



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 8 of Security Council resolution [2575 \(2021\)](#), in which the Council requested to be informed of progress in implementing the mandate of the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA) as set out in paragraph 33 of resolution [2550 \(2020\)](#). It covers the period since the issuance of the previous report ([S/2021/383](#)) of the Secretary-General, from 16 April 2021 to 15 October 2021. The report provides updates on, inter alia, political developments and intercommunal dynamics, the security and humanitarian situation; developments affecting UNISFA support for the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism; and interactions with the Governments of the Sudan and South Sudan in relation to the implementation of the mission's mandate.

II. Abyei

Political developments

2. During the reporting period, the Sudan and South Sudan continued to deepen and strengthen their relations, as evidenced by the summit between the Prime Minister of the Sudan, Abdalla Hamdok, and the President of South Sudan, Salva Kiir Mayardit, which was held in Juba from 19 to 21 August 2021. The two leaders agreed, inter alia, on the temporary reopening of border crossing corridors on 1 October 2021 and on the establishment of free trade zones along the border.

3. On 8 and 9 September 2021, a meeting of the Joint Political and Security Mechanism was held in Juba, with the Ministers of Defence of the Sudan and South Sudan as Co-Chairs. It was the first meeting of the Mechanism since October 2020. In its outcome document, the Joint Political and Security Mechanism requested South Sudan to urgently address the restrictions to freedom of movement of the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism imposed by the local communities of Aweil North County, and to reoperationalize team sites 11 and 12, from which the UNISFA/Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism had been forced to temporarily relocate in August 2021 (see sect. III below). The Joint Political and Security Mechanism welcomed and adopted the recommendations contained in the UNISFA/Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism presentation and reiterated the need to act on previous decisions, including the request that the respective presidencies consider the matters referred to them following the meetings of the Joint Political and Security Mechanism held in February and October 2020. Furthermore, the Joint Political and



Security Mechanism urged the parties to resume the meetings of the Abyei Joint Oversight Committee, which had not convened since late 2017.

4. The mission leadership continued to engage with the Sudanese and South Sudanese authorities. On 20 May 2021, the acting Head of Mission met, in Khartoum, with the Assistant Undersecretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to discuss operational challenges faced by the mission as well as the need to resume the meetings of the Abyei Joint Oversight Committee. In Juba, from 26 to 29 July 2021, he met with the Minister of Defence, the Presidential Adviser for National Security, the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation and the Co-Chair of the Committee. He returned to Khartoum from 1 to 5 August 2021 and met with the Sudanese Co-Chair of the Committee, but was unable to meet with other interlocutors, despite earlier assurances by the Sudanese authorities that meetings would be arranged. In both capitals, the acting Head of Mission discussed a series of key measures that were required to support mandate implementation. In Khartoum, the appointment of a civilian Deputy Head of Mission, the operationalization of the Athony airstrip, the issuance of visas for the three former police units and the full complement of individual police officers were discussed. No progress was made.

5. From 16 to 21 September, the acting Head of Mission returned to Juba to seek support from Government authorities to dissuade local community representatives in Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism Sector 1 from demanding the withdrawal of UNISFA/Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism from Gok Machar or impeding its freedom of movement. In spite of reassurances by the authorities, there was no improvement and on 25 September 2021, the acting Head of Mission informed the Governments of the Sudan and South Sudan, and the community of northern Aweil, that the Mechanism would be temporarily withdrawing from Gok Machar.

6. From 8 to 9 September 2021, the Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations, together with the Special Envoy for the Horn of Africa, visited Abyei to appraise the situation on the ground. The Under-Secretary-General also visited Addis Ababa, Khartoum and Juba. In Juba, he expressed concern about the situation in Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism Sector 1 (Gok Machar).

7. From 9 to 15 August 2021, UNISFA provided logistical support for a field visit to Abyei by the South Sudanese national committee on the final status of Abyei, which was established by the President of South Sudan in May 2021. In a related development, on 12 August 2021, the Chair of the Sovereign Council of the Sudan appointed a 19-member national committee on Abyei, to be led by his deputy, General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo.

8. On 9 August 2021, the Juba-appointed Chief Administrator in Abyei town replaced the deputy Chief Administrator before the end of his term. A spokesperson of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-Army in Opposition (SPLM/A-IO) criticized the decision to replace the deputy Chief Administrator, labelling it an act of "unilateral and illegal formation of the Abyei government". The Juba-appointed Chief Administrator also replaced one of the traditional chiefs on 5 August 2021.

Conflict dynamics and the security situation

9. The security situation in the Abyei Area was generally calm. The main threats to security and the protection of civilians were the continued presence of armed elements who contributed to the proliferation of arms and weapons inside the Abyei Area. Those elements were responsible for most of the violent incidents.

10. A total of 46 arms-related incidents were recorded by the mission, of which 9 were direct attacks on civilians. The attacks resulted in 17 civilians being killed and

27 being seriously wounded. The worst attack against civilians during the reporting period occurred on 16 May 2021 in Doungop, a Ngok Dinka village, allegedly perpetrated by a Misseriya armed group. The attack resulted in 11 Ngok Dinka killed and 8 seriously wounded. The armed group fled before the arrival of UNISFA troops. Following a subsequent investigation, it appeared the attack was carried out in revenge for the rustling of Misseriya cattle by Ngok Dinka community members suspected of residing in Doungop. The attack exacerbated distrust between the two communities in the Doungop area, as well as fear of future reprisal. In view of the situation, UNISFA established a temporary operating base at Doungop to intensify operations and deter potential further violence or attacks on civilians in the area.

11. The mission also recorded a violent intercommunity clash at the Amiet common market on 30 May 2021, when an unidentified armed group attacked a public vehicle travelling along the Abyei-Amiet main supply road. UNISFA troops immediately responded, capturing three Misseriya armed men. A UNISFA joint investigation team was established, which questioned the three suspects and handed them over to the Joint Protection Committee at Amiet for detention.

12. Ngok Dinka representatives expressed dissatisfaction that the three suspects had been handed over to the Joint Protection Committee at Amiet rather than to the Community Protection Committee at Abyei town. Subsequently, on 5 June 2021, during a hearing of the three suspects at the traditional court at the Amiet detention centre, an unidentified armed group attacked the court, resulting in the escape of 14 prisoners and injuries to 7 Ngok Dinka and 10 Misseriya. Four UNISFA troops were injured in the ensuing altercation between the two communities following the attack. The three suspects were apprehended anew by UNISFA troops and handed over to the Diffra Oil Police in the presence of the Executive Secretary of the Office of the Khartoum-appointed Chief Administrator for the Abyei Area, a Sudanese national monitor and Sudanese staff of the Abyei Joint Oversight Committee.

13. In August and September 2021, three cattle rustling incidents resulted in the death of two civilians. Most acts of cattle rustling have occurred in Rumamier, Awelum and Mabok in Sector South and are allegedly perpetrated by armed elements who enter the Abyei Area from neighbouring Unity State, South Sudan. The latest incident occurred on 3 September 2021, when a group of unidentified armed men opened fire on the residence of the chief of Mabok village, killing his brother and another man, allegedly to steal his cattle. The chief survived the attack.

14. Several measures have been put in place by UNISFA to improve security in the Abyei Area and protect civilians. These include long-range patrols, which run simultaneously with aerial patrols to monitor the situation in areas that are otherwise inaccessible; weekly Joint Security Committee meetings at the grass-roots level between battalion commanders and community elders and youth; and routine operational activities, such as aerial patrols and static checkpoints, which enable improved situational awareness in Abyei. During the reporting period, some 54 snap checkpoints were mounted. The gradual roll-out of the early-warning system designed to improve information-gathering and response to early warning signs of tensions and threats to civilians is under way.

15. Eight protests by youth in both communities, generally related to employment opportunities with UNISFA and contractors, took place during the reporting period. The protests have largely been peaceful but were accompanied by threats of attacks or denial of movement of the contractors.

Freedom of movement violations

16. During the reporting period, UNISFA was denied freedom of movement on 20 occasions, 5 of which affected UNISFA personnel within the Abyei Area and 15 the

UNISFA military component in support of the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism. In three of the five occasions within the Abyei Area the main gates of two UNISFA camps were blocked by former employees of UNISFA contractors protesting salaries. Of the 15 occasions that affected the UNISFA/Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism, 5 had to do with protestors blocking the main entrance to the UNISFA/Mechanism headquarters in Kadugli over recruitment practices and other employment issues. On five occasions, UNISFA/Mechanism personnel en route to fetch water were denied passage to the water source by persons blocking the access road. The incidents involved team site 21 (Tishwin) on 2 June and 7 July, headquarters in Kadugli on 13 June, and team sites 11 (Safahah/Kiir Adem) and 12 (Sumayah/War Abar) on 11 August. Demonstrations blocked access to team sites 11 and 12 on 13 August. Patrols from team site 12 were denied passage twice on 31 May and 3 June and a relocation convoy from the same team site was temporarily blocked and delayed on 31 August 2021.

17. On 17 September, Misseriya members of the defunct Joint Community Peace Committee blocked northbound UNISFA contractor trucks at the Amiet common market, requesting that tolls be paid. On 19 September southbound contractor trucks carrying rations were also blocked at the market, for the same reason.

Intercommunity dialogue

18. Developments during the reporting period were affected by the aftermath of the peace conference held in Aweil in February 2021 between representatives of the Misseriya and Ngok Dinka communities, during which divergences of views could not be bridged, as evidenced by their reluctance to sign a peace agreement. One of the main disagreements revolved around the use of the term “Ajaira” to designate the Misseriya. At present, as both parties are unwilling to shift positions on the issue of Ajaira, UNISFA is preparing to host two-day talks with both communities separately on 13 and 14 October for the Misseriya and on 18 and 19 October for the Ngok Dinka. The separate talks are aimed at preparing the ground for a joint peace conference in late October.

19. The agreement by the communities during the conference to reconvene a restructured Joint Community Peace Committee and to engage in localized premigration meetings in the three transhumance corridors was not kept. Tensions therefore rose in Abyei during the latter stages of the dry season, as herders were desperate to reach pasture and water for their cattle. UNISFA regularly engaged with the communities, urging them to allow transhumance to take place. It held separate discussions with the traditional leaders on both sides and engaged the respective local administrations urging their support in restarting the local peace process. The engagements, as well as UNISFA efforts to facilitate access to water in some key locations, resulted in limited migration activities and helped to de-escalate tensions. UNISFA also engaged with Government representatives in Khartoum and Juba on the issue of access to water during the dry season, requesting that they impress on their respective communities the need for coordination.

20. On the wider grass-roots peace process, UNISFA continued to provide good offices, through regular exchanges of views with representatives of both administrations and communities, for the resumption of dialogue on the contentious issues that pertain to the following and that have stalled the signing of an agreement allowing for the resumption of peaceful coexistence between the communities: the investigation into the assassination of the Ngok Dinka Paramount Chief in May 2013; joint investigations into the attacks in Kollom and Mabok in 2020; and the Misseriya Ajaira clan identity.

Law and order issues

21. Efforts to support rule of law continued to be hampered by the absence of the Abyei Police Service, and United Nations police remained the only entity providing law and order in Abyei. Demonstrations, public disorder and other incidents were on the rise, requiring an appropriate response by a police capacity. In Juba in July, and in Khartoum in August, the UNISFA Police Commissioner reminded interlocutors of past invitations to attend the road map exercise for the establishment of the Abyei Police Service, of the need to agree on a memorandum of understanding on the handling and handover of suspects and on delays in the issuance of visas for United Nations police.

22. The increase in population and commercial and housing construction in the three main economic activity centres of Amiet, Abyei and Agok further exposed the area to crime and related hazards, including outbreaks of fire. In addition, community protection committees have been organized to cover Noong, Tajalei and Marial Achack where new United Nations police team sites have been established. Community protection committee operations will also soon cover Athony and Goli once a United Nations police presence has been established there.

23. Despite the constraints stemming from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, United Nations police continued to build and strengthen the law-and-order maintenance capacity of the community protection committees and the Joint Protection Committee at the Amiet common market. Training and workshops continued to enhance the capacity of local traditional institutions and conflict-resolution mechanisms.

24. A total of 1,395 general crimes were recorded, representing a decrease of 286 cases compared with the previous reporting period. The decrease is attributable to an enhanced community-oriented crime prevention strategy, including mentoring, capacity-building and awareness campaigns implemented by United Nations police.

25. United Nations police conducted a total of 349 activities related to raising awareness about crime. These included meetings with community protection committees and campaigns against drug abuse, on environmental issues, on the prevention of fire outbreaks and on raising awareness about sexual and gender-based violence. Eighty-four of the campaigns were focused on crime prevention and reduction, and on road safety, and 113 on raising awareness about sexual and gender-based violence, in order to prevent and address abuse of the human rights of women and children.

26. Campaigns were conducted in Agok, Diffra, Abyei and Amiet, and two workshops, comprising traditional leaders, community protection committees, religious leaders, youth and local authorities to enhance local participation in matters of law and order matters and to strengthen the capacities of the community protection committees and Joint Protection Committee. Corrections officers serving with United Nations police conducted 103 visits to the three detention facilities in Abyei, Agok and the Amiet common market to provide advice on best practices and on compliance with international human rights standards. The lack of modern detention facilities, especially for women and juveniles, remained problematic for human rights compliance.

27. United Nations police conducted 1,620 community interactive patrols to mobilize members of the public to participate actively in peacebuilding initiatives. It also conducted 509 joint patrols, 292 independent security observation patrols and four air reconnaissance patrols in tandem with military observers and national monitors from both the Sudan and South Sudan.

28. United Nations police trained 360 members of community protection committees (279 men and 81 women) in basic policing and respect for human rights, from the 31 community protection committees stations operating in Abyei.

29. United Nations police currently comprises 49 officers, of which 32 are men and 17 women. Entry visas were granted to 19 officers during the reporting period. Visas for an additional 77 individual police officers are awaiting approval, with a view to reaching the full complement of 148. No progress was made on the deployment of the three formed police units. The Police Commissioner assumed her office in UNISFA on 1 July and the Deputy Police Commissioner has started his onboarding process.

Humanitarian situation and recovery activities

30. The Abyei Area continued to face significant humanitarian challenges caused by frequent outbreaks of violence, the presence of armed elements and population displacements, coupled with economic difficulties in the Sudan and South Sudan. Both countries continued to be affected by high rates of inflation, fiscal deficits, undiversified economies dependent on the oil sector, reduced remittance flows and the impact of climate change on the agricultural sector. The living conditions in the communities were also impacted by limited or non-existing government services, including inadequate provision of and access to basic public health, water sanitation and hygiene, education, protection services, and farming and livestock technical assistance. The COVID-19 pandemic added a further burden, having a significant impacting on existing humanitarian operations. The limited presence of humanitarian agencies, along with logistical hurdles, security concerns and political sensitivities, were major challenges.

31. There continued to be inequality in the provision of humanitarian assistance between the northern and southern parts of Abyei. Most of the estimated 92,000 vulnerable people, including seasonal migrants in the northern part of the Abyei Area, have received limited or no lifesaving assistance. Recovery support, including midterm and long-term economic opportunities also continued to be lacking in the area. The activities of international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) – funded directly by donors or through United Nations funds, programmes and specialized agencies and covering all sectors, including education, health, nutrition, water, sanitation and hygiene, protection, food security and livelihoods, shelter and non-food items – continued to be conducted almost entirely in the central and southern parts of Abyei. The aid community continued to support the ongoing peacebuilding and livelihood programmes aimed at increasing access to basic services and the capacity of government entities to maintain services and at improving livelihood opportunities.

32. Donors are looking for United Nations leadership in providing humanitarian assistance in the entire Abyei Area. Humanitarian partners from the Sudan and South Sudan are working closely to increase the resilience of affected agro-pastoralist, nomadic communities, returnees and displaced people through tailored approaches based on their specific humanitarian needs and vulnerabilities.

33. The main objective of humanitarian programming in the Abyei Area has been to alleviate human suffering and decrease dependency on humanitarian assistance among displaced people, returnees, seasonal migrants and local communities. The wider humanitarian response in the area continued to make use of community-based approaches to enhancing community integration and to implementing activities related to health, nutrition, water, sanitation and hygiene, food security and livelihoods, protection and education. Intercommunal conflict sensitivities were also taken into consideration in the humanitarian response plan, as were flooding and drought, the most significant natural hazards focused on in the plan.

34. Lack of solid baseline data for planning purposes remained a key challenge in the area. The humanitarian community still relies on estimated planning figures in providing humanitarian life-saving assistance to 220,000 vulnerable people in the area, of whom 92,000 are living in or passing through the northern part of Abyei, including Misseriya seasonal migrants and Falata nomads who had left the area in early May 2021 and were expected to return towards the end of the reporting period.

35. During the reporting period, 103,000 vulnerable people benefited from food assistance-related interventions, including the supplementary feeding programme in the central and southern sectors of Abyei. Efforts to support community livelihood activities continued and more than 60,000 livestock were vaccinated, and 15,000 treated, benefiting more than 5,000 households. Furthermore, some 3,000 households were supported with livelihood kits, including agricultural and fishing kits. In coordination with the local authorities and communities, training activities, equipment, livelihoods, income generation, small-scale infrastructures and basic animal health services and activities were provided to the targeted communities.

36. A total of 18 primary and 2 secondary health-care facilities throughout the Abyei Area remained operational. Humanitarian organizations provided routine immunizations and essential medicines, benefiting more than 205,000 people. Mobile health clinics provided primary health services to the communities in remote areas. The Ameth-Bek referral hospital in Abyei town continued to be used primarily for activities related to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Abyei community, humanitarian organizations and UNISFA coordinated their COVID-19 activities in the Abyei Area, including on COVID-19 vaccinations. Nutrition screening and support for patients with moderate and acute malnutrition reached a monthly average of 10,500 children under 5 years of age, as well as pregnant and lactating women in the Abyei Area.

37. A total of 18,000 vulnerable people benefited from 17 sanitation, water supply and multipurpose solar-powered water infrastructure projects for domestic users and farmers, and livestock projects throughout the area. A food-for-education programme supported meals for 22,000 schoolchildren in 30 primary and secondary schools in southern and central Abyei. The Education on Air activity, initiated in response to the pandemic, continued to be broadcast through Abyei FM radio for pupils. Protection, in particular of children, and against gender-based violence, remained the key challenge because of limited resources and capacities on the ground. The aid community reactivated the protection working group and its subgroups concerning sexual and gender-based violence, child protection and mine action, in order to address protection needs in a more coordinated manner jointly with the community and UNISFA.

38. UNISFA successfully completed six out of seven quick-impact projects for fiscal year 2020/21 in the southern part of Abyei, while completion of the majority of such projects (9 out of 10) in northern Abyei were still pending. Work is expected to start on the partially completed quick-impact projects as soon as their locations become accessible at the end of the rainy season. Concurrently, requisite planning and preparations in consultation with local authorities, traditional leaders, United Nations agencies, funds and programmes and NGOs are under way for the quick-impact projects planned for fiscal year 2021/22.

Women and peace and security

39. UNISFA continued its efforts to promote women's rights to equal participation, especially in decision-making spaces, which is known to contribute to longer lasting peace. It conducted advocacy with local administrations in both the Misseriya and Ngok Dinka communities. Other engagements involved strengthening collaboration with women civil society groups and their networks as well as local non-governmental organizations working on women's rights, including for women with disabilities.

40. In southern Abyei, the local authorities continued to demonstrate a willingness to strengthen women's participation in the community. After consultations with the Deputy Chief Administrator, the Gender Adviser for the local administration and the Paramount Chief of the Ngok Dinka, the authorities reinforced their willingness to expand women's political space on peace and security in Abyei (see para. 42 below).

41. During the reporting period, the Juba-appointed Administrator of the Abyei Area made changes in his ministerial and advisory teams, appointing only 3 women out of 13 ministers and advisers and none in his team of commissioners. Compared with the previous administration, even though the number of women has not been reduced, the fact that a man was favoured over the woman serving as Minister of Health meant that there was only one woman at the ministerial level since the other two had advisory positions. UNISFA engaged the local administrators, including the Gender Adviser for the local administration, to ensure that political gains for women in Abyei were not reversed and advocated for the inclusion of more women in the local administration.

42. At a meeting with UNISFA on 14 September 2021, the Paramount Chief commended the mission for its collaboration with community-based organizations and civil society organizations on gender issues and pledged his support to ensure that women were incorporated into all the structures of the local traditional leadership. The chieftaincy is in the process of revising the traditional laws of the Ngok Dinka and has pledged to outlaw harmful practices such as early marriages and gender-based violence. The Deputy Chief Administrator and Head of the Department of Local Government and Law Enforcement Agencies for the Abyei Area, who was appointed in August, is receptive to participating in the mission's planned activities on women and peace and security.

43. The mission continued to support for local communities to prevent and respond to sexual and gender-based violence through awareness-raising activities, advocacy, training and capacity-building, as well as engagement with local leaders on the eradication of harmful traditional practices such as child marriage.

44. During the period under review, 13 cases of sexual and gender-based violence and one case of trafficking entailing sexual and gender-based violence were reported involving 14 survivors, eight of whom are minors: five aged 7, 11, 13, 14 and 15 years and three aged 17 years. One of the cases involved the gang rape of a 15-year-old girl by three men. Two of the alleged perpetrators were arrested and charged in court. The general profile of the perpetrators in all the reported cases was of unarmed adult men, except for one incident, involving the rape of a 26-year-old woman by an identified armed man. The incident followed an attack on a village in Agok area of Abyei.

45. A total of 164 awareness-raising activities on the prevention of and response to sexual and gender-based violence, including in the context of COVID-19, as well as the rights of women and children, and on HIV/AIDS were conducted across the Abyei Area. Furthermore, a total of seven training courses on the prevention of sexual and gender-based violence, on promoting the rights of women and children, and on income-generation activities for widows were conducted by UNISFA for communities in Agok, Tajalei and Abyei. A total of 248 participants attended, of whom 132 were women, 71 men, 39 girls and 6 boys.

Operations of the Mine Action Service

46. The Mine Action Service initially continued its full deployment to the headquarters of the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism, sector headquarters and all active team sites, fulfilling all requests for support from the mission and enabling 59 ground monitoring mechanism missions. Following the forced relocation of UNISFA on 19 August 2021 from the two team sites in Kiir Adem

and War Abar to Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism Sector 1 headquarters in Gok Machar, the Mine Action Service removed all equipment from the two team sites by 1 September 2021.

47. The Mine Action Service assessed 445,108 m² of land in the Abyei Area as safe for use by UNISFA, humanitarian actors and the local population. Areas assessed included UNISFA temporary operating bases and patrol routes to enhance Force mobility in accordance with the dry season activity plan, one suspected landmine-contaminated area and a new graveyard site in Abyei town as requested by the local authorities. As a result of those activities, seven explosive remnants of war and two mines (one anti-personnel and one anti-tank) were recovered and subsequently destroyed in controlled demolitions.

48. As part of weapons and ammunition management, the Mine Action Service destroyed 13 weapons and 656 rounds of small arms ammunition confiscated by UNISFA troops.

49. The Mine Action Service intensified its activities related to explosive ordnance risk education, aimed primarily at children and pastoralists, following two accidents in Agok and Diffra areas that had resulted in injuries and fatalities. A total of 397 sessions were delivered, reaching 12,193 men, women, boys and girls living in the Abyei Area. The activities were conducted through short, customized dramatizations. The children and pastoralists were also provided related comic books and masks to create awareness of explosive remnants of war as well as COVID-19 mitigation measures. In addition, the Mine Action Service recruited six community liaison officers in Agok, Abyei and Diffra in order to improve community interaction and prepared a radio drama in three languages (English, Dinka and Arabic), which was broadcast on the local radio in Agok in June. The majority (89.2 per cent) of the beneficiaries of the activities managed to distinguish between safe and unsafe behaviour. Eighteen awareness-raising sessions on explosive remnants of war were also delivered as part of UNISFA induction training sessions, enhancing the awareness of 206 UNISFA military and civilian personnel (183 men and 23 women).

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

50. The situation in the area of responsibility of the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism was generally calm except in Sector 1. On 12 June 2021, chiefs and youth of Aweil North County demanded the closure of team sites 11 (Safahah/Kiir Adem) and 12 (Sumayah/War Abar), alleging insecurity, lack of social amenities, damage to local roads and biased patrolling (undertaken on the South Sudanese side only). Based on those claims, security clearances for ground monitoring missions were denied and patrols were stopped. On 28 and 29 June 2021, the Chief of the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism visited the communities to engage with them on the UNISFA/Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism mandate, to listen to their concerns and assure them of UNISFA/Mechanism support. The communities again submitted letters to the Chief in which they demanded that team sites 11 and 12 be closed. Thereafter, clearances for both ground monitoring missions and aerial monitoring missions were rejected and the operations stopped. The mission formally requested the intervention of the Government of South Sudan on the matter.

51. A delegation led by the acting Head of Mission visited Juba from 26 to 29 July 2021 to discuss the challenges in UNISFA/Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism Sector 1, among other issues. During the reporting period, those challenges included increased pressure by local communities for the closure of team

sites 11 and 12 by refusing the resupply of life-saving supplies and logistics, including rations, water, fuel and medicines. From 9 to 12 August 2021, the Chief of the Mechanism visited Juba to impress upon the Government the need to intervene and calm the tensions in Sector 1. However, he was asked to return and engage directly with the Governor of Bahr el-Ghazal State. On 11 August 2021, while the Chief was still in Juba, local chiefs and youth staged demonstrations at the Sector 1 headquarters in Gok Machar and at team site 11. The demonstrations at the Sector 1 headquarters, which included women and children, turned violent. The protesters breached the perimeter fence at four locations, forcibly entering the camp, and vandalized and looted United Nations equipment. Fortunately, there were no fatalities. Following that violent attack, all civilian staff, staff officers and United Nations military observers were evacuated to Abyei later in the day and during the next day. All national monitors were also evacuated to Abyei. On 13 August 2021, community members of War Abar staged a peaceful demonstration in front of team site 12, demanding the removal of the team site. A total of seven notes verbales have been addressed to the Government of South Sudan, with no response. Similarly, the Government of the Sudan has also been kept abreast of the situation through notes verbales, again with no response.

52. With the increased threat to life and United Nations property, and in the absence of clear support from the Government of South Sudan, UNISFA relocated troops from team sites to Gok Machar on 26 and 31 August 2021, respectively. On 31 August 2021, the UNISFA/Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism received a letter from local chiefs and youth of Aweil North County in which they demanded the closure of Sector 1 headquarters (Gok Machar) within 48 hours. In the following days, the local government repeatedly refused to grant landing clearance for an urgently required medical evacuation by helicopter of five Force Protection Unit personnel from Gok Machar to Abyei, as well as for delivery of food rations and essential medical supplies to Gok Machar.

53. On 8 September 2021, the issue was brought to the attention of the Joint Political and Security Mechanism, which was convening in Juba. UNISFA urged the Government of South Sudan to engage the local government and community in the area to resolve the issue of the medical evacuation of peacekeeping personnel and of resupplies to Sector 1 headquarters, as well as to ensure the redeployment of personnel to team sites 11 and 12. Despite assurances made at the meeting, and later to the Special Envoy for the Horn of Africa, flight landings continued to be denied, and a member of the Force Protection Unit, for whom Medevac had been denied, died on 14 September in Gok Machar without having received access to appropriate medical care. Despite political engagement by the Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations in Juba on 10 September, and by others, the situation did not improve. On 25 September, UNISFA informed the Governments of the Sudan and South Sudan that it would temporarily relocate its troops from Gok Machar to Abyei until the threats were reduced. On 27 September, UNISFA finally received clearance to land for the limited purpose of allowing technicians to prepare the Gok Machar site for closure and for the temporary relocation of all troops and equipment. On 7 October, the first convoy departed Gok Machar for Abyei, with 221 troops remaining as at 10 October 2021.

54. With regard to team site 21 in Tishwin, the decision taken in October 2020 by the Joint Political and Security Mechanism to relocate the team site from its current temporary location to a permanent site remains unimplemented. A request by the UNISFA/Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism for the national monitors of the Sudanese Armed Forces and the South Sudan People's Defence Forces to carry out reconnaissance of a new location for the team site alongside military observers from the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism remains unanswered by the Government of South Sudan. The Chief of the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism has reported to the Co-Chairs of the Joint

Political and Security Mechanism about the lack of commitment on the part of the South Sudan People's Defence Forces to the relocation.

55. Despite these challenges, most of the planned ground and aerial monitoring missions were conducted at the various team sites as planned except in Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism Sector 1. There were no border demarcation activities during the reporting period except for a meeting of the Joint Border Commission held in Khartoum from 14 to 17 June 2021. Since January 2021, the 14 Mile Area ad hoc Committee has not convened.

56. All requested aerial and ground monitoring missions were approved by the Government of the Sudan. However, approvals for the security clearance of those missions were met with challenges from South Sudan. Clearances were completely stopped in June 2021 and responsibility for approvals was transferred to the local communities in Sector 1. Freedom of movement within the Safe Demilitarized Border Zone was guaranteed for the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism except in Sector 1. The general area of team site 22, Abu Qussa/Wunkur, was still under the control of elements of SPLM/A-IO, despite a call by the Joint Political and Security Mechanism for its immediate withdrawal. As a result, South Sudan national monitors have not yet been deployed to Abu Qussa/Wunkur.

57. Concerning the seven benchmarks set out in Security Council resolutions [2550 \(2020\)](#) and [2575 \(2021\)](#), progress has been modest. Standing clearance for all air and ground patrols was granted except in Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism Sector 1 where security clearances for aerial and ground monitoring missions and for logistics and/or administrative movements were denied. Regarding the operationalization of team site 22 in Abu Qussa/Wunkur, the team site is established but not yet operational, as South Sudan has yet to deploy national monitors owing to the presence of SPLM/A-IO in the area.

58. According to benchmark 3, the Joint Political and Security Mechanism was required to meet twice during the reporting period. A meeting was held in Juba on 8 and 9 September 2021, at which the parties committed to redeploying forces outside of the Abyei Area immediately and asked UNISFA to report compliance to the Abyei Joint Oversight Committee on a monthly basis. The Mechanism also directed the 14 Mile Area ad hoc Committee to continue its work until the completion of its mission and to facilitate resumption of Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism activities in Sector 1. The Joint Political and Security Mechanism agreed to ensure the withdrawal of SPLA/M-IO from the Safe Demilitarized Border Zone by engaging the parties. The two countries agreed on a fourth commitment, which was to open border crossing corridors starting from 1 October 2021, without prejudice to existing agreements, mutual understanding, relevant international law principles and the work of the Joint Border Commission and the Joint Demarcation Committee. The Joint Political and Security Mechanism also urged the Government of South Sudan to address the situation in team sites 11, 12 and Gok Machar, and to make all necessary efforts to deploy national monitors in team site 22 (Abu Qussa/Wunkur).

59. A 14 Mile Area ad hoc Committee meeting was not conducted during the reporting period. However, in its most recent report, the Committee recommended that the Chief of Defence Force of the South Sudan People's Defence Forces issue the necessary orders for the withdrawal of their units from within the 14 Mile Area. So far, UNISFA has not been notified by the parties of any withdrawals of their elements and equipment.

60. The reopening of border crossing corridors (benchmark 5) has been achieved, including the reopening of the Meiram-Aweil crossing, which was temporarily closed owing to the COVID-19 pandemic. Of the 10 corridors, 4 are currently open and functioning: Buram-El Murra, Higlig-Bentiu, Kostî-Renk and Meiram-Aweil. Only

the Meiram-Aweil crossing is manned. With regard to the border demarcation (benchmark 6), no border demarcation activities were conducted during the reporting period except for the meeting of the Joint Border Commission held in Khartoum from 14 to 17 June 2021.

61. In accordance with benchmark 7, except at team Site 22 (Abu Qussa/Wunkur), the parties have deployed national monitors to participate in Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism operational activities. However, the attack of 11 August and the repeated protests at team sites 11 and 12 necessitated the withdrawal of all national monitors from Sector 1 to Abyei and the subsequent closure of the team sites.

IV. Administrative aspects and mission support

62. As at 1 September 2021, the number of civilian staff stood at 152 international staff, 34 United Nations Volunteers and 83 national staff, against an authorized total of 174 international staff, 36 United Nations Volunteers and 90 national staff. The vacancy rate stood at 12.64 per cent for international staff and 6.02 per cent for national staff.

63. UNISFA continued to take steps to increase the number of women in the mission, reaching out to female candidates to apply for all vacancies; all qualified female applicants were shortlisted and interviewed. Living conditions, opportunities for promotion, training and welfare concerns were rigorously addressed in order to attract and retain female staff.

64. As at 15 September 2021, the UNISFA military component stood at 3,515 personnel, comprising 3,105 men and 410 women (3,238 troops, 152 military observers and 125 staff officers). With regard to the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism, the UNISFA military component stood at 571 personnel, comprising 475 men and 96 women (537 troops, 23 military observers and 11 staff officers).

65. The police component strength stood at 49 officers – 32 men (65.3 per cent) and 17 women (34.7 per cent) – against an authorized total of 640 police personnel (148 individual police officers and 492 formed police unit personnel). This low rate of deployment is attributed to the non-issuance of visas, in particular for the formed police unit personnel. Female individual police officers represent 34.7 per cent of all individual police officers, roughly the same figure as on 1 March 2021, when they represented 34 per cent. Women account for 22 per cent of the civilian component and, in the military component, represent 11.7 per cent of all military peacekeepers.

66. During the reporting period, from 1 May to 10 October 2021, the Government of the Sudan issued 316 visas for UNISFA personnel, while 128 visas remained pending (77 for police personnel, 26 for contractors, 8 for visitors, 6 for international staff, 5 for military personnel, 4 for consultants and 2 for Mine Action Service staff and contractors).

67. Company operating bases remained deployed at Farouk, Diffra, Goli and Todach (Sector North); Dokura/Rumajak, Nong and Abyei (Sector Centre); and Marial Achak, Athony, Banton, Tejalei and Agok (Sector South). Temporary operating bases for the dry season deployment were established at Dokura 2 (Sector Centre); Rumamier and Leu (Sector South); and Um Khariet (North Sector).

68. UNISFA supported four of the Mechanism's team sites until it had to forcibly relocate team site 11 (Kiir Adem/Safahah) and team site 12 (Sumayah/War Abar) in Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism Sector 1 (Gok Machar) following demonstrations by local community representatives and pressure from local authorities to vacate the area. UNISFA retrieved most of the items from the two team sites and they are therefore currently no longer operational. In Sector 2 (Kadugli), team site 21 (Tishwin) and team site 22 in Abu Qussa/Wunkur continued to be

operational. The mission has, however, faced local opposition at both of these sites, resulting in contractor trucks and drivers being blocked from accessing team site 21, and drivers being detained with their trucks at a military camp while attempting to access team site 22.

69. Infrastructure and environmental installations continued to be upgraded at all UNISFA camps, with a view to improving troop accommodations that were no longer fit for purpose, putting in place flood mitigation measures and constructing a new heliport, which became operational on 3 June 2021. The new level II hospital was completed.

70. The mission continued to face shortages of laterite, gravel and other materials, and its contractors were often subjected to delayed road clearances from the Sudan, leading to the suspension of essential infrastructure works, including those in support of Force mobility.

71. A process is currently under way for UNISFA to source a third fixed-wing long-term air charter supporting medical evacuations, passenger operations and cargo on the northern route to Khartoum. In accordance with the previous report of the Secretary-General, the aircraft is expected to be operational by January 2022. Following the two military helicopter accidents in February and May 2019 and the subsequent suspension of their operations and repatriation of the associated contingent, the mission continued to operate with civilian helicopters only. However, a military aviation unit, including two helicopters, has now been redeployed from the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur to Abyei. Efforts remain under way to make the unit operational, and an update will be provided in the next report.

Culture of performance

72. UNISFA piloted a project on field remote infrastructure management, which provides remote monitoring of and data-gathering on mission resources such as power generators and wastewater treatment plants. It also involves installing power and water meters in individual accommodations to incentivize responsible user behaviour. The system is a key enabler for introducing the “smart camp” concept through the wide use of automation and remote control. To fully implement this concept, UNISFA is finalizing its work in the following main areas: (a) automation of reporting, allowing for the real-time verification of assets, power and water usage, and waste management; (b) predictive analysis, generating alerts to prevent the failure of critical infrastructure such as generators or the wastewater treatment plant; (c) automation of generator refuelling and the refilling of main feeder tanks, and the automation of irrigation using recycled wastewater, which improves the survival rate of saplings for carbon offsetting; and (d) monitoring and metering of well-water abstraction. The smart camp concept is to be fully rolled out in a military camp in the vicinity of UNISFA Headquarters in the coming months, to be used as a model for all UNISFA camps. Managers are increasing their use of productivity data from various systems to devise workplans and improve performance.

Response to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic

73. Since the UNISFA COVID-19 task force charted a contingency plan and a medical plan to respond to the pandemic, UNISFA leadership has been strictly overseeing implementation of preventive measures. After a period of six weeks without any new cases between early August and mid-September, 15 new cases of COVID-19 were detected over a two-week period beginning 20 September, which, as at 4 October, brought to 140 the total number of positive cases detected since the beginning of 2021. The mission carried out four medical evacuations of severe/critical cases of COVID-19 for treatment outside the mission (three civilians were taken to Nairobi and a member of a contingent was taken to Addis Ababa). Fortunately, all survived.

74. During the reporting period, the focus of the mission shifted towards vaccination, while maintaining strict compliance with preventive measures. A vaccination deployment plan was developed and UNISFA established a total of 20 vaccination centres, including 12 fixed and 8 outreach centres. A total of 9,000 doses of COVID-19 vaccine were received in two batches: the first batch of 6,000 doses arrived at the mission on 29 April 2021; the second consignment of 3,000 doses was received on 23 June 2021. The vaccination campaign was triggered on 6 May and formally closed on 23 August 2021. A total of 4,951 individuals were fully vaccinated.

Conduct and discipline

75. One allegation of fraud and no new allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse were recorded during the reporting period. The mission's Conduct and Discipline Team continued to implement its three-pronged strategy of prevention, enforcement and remedial action to prevent misconduct. Efforts to prevent sexual exploitation and abuse continued through induction training and online and refresher training for all categories of UNISFA personnel. Risk assessments and mitigation measures were also updated in UNISFA areas of operation with the relevant stakeholders. The Conduct and Discipline Team continued its outreach activities and information campaigns on the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse and on assistance to victims through the COVID-19 task force, United Nations funds, programmes and specialized agencies, protection from sexual abuse and exploitation focal points and other platforms, with a view to conducting awareness-raising for the local population and UNISFA.

V. Financial aspects

76. By its resolution [2575 \(2021\)](#) of 11 May 2021, the Security Council extended the mandate of UNISFA until 15 November 2021. The General Assembly, by its resolution [75/297](#) of 30 June 2021, appropriated the amount of \$260.4 million for the maintenance of the Force for the period from 1 July 2021 to 30 June 2022. As at 20 September 2021, unpaid assessed contributions to the special account for UNISFA amounted to \$95.7 million. The total outstanding assessed contributions for all peacekeeping operations as at that date amounted to \$3,273.1 million. Reimbursement of troop costs and of the costs of contingent-owned equipment and self-sustainment has been made for the period up to 30 June 2021, in accordance with the quarterly payment schedule. Should the Security Council decide to extend the mandate of UNISFA beyond 15 November 2021, the cost of maintaining the mission would be limited to the amounts approved by the General Assembly.

VI. Observations and recommendations

77. The warming of relations between the Sudan and South Sudan and the establishment by both countries of national committees on the Abyei issue constitute positive steps towards the possible identification of sustainable options for the final status of Abyei and the demarcation of the border. There is renewed interest in seeking a political settlement for the area among various stakeholders.

78. While I welcome the meeting of the Joint Political and Security Mechanism in Juba on 8 and 9 September 2021, I regret to note that the implementation of previous decisions of that body remains pending, and I urge the parties to ensure follow-up, including on the decisions referred to the respective presidencies. Those previous decisions include not only the issue of protection of the Diffra oilfields, but also the formation of a joint team to investigate the attacks that occurred in Nainai and Kolom on 19 and 22 January 2020, respectively. I am concerned that, despite the clear

direction expressed by the Mechanism, the parties were not able to organize a meeting of the Abyei Joint Oversight Committee during the reporting period. The Committee has not convened since November 2017.

79. I regret that, during the reporting period, UNISFA and its component in support of the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism faced new challenges in the implementation of their mandate, in particular in the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism Sector 1 in South Sudan. The repeated refusal by local government representatives of Aweil North County to authorize UNISFA to operate an urgent medical evacuation out of Gok Machar is unacceptable. I am deeply dismayed by the loss of a UNISFA peacekeeper on 14 September 2021 in Gok Machar and I express my deepest condolences to the Government of Ethiopia and to the family of the deceased. The repeated refusal to allow landing rights constitutes a serious violation of the status-of-forces agreement between UNISFA and the Government of South Sudan. I appeal to South Sudan to address the situation as a matter of urgency and to allow the immediate re-operationalization of team sites 11 and 12 of the Mechanism. As the improved relations between Sudan and South Sudan create a conducive environment for the start of the border demarcation process, any impediments to the implementation of the Mechanism mandate should be avoided.

80. I remain deeply concerned that no progress has been made regarding the operationalization of the Athony airstrip and the issuance of visas for the three formed police units and additional 98 individual police officers. I also urge the Sudanese and South Sudanese authorities to permit the deployment of human rights expertise to UNISFA, in accordance with the relevant Security Council resolutions.

81. The rapprochement between the two Governments has yet to be felt in Abyei, where the relations between the Misseriya and Ngok Dinka communities remain tense. The acceptance by both communities of a UNISFA initiative to hold separate meetings with each community, to be followed by a meeting of Misseriya and Ngok Dinka in late October, is encouraging. To further the intercommunity dialogue, I call for enhanced engagement between the parties in the local peace process, including on the issue of the grazing entitlements of the pastoralists and other issues of mutual concern. I also encourage the continuation of efforts to advocate for right of women to equal participation as well as progress in the inclusion of youth and women in local peace dialogues.

82. I encourage the African Union to enhance its efforts to promote political mediation, including through possible support to the parties in resuming the meetings of the Abyei Joint Oversight Committee. UNISFA has requested the support of the African Union High-level Implementation Panel in the holding of an Abyei Joint Oversight Committee meeting at the end of October 2021. I wish to reiterate that the United Nations stands ready to support the organization of such meetings. I further echo an earlier request of the Peace and Security Council of the African Union that the African Union Commission and the African Union High-level Implementation Panel develop modalities for releasing the report on the killing of Chief Kuol Deng Kuol of the Ngok Dinka.

83. As the Security Council considers the renewal of the mandate of UNISFA, together with the recommendations of the strategic review I submitted to the Council on 17 September 2021, I recommend an extension of the mission's mandate by six months.

84. In conclusion, I wish to extend my gratitude and appreciation to the acting Head of Mission/Force Commander of UNISFA, Major General Kefyalew Amde Tessema, and all UNISFA personnel for their tireless efforts to maintain peace and security, often under very difficult conditions. I also commend my Special Envoy for the Horn of Africa, Parfait Onanga-Anyanga, the African Union, including the African Union High-level Implementation Panel, and the Government of Ethiopia for their active engagement in support of the stabilization of the Abyei Area.

