



# Security Council

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## The situation in Abyei

### Report of the Secretary-General

#### I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to paragraph 33 of Security Council resolution [2445 \(2018\)](#), 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 my previous report ([S/2018/923](#)), from 16 October 2018 to 15 April 2019. The report provides an update on and an analysis of the security situation, the relevant political developments and the operating environment of the mission. It also outlines the progress made to reconfigure the mission, including a reduction in troops and an increase in police personnel, as well as recommendations for further revisions.

#### II. Abyei

##### Conflict dynamics and security situation

2. During the reporting period, the security situation remained generally calm, with sporadic incidents of violence. The conflict in Abyei continued to be characterized by layers of parallel dynamics, namely intercommunal violence primarily between the Ngok Dinka and the Misseriya, criminality and the presence of armed elements. There were reports of 13 violent incidents involving the use of small arms, in which nine persons were killed. They included three armed robberies, all of which were perpetrated against those travelling to or from the Amiet common market. One violent incident included shooting aimed at a UNISFA patrol, although there were no casualties. Criminality remained the greatest challenge, with 1,675 incidents during the reporting period, comprising 1,409 petty crimes and 266 serious crimes, including murder and robbery. Most of the criminal incidents remained intracommunal and were a consequence of the adverse economic situation in Abyei and surrounding areas, as well as the prevalence of small arms.

3. Intercommunal tensions between the Ngok Dinka and the Misseriya normally peak during the annual migration of the Misseriya and their cattle southwards through the Abyei Area. The migration season began in October, with 37,000 seasonal Misseriya herdsmen having entered the Area. Most of the intercommunal violence noted during the season stems from animal rustling incidents. There were 16 such incidents during the reporting period, resulting in two fatalities. Because the incidents



of rustling have the potential to cause wider intercommunal tensions, UNISFA responds to each incident promptly by dispatching patrols and initiating an investigation. In seven of the incidents, UNISFA was able to track and retrieve some of the stolen animals, and in two incidents, all of the animals were recovered.

4. While the joint peace committee remains the essential community-led mechanism for bringing together both communities for dialogue to dissipate anxieties and prevent violence, UNISFA also plays a key role in this regard. Following an animal rustling incident on 17 February, intercommunal tensions between the Misseriya and Ngok Dinka increased at the Amiet common market, and a confrontation ensued. As a result of its presence at the market, UNISFA was able to intervene swiftly and prevent violence.

5. During the current migration season, intercommunal tensions rose following the killing of a Misseriya herdsman and the theft of his cattle near the Amiet common market on 17 November. A joint peace committee was convened to discuss the incident, on 22 November. The Ngok Dinka denied any involvement, adding that the perpetrators came from outside the Abyei Area. Nevertheless, the Misseriya held the Ngok Dinka responsible for not having intercepted the cattle, which were reportedly taken to Twic County, in South Sudan, through Ngok Dinka areas. Tensions came to a head at a subsequent joint peace committee meeting, on 6 December, when the Ngok Dinka refused to pay compensation, or blood money, for the aforementioned killing of the Misseriya herdsman. Furthermore, the Ngok Dinka accused the Misseriya of carrying out a retaliatory attack on 10 December near Kol-Ngol-Nyang-Colognal, a village situated between Rumamier and Marial Achak, Sector South, in which two of their community members had been killed. The Misseriya threatened the Ngok Dinka with harm if they were to go to the Amiet common market. In addition, the Misseriya boycotted the annual pre-migration conference until the compensation was paid.

6. On the following day, 7 December, Misseriya traders refused to open their shops in the Amiet common market and prevented the market from functioning, with the exception of the sale of perishable goods. On 9 December, the Ngok Dinka confronted the Misseriya at the market, although there was no violence. In the following days, UNISFA held separate meetings with the two communities to calm tensions. On 12 December, the acting Head of Mission and Force Commander convened a joint peace committee meeting with both communities, at which they continued to blame each other. Nonetheless, the market resumed all trading activities on 12 December, which highlighted the shared need for the market of both communities. The interdependent relationship continued to be demonstrated during the reporting period, including on 30 December, when Ngok Dinka and Misseriya community leaders were able to de-escalate tensions between the two groups following a subsequent incident at the market, in which a member of the Ngok Dinka was killed by a member of the Misseriya.

7. With the Amiet common market having become an economic hub between Sudan and South Sudan, Abyei has risen in importance. There are reported to be some 30,000 people who use the market, which has also drawn in communities from the neighbouring areas in the Sudan and South Sudan. Periodically, there are tensions in the Abyei Area among communities who enter the Area. During the reporting period, tensions with the Nuer, who entered the Abyei Area from Unity State, in South Sudan, continued. Violence broke out between the Nuer and the Ngok Dinka in the Amiet common market on 19 February, when 3 Ngok Dinka were killed and another 10 wounded, in addition to one UNISFA peacekeeper who was injured while intervening.

8. The presence of armed elements in the Abyei Area also continued to have the potential to trigger intercommunal tensions. During the reporting period, UNISFA

received eight reports from residents regarding the presence of armed elements. Most of the sightings were in Sector Centre and Sector South. UNISFA was able to confirm the presence of one possible armed group of 51 men, who were suspected to be rebel elements from South Sudan. The group stated that it was returning to Wau, in South Sudan, under the terms of the revitalized peace agreement. The mission conducted an investigation and allowed the group to proceed to South Sudan.

9. UNISFA also continued to confiscate weapons in the Abyei Area. During the reporting period, the mission seized nine small arms from three members of the Misseriya and two members of the Ngok Dinka.

### **Local peace efforts**

10. While the communities are able to weigh in against spoilers, in particular to ensure that activities continue at the Amiet common market, fundamental political issues relating to the dispute over Abyei remained unresolved. One of the issues, namely the Ngok Dinka assertion that Misseriya may not convene in Sector Centre and Sector South, and in particular in Abyei town, continued to be raised during the reporting period. It is important to note that the assertion dates back to 2013, when the Ngok Dinka Paramount Chief was killed, in Abyei town. Consequently, UNISFA instituted a disengagement line between the communities, in particular during the migration season. The line prevented the Misseriya from entering Ngok Dinka areas, thereby avoiding intercommunal tensions. Intercommunal relations markedly improved over the years and culminated in the establishment of the Amiet common market in 2016, after which the mission started to relax the enforcement of the disengagement line, as communities stayed within the agreed areas to avoid conflict. During the 2017/18 migration season, instead of enforcing the disengagement line, the mission undertook robust patrolling of flashpoints. Given the improved relations, the Misseriya have come to expect that access would also be granted to Abyei town, but the Ngok Dinka continue to resist. On 10 January, the Misseriya again raised the idea of moving joint peace committee meetings from Todach, Sector North, to Rumajak, near Abyei town. Disagreement over the matter triggered a suspension of the weekly joint peace committee meetings on 24 January. UNISFA engaged with both communities, attempting to resolve the impasse. The two groups resumed the joint peace committee meetings independently on 21 February, a move initiated by the community leaders to address and de-escalate tensions following the killing of a Ngok Dinka trader on 13 February.

11. In an effort to prevent intercommunal tensions during the migration season, UNISFA, in collaboration with United Nations agencies, funds and programmes, has facilitated the annual pre-migration conference since 2017. Usually held in December, the conference allows the communities to agree on the modalities of the Misseriya movement through the Abyei Area, specifically including areas that can be accessed by the Misseriya for grazing, and compensation for animal rustling and deaths. For the most recent migration season, however, the conference was only held on 25 March, owing to the Misseriya position that the conference must be held closer to Abyei town, specifically Rumajak. In actuality, however, the conference was held in Todach.

### **Political developments**

12. No progress was made in implementing outstanding commitments agreed upon by the parties in the 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 of 20 June 2011. The Abyei Joint Oversight Committee did not convene during the reporting period. The last meeting of the Committee was held on 13 and 14 November 2017.

13. In a worrying trend, UNISFA has noted heightened political rhetoric from the Misseriya community. It was reported that, on 7 January, at the celebration of the independence of the Sudan in Goli, Sector North, there was some discussion of recapturing the Abyei Area for the Sudan. A few days later, however, on 10 January, Misseriya leaders rebuffed the notion of recapturing the Area, stating that their goal continued to be peaceful coexistence with the Ngok Dinka. The Misseriya community leaders added subsequently that their community was facing pressure from the Sudan on the matter. Furthermore, a Sudanese national monitor had insisted on being part of the joint peace committee meeting on 20 December, claiming that he had been authorized by his Government to do so. The Ngok Dinka suspended the meeting, stating that the joint peace committee was a mechanism between the two communities, not the two Governments. National monitors, who are military officers from the Sudan and South Sudan, are deployed to the Abyei Area with UNISFA to observe the demilitarization of the Area. Their only role is observation.

14. From 28 to 30 January, the newly appointed Sudanese Co-Chair of the Abyei Joint Oversight Committee visited Abyei. The visit, which, it is important to note, occurred at a time when intercommunal tensions were high, following the 7 January celebration of the independence of the Sudan, had only been verbally communicated to UNISFA on 24 January. There was no subsequent official correspondence on the details thereof. The details were only known after the Co-Chair had already arrived in the Abyei Area. Some of the Ngok Dinka community leaders viewed the visit as a provocation and threatened violence. In order to prevent intercommunal violence, UNISFA requested the Co-Chair to refrain from visiting the Amiet common market, but the Co-Chair proceeded to visit the market despite warnings from UNISFA of the potential for violence. The visit concluded without incident.

#### **Rule of law issues**

15. The UNISFA police component continued to provide training and advice to community protection committees in Sector Centre and Sector South, as well as to the joint peace committee based at the Amiet common market. A total of 172 members of the community protection committee and the joint peace committee (154 men and 18 women) received basic police training. Owing to the increase in criminality, the police component began to recruit more members to serve with the community protection committees, with a focus on engaging with women. Corrections officers who were part of the police component provided advisory and monitoring services to 72 members of the community protection committee and the joint peace committee at the three existing detention facilities, in Abyei town, Agok (Sector Centre) and the Amiet common market. Owing to the limited number of detention facilities in the Abyei Area, UNISFA renovated the facility in Abyei town and is in the process of assisting in the construction of the facility at the common market. The work was done through the use of quick impact project funds.

16. The continued reluctance of the Governments of the Sudan and South Sudan to agree on handover procedures for criminal suspects apprehended in the Abyei Area remains a challenge for the mission. In the meantime, UNISFA continues to facilitate the handover of arrested suspects to the relevant national authorities of the Sudan and South Sudan through the national monitors and the traditional judiciary. During the reporting period, two Misseriya suspects were handed over to the Government of the Sudan through their national monitors. The first suspect was arrested on suspicion of having killed a member of the Ngok Dinka community and the second was held for attempting to burn a Ngok Dinka home.

17. On three occasions, in December 2018 and January and March 2019, UNISFA invited the parties to take part in an integrated planning exercise for the establishment

of the Abyei Police Service, a stipulation of resolution [2445 \(2018\)](#). While the Sudan responded positively, South Sudan has not responded to the invitations.

### **Humanitarian situation and recovery activities**

18. Limited or non-existent basic services in the Abyei Area, coupled with high inflation and economic crises in the Sudan and South Sudan, continued to create significant humanitarian needs in the Abyei Area. United Nations agencies, funds and programmes, as well as non-governmental organizations, continued to provide humanitarian and recovery assistance to 182,000 vulnerable people. They included 102,000 people from the Ngok Dinka community, 9,000 people displaced from neighbouring states in South Sudan, 34,000 people from the Misseriya community and 37,000 seasonal Misseriya migrants who had entered the area in October.

19. More than 111,000 vulnerable people benefited from various food assistance-related activities, including the supplementary feeding programme in the central and southern parts of Abyei. Efforts to support community livelihood activities continued during the reporting period, with 126,000 livestock vaccinated against various diseases and 17,600 livestock treated, thereby benefiting 9,400 households. Training in basic animal health, the handling and processing of fish, post-harvest handling, the establishment of fruit tree nurseries and vegetable production were provided. Other key activities included the provision of assorted vegetable seeds and fishing kits.

20. A total of 17 primary and 2 secondary health-care facilities throughout the Abyei Area remained operational thanks to support from the humanitarian community. In addition, humanitarian organizations provided routine immunizations and essential drugs, benefiting more than 100,000 people during the reporting period. Construction commenced on two new clinics in Goli, Sector North, and Majak, Sector South. Mobile health clinics provided primary health services to the communities in the remote areas of northern Abyei. Nutrition screening and support for patients with moderate and acute malnutrition covered a monthly average of 10,000 children under 5 years of age, as well as pregnant and lactating women, in the Abyei Area. In addition, awareness-raising and capacity-building activities were conducted, including on-the-job training for clinical staff and health awareness sessions.

21. A total of 9 new handpumps and boreholes were drilled, 14 handpumps were rehabilitated, 3 handpumps were upgraded to mini solar-powered water yards and 3 water yards were repaired, benefiting 25,000 people throughout the Area. A new water yard in the Amiet market, which will provide safe water to at least 3,000 people, was constructed. UNISFA has initiated 19 small-scale quick impact projects, including the installation of new handpumps and the rehabilitation of existing water yards. To date, 65 per cent of the projects have been completed, and the remaining projects are scheduled to be completed in May.

22. Kits containing education materials, including textbooks, early child development kits and tents for classrooms, were distributed in 42 primary schools throughout the Area. The food-for-education programme supported meals for 22,000 schoolchildren in 30 primary and secondary schools in southern and central Abyei. Other major activities included the establishment of children's clubs in northern Abyei, the provision of school recreational activities and psychosocial support to students and the upgrading and renovation of schools in the Area.

23. Recovery initiatives undertaken during the reporting period included the construction of a grinding mill in Athony, Sector South. The absence of development projects and the limited provision of basic services continued to pose challenges for the humanitarian community, with limited capacity and resources to address the needs.

### III. Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism

#### Progress on benchmarks

24. Notable progress has been made by the parties on five of the seven benchmarks outlined in Security Council resolution 2438 (2018) as conditions for the renewal of the support provided by UNISFA for the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism. Progress on each benchmark is outlined below.

#### *United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei and Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism patrols*

25. The Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism received 100 per cent approval for all aerial patrol requests from both parties. Clearance for ground patrols and landing in the Safe Demilitarized Border Zone was also given as and when requested, without delay. Of the 96 aerial patrols planned from April 2018 to February 2019, 80 were conducted and 16 cancelled owing to the non-availability of air assets or poor weather conditions. Of the 113 planned ground patrols, 95 were conducted while 18 were cancelled owing to adverse weather and poor road conditions.

#### *Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism team sites*

26. Three team sites have been set up in their permanent locations and are fully operational: As Sumayah/Wierayen, Safaha/Kiir Adem and Tishwin. For the Safaha/Kiir Adem team site, the Governor of Lol State successfully raised the awareness of the Paramount Chiefs, the County Commissioner of Gok Machar and the local community on 2 November. As a result, on 11 November, the County Commissioner met with the local authorities, who agreed to release land for the establishment of the team site. Subsequently, the land was released to the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism on 13 November. Preparation of the team site commenced on 14 November, and a ground monitoring patrol started on 31 January. With regard to As Sumayah/Wierayen, on 7 December, the Deputy Governor of Aweil East and other state assembly members unanimously agreed to the release of land for the establishment of the team site. On 16 December, preparations for the team site began, and ground monitoring patrols commenced on 31 January.

27. The intended team site location at Abu Qussa/Wunkur was observed to be occupied by armed elements who identified themselves as belonging to the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-Army in Opposition. Pending the withdrawal of the elements, a temporary team site was established at El Amira, 38 km from the selected location. On 7 January, an advance team from the temporary base at El Amira conducted another reconnaissance visit to Abu Qussa/Wunkur, where they were denied access and threatened with violence, should they return. UNISFA brought the issues to the attention of the parties, and they were discussed at the 18 March meeting of the Joint Political and Security Mechanism, where the parties agreed to engage with the group's leadership.

#### *Community sensitization to enable ground movement by the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei from Gok Machar into the Safe Demilitarized Border Zone and the establishment of the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism team sites as per benchmark 2*

28. As stated above, efforts to raise awareness were made by local authorities and two team sites in the 14 Mile Area were successfully established during the reporting period.

*Convene at least two meetings of the Joint Political and Security Mechanism, and for both parties to completely withdraw from the Safe Demilitarized Border Zone*

29. The Joint Political and Security Mechanism met twice in ordinary sessions on 12 October, in Juba, and 18 March, in Khartoum. With regard to the redeployment of forces outside the Safe Demilitarized Border Zone, the parties agreed, at the meeting of the Joint Political and Security Mechanism on 18 March, that any forces left in the Zone would be withdrawn within 30 days.

30. Until 9 December, the Sudan maintained a military camp at Lafa Mayon, located some 500 m from the Tishwin team site. The military were relocated 600 m from the northern limit of the Safe Demilitarized Border Zone and replaced by Sudanese police personnel. There are also two South Sudanese police camps in the Zone around Tishwin. Ground monitoring patrols from the Safaha/Kiir Adem and As Sumayah/Wierayen team sites observed the two camps of the South Sudan People's Defence Forces at Wierayen and Riankuel, although they do not appear to be well equipped. The mission has also observed a suspected South Sudanese police camp near As Sumayah.

#### *Border crossing corridors*

31. Neither Government has made an effort to develop a timeline for verifying the functioning of the 10 border crossings and free movement across the border. UNISFA can only confirm the operation of the Al-Hijelij/Bentiu and the As Sumayah crossings through monitoring by the Tishwin and As Sumayah/Wierayen team sites. A timeline of 30 days to open six of the border crossing corridors was agreed upon by the parties at the meeting of the Joint Political and Security Mechanism on 18 March.

#### *Customs and migration*

32. Neither Government has made any effort to establish customs and immigration offices and migration offices for at least two of the four phase I border crossings between the Sudan and South Sudan.

*Hold at least two meetings of the Joint Border Commission and Joint Demarcation Committee, with one meeting of each occurring prior to 15 March 2019*

33. The Joint Border Commission was reactivated and met in Juba on 11 and 12 February. It directed the Joint Demarcation Committee to prepare and demarcate agreed sections of the boundary line between the Sudan and South Sudan. The Joint Border Commission also directed the Joint Demarcation Committee to complete a detailed description of boundary lines on agreed, disagreed and claimed areas. From 23 to 25 February, the ninth meeting of the Joint Demarcation Committee was held in Khartoum. There, the parties agreed to prepare a budget for demarcating the agreed areas. At the tenth meeting of the Joint Demarcation Committee, held in Juba from 6 to 8 March, a budget was prepared for reconnaissance and demarcation of the agreed areas. The Joint Demarcation Committee presented this budget to the Joint Border Commission from 12 to 14 March in Addis Ababa. The Joint Border Commission requested the Joint Demarcation Committee to prepare a boundary delimitation document for the agreed boundary sections to complement the budget, as well as a detailed workplan for the demarcation.

#### **Challenges**

34. UNISFA has successfully established team sites in the Safe Demilitarized Border Zone and is able to determine the location of forces in the Zone. However, the mission is not mandated to instruct the forces to redeploy. The Joint Political and

Security Mechanism remains the mechanism for bringing together the Ministers of Defence to resolve these and other issues. The infrequency of the meetings creates a challenge for UNISFA, as despite its observation of violations, the mission is unable to persuade the parties to withdraw unilaterally.

#### **Notable developments**

35. In August 2018, South Sudan announced the resumption of oil production at the Toma South oilfield in the Safe Demilitarized Border Zone, following assistance from the Sudan to repair and operate the field. This stemmed from the Khartoum Declaration of 27 June 2018, in which South Sudanese parties agreed to collaborate with the Sudan to rehabilitate the Unity and Tharjiath oilfields. In January, South Sudan had reported that oil production had resumed further south in the Unity oilfields and that, along with Toma South, the combined production was at 35,000 barrels per day.

### **IV. Mission reconfiguration**

36. In accordance with resolution [2445 \(2018\)](#), a reduction of the troop ceiling through the withdrawal of 655 UNISFA troops from the Abyei Area will be implemented in two phases. In the first phase, 360 troops had been planned to be repatriated by 15 March. However, owing to the helicopter crash on 9 February (see para. 52 below) and the resulting shortage in air assets, the troops will now be repatriated from 22 April to 8 May. The second phase of troop reduction will commence once the formed police unit is deployed to the Abyei Area.

37. In February, the Police Division selected Jordan as the contributing country for the formed police unit on the basis of rigorous suitability criteria, including capability, ability to deploy during the current mandate period, language skills and the inclusion of female officers. Before the deployment of the formed police unit, Jordan must send a delegation to the mission area to conduct a technical reconnaissance visit. UNISFA sought visas for the delegation on 12 March and has yet to receive a reply from the Government of the Sudan. The reconnaissance visit is essential and part of the deployment procedures to ensure that the unit is deployed to the area with all the requisite equipment and items.

38. With regard to the increase in individual police officers, the Police Division screened 214 nominees from 12 police-contributing countries. In accordance with standard selection requirements, 141 were recommended for deployment with UNISFA. Nevertheless, the delay in the issuance of visas has resulted in no increase in the deployment of individual police officers.

#### **Proposed civilian component**

39. Through the independent review undertaken by General Martin Luther Agwai, in 2018, it was recognized that UNISFA needed to be given a more significant role in supporting the political process. Subsequently, in the reconfiguration proposal, submitted to the Security Council on 20 August ([S/2018/778](#)), it was recommended that a strong link be created with the African Union High-level Implementation Panel in order to follow up on commitments and to help to organize and support the meetings that are essential for political progress. In line with the request made in resolution [2445 \(2018\)](#), a civilian component is proposed, as described below, to allow the mission to address the current realities by supporting the parties, the African Union High-level Implementation Panel and the African Union Commission to advance day-to-day solutions. In order to achieve this, the mission needs political affairs capability, and it is recommended that a small political affairs section be

created, with nine posts at various levels. Three posts of political affairs officer (P-3/P-4) are proposed, one in Khartoum, one in Juba and one in Addis Ababa. The officers in the Sudan and South Sudan would monitor relevant political developments and establish a good relationship with their counterparts in the Governments. The officer based in Addis Ababa would be the link to the African Union High-level Implementation Panel and the African Union Commission to bridge the gap with the mission on the ground and provide support, as needed.

40. Two political officers (P-3/P-4) are proposed to be based at the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism sector headquarters, one at Kadugli and the other at Gok Machar. The officers would monitor developments on the Safe Demilitarized Border Zone and border demarcation activities. It is envisaged that they would be the focal points for the mission's assistance to the African Union Border Programme as it attempts to demarcate the agreed areas of the border, in accordance with the recent decisions of the Joint Demarcation Committee. Another three political affairs officers (P-3/P-4) would be based at mission headquarters in Abyei town, and all eight political affairs officers would report to the head of the Political Affairs Section (P-5), the ninth post. The main responsibilities of the Section would be to monitor developments, in particular those having an impact on border issues, to provide analysis and to advise the senior management of UNISFA on the best ways to support the political process.

## V. Operations

41. As at 8 April, the UNISFA military component stood at 4,504 personnel, composed of 4,050 men and 454 women (4,239 troops, 141 military observers and 124 staff officers) against an authorized ceiling of 4,140. The UNISFA police strength stood at 40 individual officers, 29 men and 11 women, against an authorized total of 345. With regard to the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism, the UNISFA military component stood at 585 personnel, comprising 512 men and 73 women (557 troops, 17 military observers and 11 staff officers). The number of civilian staff stood at 139 international staff, 33 United Nations Volunteers and 76 national staff, against authorized totals of 161 international staff, 33 United Nations Volunteers and 86 national staff. During the reporting period, the mission completed the rotation of two infantry battalions and one utility helicopter unit, with a total of 2,101 troops (1,023 inbound and 1,078 outbound) and the transportation of 128 tons of inbound and outbound troop luggage through Kadugli airport.

42. During the reporting period, UNISFA conducted 16,618 ground patrols in Abyei, 10,931 during the day and 5,887 at night, including 1,391 joint patrols by the military and police components. The mission also conducted 21 joint aerial patrols with the national monitors of the Sudan and South Sudan over the Abyei Area during the same period. For the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism, the mission undertook 43 aerial monitoring missions over the Safe Demilitarized Border Zone. It also conducted 43 ground monitoring patrols from the Tishwin team site, and the newly established team sites at Safaha/Kiir Adem and As Sumayah/Wierayen conducted six ground monitoring patrols each.

### Issuance of visas

43. The Government of the Sudan issued 148 visas for UNISFA personnel from 16 October to 8 April, while 168 visas remained pending (20 for military personnel, 116 for police personnel, 2 for Mine Action Service contractors, 19 for official visitors, 4 for international consultants and 7 for contractors). Mission leadership

followed up regularly with government officials in Khartoum and sent formal correspondence to urge the issuance of visas.

### **Gender**

44. UNISFA continued to seek opportunities to increase the number of women in the mission, including by shortlisting all qualified female applicants for vacancies. During the reporting period, a civilian Women and Child Protection Adviser was deployed to the Abyei Area. The adviser has already engaged with women leaders from the Ngok Dinka and Misseriya communities as part of the mission's efforts to build partnerships and collaborate with the communities on issues relating to gender and women's rights.

45. UNISFA, in collaboration with United Nations agencies, funds and programmes, held two events in Abyei and Diffra, on 9 and 19 March, respectively, to commemorate International Women's Day. Aimed at UNISFA personnel and local women leaders from both communities, the events included two workshops for 16 women leaders from the Ngok Dinka community and 25 community leaders (17 women leaders, 6 girl leaders and 2 male community leaders) from the Misseriya community. Through the workshops, awareness was raised of Security Council resolution [1325 \(2000\)](#) on women and peace and security, and practical roles for women as agents for peace in conflict and post-conflict situations were highlighted. In addition, the police component undertook 35 gender awareness campaigns with male and female members of the community protection committee and the joint peace committee. The campaigns were focused on gender equality, gender mainstreaming, the impact of gender on conflict resolution and the inclusion of women in the peace process. The campaigns were aimed at empowering women to take an active role in community conflict resolution mechanisms, in particular the community protection committee and the joint peace committee. The police component worked actively with community leaders to encourage more women to join such mechanisms.

### **United Nations Mine Action Service operations**

46. During the reporting period, 13 explosive remnants of war and one anti-personnel mine were recovered by Mine Action Service teams in the Abyei area and subsequently destroyed in controlled demolitions. The Mine Action Service is also clearing a reported minefield in southern Abyei. In the Abyei Area, the Mine Action Service destroyed 16 weapons and 362 rounds of small arms ammunition confiscated by UNISFA troops in line with the mission's mandate and continued to maintain the UNISFA storage facility for weapons and ammunition.

47. At the start of every dry season, the Mine Action Service clears the most strategic roads and routes, identified by the mission management. This is necessary, as a majority of the routes are waterlogged during the rainy season, creating the possibility that explosive remnants of war may move or be uncovered. As a result of the survey and clearance operations, 293,801 m<sup>2</sup> of land and 120.48 km of roads were assessed as safe from explosive hazards. In addition, the Mine Action Service conducted 53 mine risk education sessions for the Abyei population, reaching 1,643 people (447 boys, 366 girls, 467 men and 363 women) during the reporting period.

48. The Mine Action Service remained essential for the operations of the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism, demining and preparing locations for the establishment of the new team sites, as well as patrol routes. In this regard, the Mine Action Service cleared 255,302 m<sup>2</sup> of land and 40.885 km of routes. In addition, the Mine Action Service supports the ground monitoring missions from the three team sites in the Safe Demilitarized Border Zone.

## **Infrastructure**

49. As is its usual practice, to expand the mission's footprint, at the onset of dry season, UNISFA established temporary operating bases at Um Khariat and Alal. Company operating bases remained deployed at Farouk, Diffra, Goli and Todach (Sector North), Dokura/Rumajak, Noong and Abyei (Sector Centre) and Marial Achak, Athony, Banton, Tajalei and Agok (Sector South). In the Safe Demilitarized Border Zone, UNISFA maintained the Tishwin team site and established the As Safhah and As Sumayah Wierayen team sites during the reporting period.

50. Infrastructure and environmental installations upgrades continued at all UNISFA locations. New accommodation facilities for military staff officers and observers and the police component at the mission headquarters are at an advanced stage of completion. Drainage in the Abyei camp is being improved as the construction of concrete drainage is continuing. Other infrastructure work, carried out to improve conditions in the Abyei camp, has been suspended, owing to a shortage of marram and fuel deliveries from the Sudan. Two major road renovation projects have not commenced, although contracts have been awarded, as clearance by the Government of the Sudan has yet to be granted. This will continue to jeopardize the mission's ability to move and resupply, in particular during the rainy season, which will commence in June or July.

51. Of the 33 wastewater treatment plants planned for all UNISFA bases, 18 were installed during the financial year 2017/18. The installation of the remaining 15 plants in the current financial year, 2018/19, was completed substantially during the current dry season. The remaining electrical and water connections and backfilling in eight locations were completed on 31 March.

52. During the reporting period, UNISFA reduced its fleet by one fixed wing aircraft, in line with the United Nations initiative to lower the aviation budget. As of 1 November, the mission operated two dedicated fixed-wing aircraft and one regional jet on a cost-sharing basis, with the United Nations Mission in South Sudan paying 60 per cent and UNISFA paying 40 per cent. This has negatively affected the ability of the mission to maintain flexibility, in particular for medical evacuations. The mission continued to operate four helicopters, two of which were through a letter of assist from the Government of Ethiopia. On 9 February, one of the aircraft provided through the letter of assist crash-landed in Abyei town, killing three peacekeepers, injuring another three and damaging a parked helicopter. Subsequently, the mission had to request additional helicopters. The United Nations Mission in South Sudan provided UNISFA with one helicopter, and an additional aircraft was received from a contractor on 17 March.

53. UNISFA is improving its technology operation and services continuously by enhancing its infrastructure. Upgrades, fail-safes and redundancies of equipment have been initiated to ensure that incidents have a minimal impact. Through coordination with the Global Service Centre and Service for Geospatial, Information and Telecommunications Technologies staff at other missions, the Service was able to repair in a timely fashion critical damage to wireless Internet services caused by a lightning strike in September 2018. A major objective of the Service's infrastructure enhancement is to address welfare concerns, including limited capabilities for emergency medical evacuation, as UNISFA is located in an isolated environment, with minimal facilities and communication services.

## **Culture of performance**

54. UNISFA developed a performance management system closely aligned with its enterprise risk management framework. The intention is to measure and improve

outcomes relating to force mobility, the environment, infrastructure development and mandate implementation. The mission has developed metrics and targets that are tracked and reported upon to end users, managers, mission leadership and United Nations Headquarters.

### **Other operational issues**

55. Since 3 January, in Abyei town, some local employees of the camp management contractor have been on strike over their perceived lower wages and have at times blocked the entrance of the UNISFA headquarters. The employees had previously worked as local individual contractors hired to operate and maintain the wastewater treatment plant. However, the mission found that relying on local individual contractors for such operations exposed the mission to risk, owing to a lack of adequate skills and the lack of an accountability framework. In order to address this risk, a camp management contractor was deployed and started work in January.

56. Once the camp management contractor was deployed, many of the locals who had previously been individual contractors were taken on by the camp management contractor as its employees. The local employees of the camp management contractor are paid more than local employees of similar United Nations contractors in other peace operations in the Sudan and South Sudan. However, their grievance remains that the wages are lower than those that they were being paid as individual contractors. Despite the continued strike, all life support functions, such as power generation, water purification, wastewater treatment and waste disposal, have been sustained through contingency plans. The absence of the employees has had an impact on minor improvements to camp infrastructure that require large numbers of skilled and semi-skilled workers.

## **VI. Financial aspects**

57. The General Assembly, by its resolution [72/289](#), appropriated the amount of \$263.9 million for the maintenance of the Force for the period from 1 July 2018 to 30 June 2019. As at 26 March, unpaid assessed contributions to the Special Account for UNISFA amounted to \$47.5 million. Total outstanding assessed contributions for all peacekeeping operations as at that date amounted to \$2,246.9 million. Troop costs have been reimbursed for the period up to 30 September, while the costs of contingent-owned equipment have been reimbursed for the period up to 30 September, in accordance with the quarterly payment schedule.

## **VII. Observations and recommendations**

58. UNISFA has continued to play a stabilizing role in the Abyei Area and along the border region between the Sudan and South Sudan. I commend the Mission for its proactive stance, in particular its continued efforts towards engagement and mediation between the Ngok Dinka and Misseriya communities. This demonstrates the mission's commitment to the well-being of the people of the Abyei Area and the border areas.

59. I also reiterate my praise for the commitment of the two communities in the Abyei Area to peace and reconciliation. In particular, I commend the community leaders who have weighed in against spoilers and continued, undeterred by the lack of strong engagement between the two Governments, to achieve a good degree of peaceful coexistence. The communities, supported by UNISFA, have created a conducive environment for the two countries to create enduring peaceful relations by resolving their border issues. Nonetheless, the Abyei Area continues to face law and

order challenges and, in this regard, I urge South Sudan to move forward with the joint planning exercise for the establishment of the Abyei Police Service. In the same regard, I urge the Sudan to issue visas expeditiously, in particular to allow the increase in UNISFA police personnel in order to address rule of law issues in the Abyei Area.

60. While the commitment of the local population to preserve the peace is evident, neither the Government of the Sudan nor that of South Sudan has made any significant efforts to consolidate the gains achieved. Furthermore, recent reports of heightened political rhetoric in communities is gradually becoming a worrying trend. I urge the Governments of the Sudan and South Sudan to discourage the communities from taking any action that could jeopardize the fragile peace achieved in the Abyei Area.

61. Notable progress has been made by the two countries on five of the seven benchmarks set by the Security Council to advance the border demarcation. However, the lack of meaningful progress by both Governments in addressing critical issues, such as the completion of the withdrawal of forces from the Safe Demilitarized Border Zone and the full establishment of border crossing corridors, as well as customs and migration offices, has continued to create challenges for UNISFA in providing support for the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism. Both countries should focus on consolidating the gains achieved by UNISFA and resolve the deadlock over the border issues.

62. Notwithstanding the difficult internal circumstances that both countries face, relations between the Sudan and South Sudan have improved significantly in the past year, in particular through the role of the Sudan in facilitating the revitalized peace agreement reached by the South Sudanese parties in September 2018, as well as the resumption of joint oil operations. I urge the two countries to further this positive trajectory for the benefit of their border communities. The efforts of both countries remain essential to progress, and I ask the two Governments to conduct discussions at the ministerial level to review the implementation of their agreements. I pledge the support of the United Nations for such an endeavour. I also call upon the members of the Security Council to pursue diplomatic efforts to impress upon the two countries the importance and urgency of progress towards resolving their border issues. An open-ended mandate for UNISFA should not be acceptable, nor is it affordable for the international community.

63. UNISFA was established as an interim security force in 2011, and the operating environment for the mission has changed over the past eight years. In this regard, the mission must adapt to the situation on the ground, as well as preserve the important gains that it has achieved and, most important, reinvigorate the political process, which would allow the mission to develop its exit strategy. The dispute over Abyei and the border region between the Sudan and South Sudan must be prevented from becoming another frozen conflict. Our priority must remain improving the lives of the people living in these areas.

64. The presence of the mission remains essential to the stability of the Abyei Area and border region, and I therefore recommend that the mandate of UNISFA be extended for another six months, with the expectation that both Governments make progress towards the commitments they have set for themselves in their agreements. I also ask the Security Council to view the progress described in the present report as only part of what could be achieved if UNISFA were enhanced to provide further support to the parties and the African Union. In this regard, I request that the Council positively consider the recommendations on enhancing the mission's civilian component in order to advance its support to the African Union Commission and the African Union High-level Implementation Panel, as well as to the two parties.

65. Lastly, I extend my sincere gratitude and appreciation to the outgoing acting Head of Mission and Force Commander, Major General Gebre Adhana Woldezgu,

under whose tenure the mission has implemented its mandate successfully and further operationalized the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism by establishing two team sites in the Safe Demilitarized Border Zone. I am particularly grateful to all UNISFA personnel for their efforts to maintain peace and stability under challenging conditions. I also extend my gratitude to the African Union High-level Implementation Panel and the African Union Commission for their stewardship of the peace process.

