

Adjust UN force in Abyei to current realities, peacekeeping chief urges Security Council

Amidst an increase in criminal activity in the Abyei area, which is contested by Sudan and South Sudan, the United Nations top peacekeeping official on Thursday called for deployment of additional police units, to enhance the UN's focus on maintaining law and order there, and furthering peace between local communities.

The proposed additional personnel – both formed police units and individual officers – are within the current troop ceiling authorized for the UN Interim Security Force for Abyei ([UNISFA](#)), Jean-Pierre Lacroix, the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, told the Security Council.

UNISFA was established by the Security Council in 2011, amid deteriorating tensions in the Abyei region – a resource-rich area contested by the two neighbouring countries – shortly before South Sudan became independent. It is tasked with monitoring the flashpoint border, facilitating delivery of humanitarian aid, and is also authorized to use force to protect civilians and humanitarian workers in the region.

In his briefing to the 15-member Security Council, Mr. Lacroix presented a set of recommendations to adjust UNISFA to the current situation on the ground to allow it to best support the Governments of Sudan and South Sudan in their efforts to reach agreement over the region and its future.

The “modest adjustments” would enable the UN peacekeeping mission to better support border demarcation efforts by the African Union Border Programme, including the “much-needed” sensitization of border communities, said the senior UN official.

The recommendations envisage the establishment of two further sector headquarters and team sites with the “Safe Demilitarised Border Zone” to make the border region safer and more secure.

“Troops would be transferred from the Abyei area to achieve full operating capability for the border monitoring mechanism,” elaborated Mr. Lacroix, noting that such a move would harmonize the “diminishing military threat with the corresponding-reduction in military need” for the region.

Mr. Lacroix also briefed the Council on progress made by the Governments of Sudan and South Sudan towards implementing the benchmarks outlined in resolution [2412](#) (2018).

The benchmarks include freedom of movement for UNISFA air and ground patrols, an improved joint border verification and monitoring mechanism, the joint

political and security mechanism, border crossing corridors, and border demarcation.