

Continuing efforts towards peace in South Sudan

Thank you, Madam President. I'd like to thank SRSG Shearer and Mr Yakani for their briefings today. I also wish to convey the United Kingdom's gratitude for the work that UNMISS continues to do under immensely challenging circumstances.

In March, this Council unanimously commended the South Sudanese parties for demonstrating leadership. The formation of the revitalised transitional government of national unity was a significant moment in South Sudan's short history, and it gave the people of South Sudan renewed hope for a brighter future.

But in the past three months, the world has changed. COVID-19 has affected all of us. South Sudan is no different. COVID-19 has already had an impact on lives across South Sudan, from the highest levels of government to ordinary men, women and children. And UNMISS has been affected, too, including through the sad death of a civilian staff member.

It's important the measures taken to limit the spread of the virus allow lifesaving services to continue. And we are particularly concerned by the risks COVID-19 poses to those who have been made more vulnerable by forced displacement, including those living in Protection of Civilian sites. And we thank UNMISS and all humanitarian actors on the ground for their efforts to mitigate these risks and hope that the South Sudanese authorities will make every effort to work with partners on preventing the spread of the disease, protect health care workers and enable humanitarian access.

COVID-19 also poses obvious risks to the health and safety of peacekeeping personnel. And we hope the Secretariat will continue taking all necessary steps to assure medical and casualty evacuation arrangements for all personnel as part of ensuring that UNMISS can keep delivering its mandate.

Madam President, the United Kingdom is deeply concerned at recent increases in violent conflict. Since the beginning of the year thousands of South Sudanese have been killed or injured in hundreds of separate incidents of serious violence, including most recently in Jonglei states in May. I note that among those killed in Jonglei were three NGO staff – underscoring once again the dangers humanitarian personnel face as they go about that life-saving work in South Sudan.

The violence in the Equatorias stemming from the breakdown of the ceasefire has killed and displaced hundreds more. There have been shocking reports of sexual violence carried out by forces on all sides. And this has a critical role to play, of course, in reducing these conflicts and mitigating the impact, including through facilitation of community dialogue and patrolling hotspots. But COVID-19 is inevitably affecting the mission's ability to carry out these vital tasks.

So, Madam President, it is therefore all the more urgent for the transitional government to expedite implementation of the peace agreement, even if that means confronting a series of difficult decisions. The delay in appointing state governors, for example, has created avoidable power vacuums which have exacerbated subnational tensions and fuelled violence. The United Kingdom urges the Unity Government to redouble its efforts to make progress on the transitional security arrangements, strengthen its messaging to counter hate speech, misinformation and incitement to violence, and tackle impunity through enhanced accountability to sexual and gender based crimes.

Madam President, the United Kingdom remains committed to South Sudan. In March, I said, "now the hard work begins". Three months on, much of that hard work remains to be done. The longer the parties delay, the harder it will become. Full and prompt implementation of the peace agreement by leaders working together in genuine unity with the best interests of their people at heart remains the best hope for South Sudan and its people in these uniquely challenging times.

Thank you, Madam President.