolutions. In addition, there was no progress on the deployment of the three Formed Police Units owing to non-issuance of visas, with a severe impact on the capability of UNISFA to deliver on its rule-of-law mandate.

67. As at 31 March, the Government of the Sudan issued 1,192 visas for UNISFA personnel during the period under review, and approximately 220 visas remained pending: 21 for civilian staff, 157 for military personnel, 34 for contractors, 3 for the United Nations police, not including those requested in the past for the full deployment of authorized the United Nations police personnel, and 1 for a consultant.

68. UNISFA company operating bases remained deployed at Diffra, Goli and Todach (Sector North), Dokura/Rumajak, Noong and Abyei (Sector Centre), Highway (Sector Centre) and Marial Achak, Athony, Banton, Tejalei and Agok (Sector South). The dry season deployment plan for 2022 and 2023 to increase Force mobility included temporary operating bases at Dungoup (Sector Centre) and Rumamier (Sector South), which were already established and occupied by troops. Engineering works for the temporary operating base at Leu (Sector South) and Um Khariet (Sector North) are in the final stages for the deployment of troops. The temporary operating bases continued to operate as seasonal and were positioned along the migration routes, mainly in the rainy season. The sector 2 headquarters of the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism in Kadugli had two operational team sites: Tishwin and Abu Qussa/Wunkur.

69. Infrastructure works continued to raise existing infrastructure to acceptable standards to ensure that there was no slowdown in deployments.

### **Culture of performance**

70. The smart camp programme is intended to protect and sustain peacekeepers and incorporates technology as a multiplier of these fundamental functions. The first smart camp, which serves as headquarters for the Indian Battalion, was constructed by UNISFA with support and guidance from the Department of Operational Support and inaugurated on 6 March. The approved smart camp construction plan for 2023 will include Highway Company Operating Base in Sector Centre, the Sector South headquarters in Athony, and the Agok Company Operating Base in Sector South.

71. The successful completion of the pilot smart camp in Dokura/Rumajak gave the mission insights into its resources and opportunities to improve resilience, reduce fuel consumption and increase the reliability of critical life support. The pilot is in the benefits realization phase and the overall project is in the building-at-scale phase.

72. To enhance its situational awareness and rapid response, the mission launched its early warning system aimed at gathering early warning gender-disaggregated data, including by responding to alerts in full consultation with community members. The early warning system will work with the Joint Mission Analysis Centre, the Situational Awareness Geospatial Enterprise (SAGE) database launched in February and the mission peacekeeping-intelligence coordination mechanism, which relies heavily on the early warning system for information-gathering. The mission also made significant progress in implementing the Comprehensive Planning and Performance Assessment System, including finalizing its Results Framework, featuring impact indicators against which UNISFA has regularly collected data. On 21 and 22 March, UNISFA undertook its first data-based system impact assessment.

**Response to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic**

73. The UNISFA medical unit maintained the measures put in place and continued to follow Headquarters and the World Health Organization guidance regarding the management of COVID-19 cases. As a result, 20 positive cases were recorded during the reporting period. The mission remained vigilant, with testing carried out in all suspected cases.

**Conduct and discipline**

74. There were no allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse during the reporting period. Sensitization and awareness-raising sessions were expanded by the Conduct and Discipline Section by training 105 military staff, including 1 woman, from troop-contributing countries at their various locations. Six monthly induction trainings were delivered for 8 civilians, 57 military staff officers and observers, 21 civilian police, 1 United Nations Volunteer and 17 contingent troops, including 16 women. The Conduct and Discipline Section also delivered 12 refresher sessions to 29 military observers and 252 military staff from troop-contributing countries, including 30 women. It continued to advance networks for the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse. In addition, it rolled out a simulation exercise to complement the training on conduct and discipline and sexual exploitation and abuse, targeting uniformed personnel and civilians.

**Public information**

75. During the period, the Strategic Communication and Public Information Section trained approximately 46 local journalists during three sessions, in November, December and February, on media law and ethics and undertook sensitization and education programmes to combat hate speech, misinformation and disinformation. A cyberspace response platform and youth sports activities, including a mobile theatre, were part of the efforts to counter misinformation and disinformation based on the mission's integrated communication architecture.

**V. Financial aspects**

76. By its resolution [2660 \(2022\)](#), the Security Council extended the mandate of UNISFA until 15 November 2023.

77. The General Assembly, by its resolution [76/281](#), appropriated \$259.7 million for the maintenance of the Force for the period from 1 July 2022 to 30 June 2023.

78. As at 23 March 2023, unpaid assessed contributions to the special account for UNISFA amounted to \$121.1 million. The total outstanding assessed contributions for all peacekeeping operations as at that date amounted to \$3,191.9 million.

79. Reimbursement of troop costs and of the costs of contingent-owned major equipment and self-sustainment are in the process of being paid for the period up to 31 December 2022, in accordance with the quarterly payment schedule.

**VI. Observations and recommendations**

80. I am encouraged by the conclusions of the summit in Juba on 12 January between the President of South Sudan and the Chairperson of the Sovereign Council and Commander of the Sudanese Armed Forces, and their commitment to revamp discussions on the Abyei political process and on cooperation on their shared border. I also welcome the meeting of the Joint Political and Security Mechanism in Juba on

18 January, at which the Mechanism decided on several matters, including the redeployment of government forces outside the Safe Demilitarized Border Zone. I take note of the pending task assigned to the secretariat of the Mechanism to develop a strategy for the sensitization of the local populations along the common border, including Gok Machar, which would help to facilitate the resumption of Joint Border Verification Monitoring Mechanism activities in its sector 1. I urge the parties to take vigorous steps to ensure the implementation of the action points contained in the outcome document.

81. I am very concerned about the impact of the fighting in the Sudan on efforts towards a peaceful settlement of the final status of Abyei and border issues, and the effect on the implementation of the mandate of UNISFA at all levels. The United Nations remains ready to accompany the parties in an inclusive political process for the settlement of the Abyei issue, working closely with the African Union and IGAD.

82. While I welcome efforts by South Sudanese security forces to quell violence between Ngok Dinka and Twic Dinka communities in southern Abyei and northern Warrap State, South Sudan, I am concerned by the continued presence of South Sudan People's Defence Forces, intelligence officers and South Sudan National Police in the south of the Abyei Area in violation of its demilitarized status. I am also concerned about the decision of the Government of the Sudan to deploy Sudan National Police officers in the northern part of Abyei. I echo the request made by the Security Council to both South Sudan and the Sudan that the Abyei Area be demilitarized from any forces, as well as armed elements of the local communities, other than UNISFA and the Abyei Police Service, which has yet to be established.

83. Furthermore, I strongly condemn the continued fighting between the Ngok Dinka and Twic Dinka communities, which has led to casualties, the destruction of homes and the displacement of populations, thereby weakening the already fragile social fabric. The tensions between Ngok Dinka and Twic Dinka communities have given rise to an increase in the circulation of ammunition and weapons among the civilian population, in particular young people. I am particularly concerned at the potential recruitment or use of minors in hostilities, which may constitute violations of international law. In this regard, I call upon all stakeholders, including the local authorities and communities, to end hostilities and strengthen their collaboration with UNISFA by providing early warnings.

84. I call upon the leaders of the Ngok Dinka and Twic Dinka communities to prioritize the implementation of the cessation of hostilities agreement of 4 April 2022, and I welcome the meeting of the two communities held on 20 March under the auspices of the President of South Sudan. The United Nations stands ready to facilitate inclusive dialogue, social cohesion and reconciliation, in support of South Sudanese authorities.

85. I equally call upon the representatives of the Misseriya and Ngok Dinka communities to use the positive engagement demonstrated during the seasonal peace conference held in March to work towards peaceful cohabitation, in particular during the period of transhumance, and ensure the meaningful participation of women in the peace process.

86. Complementing the work of UNISFA to engage with local communities, the first stages of implementation of the Abyei joint programme of the United Nations country teams in the Sudan and South Sudan, UNISFA provided an important step towards peacebuilding support, focused on the areas of water management, health and livelihoods. While the fighting in the Sudan is expected to significantly impact the implementation of the joint programme, UNISFA and the two Resident Coordinators are working hard to ensure that several key aspects of the programme, including those

aimed at addressing the deteriorating humanitarian situation and economic hardship in the Abyei Area, can continue.

87. While commending the efforts of the United Nations police to mentor and build the capacities of the community protection committees and joint protection committee, I reiterate the need for both parties to participate in a joint integrated planning exercise to develop a road map strategy for the establishment of the Abyei Police Service with a view to addressing many of the perennial rule of law challenges in the Abyei Area until the parties agree on its final status.

88. I condemn the repeated restrictions on the freedom of movement of UNISFA and its contractors, which disrupt the mission's ability to implement its mandate fully. I call on both parties to ensure that the freedom of movement of UNISFA in its area of responsibility is maintained.

89. While UNISFA does its utmost to maintain security and stability in the Abyei Area, the Force continues to be overstretched, notably in the absence of progress on the deployment of the three Formed Police Units, in line with the Security Council authorization, and I urge the parties to allow for their deployment. It is anticipated that the mission's capacity will suffer the impact of the outbreak of violence in the Sudan in April, including remaining deployments of troops and contingent-owned equipment.

90. During the reporting period, UNISFA oversaw the late stages of its transition from a Force provided by a single troop-contributing country to a multinational Force comprising eight troop-contributing countries. I congratulate the troop-contributing countries and the mission for this achievement.

91. I thank the acting Head of Mission and Force Commander of UNISFA, Major General Benjamin Olufemi Sawyerr, my Special Envoy for the Horn of Africa, Hanna Tetteh, and all UNISFA personnel, as well as United Nations agencies, funds and programmes in Abyei, for their commitment to maintaining peace and security, under increasingly difficult conditions.



# Map

## UNISFA FEBRUARY 2023

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