

# Rival South Sudan leaders still 'bent on armed confrontation' – UN peacekeeping chief

The peace process in South Sudan is at a critical juncture while opposing sides allow themselves to get bogged down in arguments over ministerial quotas, the United Nations peacekeeping chief said on Tuesday, as the country prepares for a third round of regionally-backed peace talks.

“Parties remain far apart on the issues of governance and security,” Jean-Pierre Lacroix, the UN Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, told the Security Council, noting that agreement on permanent ceasefire terms and transitional security arrangements, remain elusive.

In addition, while the Intergovernmental Authority on Development, IGAD – an eight-country trading-bloc in Africa – has worked to narrow the gap ahead of talks, the parties remain far from agreement.

The world’s youngest country, South Sudan, has spent much of the past seven years mired in conflict, riven by a political face-off between President Salva Kiir and his then former Vice-President Riek Machar that erupted into full-blown war late in 2013.

The conflict shows no signs of abating and there has been a recent surge in violence across large parts of the country, impacting thousands of civilians. Nearly 4.3 million South Sudanese have been driven from their homes – 1.7 million internally, and around 2.5 million across its borders.

Of particular concern is the scale of sexual violence perpetrated, said Mr. Lacroix, underscoring that reports of rape and gang rape are compounding what is already a “desperate situation” for women and girls.

Humanitarian agencies are also facing increasing challenges responding to those in need. In April, two relief workers were killed, bringing to 100 the total number of aid workers killed since December 2013.

“We must respond and respond quickly to ensure accountability for these violations and abuses and bring an end to these heinous acts once and for all,” stressed the senior UN official.

## **No sign of ‘meaningful implementation’ of ceasefire agreement**

Both the Government and opposition remain bent on armed confrontation and the Agreement on Cessation of Hostilities – signed in December last year – is yielding little, underscored Mr. Lacroix, calling on the Council to use its influence.

“It is in this context that I reiterate that there must be a tangible cost

for the continuation of violence in South Sudan,” he said, “there must be consequences for blatant violations of the Cessation of Hostilities agreement and broken promises to protect civilians.”

“Without consequences, we have no one to blame but ourselves for allowing the crisis to escalate unchecked and perpetuating a lack of confidence in a political solution to the crisis.”

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## [‘Fabric of society’ at risk in Bosnia and Herzegovina, UN Security Council told](#)

With elections looming, tensions across Bosnia and Herzegovina are rising alongside inflammatory rhetoric against the country’s long-standing peace agreement, a senior figure monitoring its implementation has warned.

Valentin Inzko, the High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina, told the Security Council on Tuesday that the situation was being heightened by a “general trend” towards stockpiling weapons across the Balkan state.

“I am deeply concerned by the recent readiness among some politicians to refer to the possibility of a renewed conflict, including controversial statements by senior Bosniak politicians suggesting that a rearming effort was underway to ‘respond’ in case of a hypothetical war,” said Mr. Inzko.

At the same time, senior Republika Srpska officials were also resorting to violent rhetoric, denying the statehood of Bosnia and Herzegovina and advocating for eventual secession, he added.

“Public comments were also made, glorifying convicted war criminals and calling for the return of an Republika Srpska army.”

There needs to be a change in the way politics is conducted within the country – *High Representative Valentin Inzko*

Mr. Inzko warned that some Croat officials have “mused” about the territorial reorganization of the country and threatened the dissolution of the state if the current electoral issues are not resolved to their satisfaction.

“Bosnia and Herzegovina is a single, multi-ethnic, sovereign state, consisting of two entities, in which all citizens – the three constituent peoples and others – live and work together, and elected officials above all

have a responsibility to contribute to peace and reconciliation,” stressed the High Representative, urging all public figures to choose their words more carefully and responsibly.

## **Progress cannot be taken for granted**

In his briefing, High Representative Inzko said while the country has made significant strides since the end of the war in 1995, the progress cannot be taken for granted.

“The risk is that this divisiveness and sense of unease about the future of the country slowly seeps into the fabric of society,” he said, urging the international community to increase efforts to promote reconciliation in Bosnia and Herzegovina and across the region.

“Beyond this, there needs to be a change in the way politics is conducted within the country. It needs to come from the politicians themselves, but we as an international community, individually and collectively, have an interest in encouraging this change.”

The Office of the High Representative (OHR) is an ad hoc international institution responsible for overseeing implementation of civilian aspects of the Peace Agreement that ended the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina that saw thousands killed in fighting.

In addition, the conflict witnessed widespread violations of human rights and international humanitarian law, including war crimes and crimes against humanity and necessitated the setting up of a special international court, the International Criminal Tribunal for former Yugoslavia (ICTY) to prosecute those accused.

ICTY concluded its work in December last year, having heard the testimony from nearly 5,000 people and sentencing 90 individuals for their crimes.

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## **UN chief ‘deeply concerned’ by US decision to exit Iran nuclear deal**

Following a decision on Tuesday by the United States to withdraw from the 2015 nuclear agreement with Iran, the United Nations chief said he was “deeply concerned” by the move, and called on all parties to preserve the deal.

President Donald Trump made the announcement at the White House, and immediately afterwards signed a memorandum to begin reinstating economic sanctions on Iran at “the highest level”.

In a statement released shortly afterwards, UN [Secretary-General António Guterres](#) said: “I am [deeply concerned](#) by today’s announcement that the United States will be withdrawing from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) and will begin reinstating US sanctions.”

“I have consistently reiterated that the JCPOA represents a major achievement in nuclear non-proliferation and diplomacy and has contributed to regional and international peace and security,” he added.

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The JCPOA – reached by Iran, China, France, Germany, Russia, the United Kingdom, the US and the European Union – sets out rigorous mechanisms for monitoring restrictions placed on Iran’s nuclear programme, while paving the way for the lifting UN sanctions against the country.

“It is essential that all concerns regarding the implementation of the Plan be addressed through the mechanisms established in the JCPOA,” Mr. Guterres stressed, adding that “issues not directly related to the JCPOA” should be addressed separately.

The UN chief called on other JCPOA participants to abide fully by their respective commitments and on all other Member States to support the agreement.

Earlier this month, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) released a [statement](#) via its Spokesperson, reiterating the fact that according to its December 2015 [Board of Governors report](#), “the Agency had no credible indications of activities in Iran relevant to the development of a nuclear explosive device after 2009.”

At the Board of Governors meeting in March this year, IAEA chief Yukiya Amano said Iran was still abiding by the deal and IAEA inspectors had been given access to all sites and locations, upon request. “If the JCPOA were to fail, it would be a great loss for nuclear verification and for multilateralism,” he said.

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**[Prevent terrorists profiting from cross-border crime, urges UN Security](#)**

# Council

The United Nations Security-Council on Tuesday called on all countries as well as international organizations to do more to stop terrorists enriching themselves through cross-border organized crime.

In a statement read out by Joanna Wronecka – the Permanent Representative of Poland, which holds the Presidency this month – the Council urged UN Member States “to secure their borders against, investigate and prosecute terrorists and criminals working with them, including by strengthening national, regional and global systems to collect, analyse and exchange information.”

The Council also called on all Member States to use “all existing tools,” and the resources of the [UN Office on Drugs and Crime](#) (UNODC), the [International Civil Aviation Organization](#) (ICAO), [INTERPOL](#) and the [World Customs Organization](#) (WCO), to strengthen international cooperation.

But in adopting new counter terrorism measures, the Security Council reminded countries that they “must comply” with all their obligations under international law, including human rights law, refugee law and humanitarian law.

“Respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms and the rule of law are complementary and mutually reinforcing with effective counter-terrorism measures and are an essential part of a successful counter-terrorism effort,” stressed the 15-member Council.

Also in the statement, the Security Council called for better understanding of the links between terrorists and criminal groups which operate across borders, urging UNODC and the Counterterrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED) – which was formed to coordinate the UN’s overall effort – to monitor ties closely.

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## [New Ebola outbreak confirmed in DR Congo: UN health agency scales up response](#)

Two new cases of Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) have been confirmed in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) by Government scientists there, prompting the UN health agency to immediately scale up its response.

The new Ebola cases were identified on Tuesday in a remote area of the country's north-west, near the town of Bikoro, near the Congo River.

In a [statement](#), the [World Health Organization](#) (WHO), said the two positive samples, out of five tested overall, had come from the Iponge health facility, located close to Bikoro, and additional specimens were being collected for further testing.

[“Our top priority is to get to Bikoro](#) to work alongside the Government and partners to reduce the loss of life and suffering related to this new Ebola virus disease outbreak,” Peter Salama, the Deputy Director-General for Emergency Preparedness and Response at WHO, said in Tuesday news release.

“Working with partners and responding early and in a coordinated way will be vital to containing this deadly disease,” he added.

WHO is employing the model it [successfully deployed following a similar Ebola outbreak last year](#), which included a timely alert by local authorities of suspected cases, prompt testing, immediate notification of results, and a fast response by local and national authorities together with international partners.

## **Response thus far**

A multidisciplinary team of experts from WHO, Médecins Sans Frontières and the Government has already been deployed to Bikoro to coordinate and strengthen the response.

Matshidiso Moeti, the Regional Director for Africa at WHO, underlined the importance of strong coordination from the outset, saying that a comprehensive response was vital.

“We will work closely with health authorities and partners to support the national response,” he said.

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WHO has also assigned dedicated staff and resources across the agency to tackling the outbreak, and released some \$1 million from its emergency contingency fund to support efforts over the next three months, and stop the disease spreading.

The situation on the ground in Bikoro, situated along Lake Tumba in Equateur Province is particularly challenging, given its distance from the capital and the limited availability of health services. Facilities in the town have had to rely on international organizations for fresh medical supplies.

## **Ninth outbreak in the DRC since 1976**

This is the ninth outbreak, since the discovery of the Ebola virus in the country in 1976.

The virus is endemic to DRC, and causes an acute, serious illness which is often fatal if untreated. The virus is transmitted to human through contact with wild animals and can then be passed from person to person. Ebola is fatal in about 50 per cent of cases.

An outbreak in West Africa which began in 2014 left more than 11,000 dead across six countries, and was not declared officially over by WHO until the beginning of 2016.

[First symptoms](#) generally include the sudden onset of fever, fatigue, muscle pain, headache and sore throat. This is followed by vomiting, diarrhoea, rash, symptoms of impaired kidney and liver function, and in some cases, both internal and external bleeding.