



# 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 [2497 \(2019\)](#), 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/2019/817](#)), from 16 October 2019 to 15 April 2020. The report provides updates on, inter alia, political developments, the security situation, the operating environment, the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism, intercommunal dynamics, human rights monitoring, mission performance, progress made on the reconfiguration of the mission, and the participation of women in all aspects of operations.

#### II. Abyei

##### Political developments

2. The reporting period saw significant political developments both in the Sudan and in South Sudan. Both countries are in the midst of political transitions. In South Sudan, some progress was made in the implementation of the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan with the announcement of the cabinet of South Sudan's Revitalized Transitional Government of National Unity, while in the Sudan, the Sovereign Council and the transitional Government undertook extensive talks to overcome internal divisions and facilitate the transition. UNISFA welcomed the developments and supported them by ensuring the Abyei Area remained stable and secure. UNISFA leadership continued to engage with the Governments of the Sudan and South Sudan in order to facilitate the implementation of the pending aspects of their previous agreements and the UNISFA mandate. UNISFA leadership focused its interactions with government interlocutors at the highest level on matters related to security and the protection of civilians, as well as on challenges, including armed attacks, and proposed mitigation measures that would require the support and approval of the respective Governments.

3. In Khartoum, UNISFA leadership met with the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Asma Mohamed Abdalla on 13 November 2019. On 2 December, it met separately with the first Vice-President of the Sovereign Council, Lieutenant General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, and Abyei Joint Oversight Committee Co-Chair (Sudan), Ahmad

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Salih Saluhah; and on 29 December, it met separately with the Prime Minister of the Sudan, Abdalla Hamdok, and the Minister of Defence, Lieutenant General Jamal Omar. During the interactions, UNISFA leadership underscored the need to facilitate the deployment of the authorized additional United Nations police and formed police units, to appoint a civilian Deputy Head of Mission and to operationalize the Athony airstrip to reduce UNISFA transport costs and logistical challenges. The Prime Minister, as well as the Vice-President of the Sovereign Council, advised that a task force with relevant Government officials would study the concerns and revert in due course. UNISFA leadership also presented its plans to readjust its deployment, establish checkpoints and reactivate the Joint Military Observation Committee and joint military observer teams, in order to curb incidents of violence, including those perpetrated by armed groups. UNISFA leadership also discussed these matters on 13 January 2020 in Juba with a South Sudanese delegation led by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of South Sudan, Awut Deng Acuil, and the Minister of Defence, Kuol Manyang Juuk.

4. In consultation with relevant officials in Khartoum and Juba, UNISFA drafted the agenda for a joint meeting, which was held in Juba under the auspices of the Joint Political and Security Mechanism on 19 February, a few weeks after the attacks in the Nainai-Kolom area on 19 and 22 January, during which 36 civilians were killed. During the meeting, which included members of the Mechanism and representatives of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and of Defense of both countries and representatives of the Abyei Joint Oversight Committee, progress was made on a number of issues, including the establishment of checkpoints, the introduction of “search and seize” operations and the deployment of joint military observer teams through the Abyei Area. Both parties, in their outcome document, urged the Committee to resume regular meetings. Other matters that UNISFA included on the agenda, such as the use of Athony airstrip, the formalization of protocol regarding the handover of suspects with UNISFA, the issue of Diffra oil police and the establishment of a joint investigation team into the Nainai-Kolom armed attack, were taken on board by both parties. However, it was decided to refer these matters to their respective presidencies for further consideration.

5. On 5 March, UNISFA invited both parties to attend a consultative meeting with Abyei Joint Oversight Committee stakeholders in Khartoum on 24 March as part of its efforts to maintain necessary engagement with and between the parties, to update the parties on urgent security matters and to consider practical measures for the revitalization of the Committee. In the light of the ongoing coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, the proposed meeting had to be postponed, alongside the meeting of the Joint Political and Security Mechanism that was slated to be held in Khartoum on 25 March.

6. At the local level, in order to address heightened intercommunity tensions in Abyei, the most recent incidents of which were the Nainai-Kolom attacks of 19 and 22 January, UNISFA leadership engaged with the administrative and traditional leaders as well as with the joint community peace committee, which brings together representatives of the Ngok Dinka and Misseriya every week. UNISFA briefed them on security developments within the Abyei Area, including those related to the seasonal migration, on mitigation measures that UNISFA intended to put in place to curb violence, and on the episodic presence of armed groups within the UNISFA area of responsibility. UNISFA also informed community representatives of discussions held in both Khartoum and Juba and the outcomes of the 19 February meeting of the Joint Political and Security Mechanism meeting held in Juba and urged both sides to maintain constructive dialogue.

7. To drive the local peace processes forward in the migration season, UNISFA proposed to convene a traditional leaders’ conference. While interlocutors in the

capitals and within the Abyei Area agreed in principle, the Abyei Joint Oversight Committee Co-Chair (Sudan) expressed reservations regarding timing and the composition of the delegations. This notwithstanding, the conference, comprising both Ngok Dinka and Misseriya traditional leaders, including the Paramount Chiefs, Bulabek Deng Kuol and Nazar Mukhtar Babo Nimr, was held in Diffra, Sector North, on 16 March. The two sides acknowledged the need for peace and agreed to preserve the status quo until a follow-up meeting on 1 April, which was cancelled owing to the COVID-19 pandemic. The follow-up meeting was held in Diffra on 9 April, but no agreement was reached on the southern migration of the pastoralists. These meetings were a relative success in that they brought together the traditional leaders of the two sides in the aftermath of the Kolom incident. They were also the first meetings in that format since November 2017, when the leaders met in Addis Ababa during the Abyei Joint Oversight Committee meeting held there.

### **Conflict dynamics and security situation**

8. The security situation in the Abyei Area remains fragile, with episodes of heightened tensions between the Ngok Dinka and the Misseriya communities, an increase in criminality and the presence of armed elements in the UNISFA area of responsibility. On 7 November 2019, an armed group, suspected to be Misseriya, killed seven Ngok Dinka at Myordol and two at Dungop, Sector South. On 24 November and 8 December 2019 an armed group, suspected to be Misseriya, attacked and killed Ngok Dinka residents at Leu, Sector South. A total of five Ngok Dinka were killed in these incidents. On 9 April, three Misseriya were killed in the area of Marial Achack.

9. January saw a rise in attacks across intercommunal lines. In a major escalation, on 19 January 2020, three Misseriya were killed at Nainai by attackers suspected to be Ngok Dinka; and, on 22 January 2020, 33 Dinka were killed by Misseriya armed elements at Kolom in what is believed to be a retaliatory attack. Five Misseriya, suspected to be linked to the attack, including three juveniles, were apprehended by UNISFA and handed over to the representatives of the Government of the Sudan. While UNISFA conducted an internal investigation into these attacks, both parties have yet to confirm whether a joint investigation will be conducted, as discussed during the meeting of the Joint Political and Security Mechanism held in Juba on 19 February 2020.

10. In addition to these fatalities, some 28 individuals were wounded in other armed attacks, including 14 children. A total of 4 civilians died as a result of fire, 2 were murdered and 10 were reported missing. The mission recorded the first carjacking incident in many years, when on 15 February 2020, a vehicle contracted by the Mine Action Service was commandeered by an armed Misseriya in the vicinity of Goli, Sector North. On 18 March 2020, an armed man fired five rounds at a military observer patrol team while the team was returning from its morning patrols near Goli, Sector North. One of the military observers sustained injuries from fragments of a broken window glass. In addition, on 30 March 2020, a UNISFA topographic survey team was blocked by eight locals, 4 km north of Goli. The team observed that one of the two vehicles used by the perpetrator was a white four-door pickup truck with the logo of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) on the sides. Further investigations will be conducted into the alleged circumstances of the use of a UNICEF vehicle.

11. UNISFA strove to contain insecurity and to maintain the Abyei Area as a weapons-free zone through rapid response and presence in sensitive areas. However, the movement of armed men reported by the local population on several occasions during the reporting period remained a source of concern since they increasingly enter the Abyei Area from the west, east and south-eastern flanks where UNISFA is not

deployed, commit crimes, such as cattle rustling, murder and kidnapping, and subsequently exit the Area. In addition, some cattle herders entering the Area during the dry season were reported to be armed. On 19 March 2020, a violent clash occurred between Nuer and Misseriya youth, as the latter were grazing cattle north-west of Mayom County (outside the Abyei Area). A total of 10 Nuer and 12 Misseriya reportedly died in the clash. The Misseriya claimed that the Nuer attackers were aided by the Ngok Dinka. The mission has therefore reviewed its concept of operations in the dry season and has increased its foot and mobile patrols, with two of the four approved permanent check points already established at Dokura/Rumajak (Sector Centre) and Todach (Sector North). Work is in progress on the other two permanent checkpoints – at Farouk (Sector North) and Agok (Sector South) – as well as on mobile check points. Three new temporary operating bases are being established at Shegeg, Rumamier and Leu to prevent threats from the east and south-eastern flanks.

### **Intercommunity dialogue**

12. During the reporting period, UNISFA continued to support intercommunity dialogue, in particular through the weekly meetings of the joint community peace committee to discuss cases of murder, livestock rustling, blood money compensation and seasonal migration issues. In late 2019 and early 2020, UNISFA engaged extensively with both communities to address tensions linked to disagreements on the southern movement of the Misseriya pastoralists. UNISFA supported the communities in overcoming the deadlock through a series of three pre-migration dialogues along the three migration routes at Noong, Sector Centre, Dungop, Sector Centre, and Tejalei, Sector South, held on 13, 14 and 16 January 2020, respectively. A final meeting in Marial Achack, Sector South, during which a comprehensive agreement was expected to be signed, was cancelled as a result of the Nainai-Kolom incidents. Dialogue between the communities was suspended and only resumed on 6 February 2020 in the joint community peace committee at the behest of UNISFA. The Misseriya agreed to put on hold the transhumance pending the establishment of a joint team to investigate the Nainai-Kolom incidents. Dialogue was again suspended on 15 February following the decision of South Sudan to restore the original pre-2015 10 states, in which a reference was made to the Abyei Area as a special administrative area of South Sudan. Following lengthy discussions in Khartoum, where Misseriya traditional leaders regrouped following the 15 February announcement, the latter agreed to take part in the peace conference that UNISFA organized in Diffra on 16 March 2020 (see para. 7 above).

13. UNISFA continued to implement quick-impact projects to support the local population and help the implementation of the mission's mandate. The 15 quick-impact projects are currently implemented under the 2019/20 budget and are scheduled to be completed by the end of June 2020. They comprise five solar water reservoirs and various improvements, including at four primary schools, a hospital, a meeting hall, a community hall and a facility run by the community protection committee. The allotted annual amount of \$500,000 and the number of projects are distributed equally between the two communities. A quarter of the current projects target facilities that are used jointly by the Ngok Dinka and the Misseriya. About 70 per cent of the prospective beneficiaries of all projects are youth and women.

### **Rule of law**

14. Given the absence of government rule of law institutions, UNISFA continued to place emphasis on improving the existing traditional conflict-resolution arrangements. To enhance the capacity of local traditional institutions to dispense justice, UNISFA continued to improve the understanding of the traditional judges of judicial procedures applicable during the arrest, detention and fair trial of an offender

accused and charged with a crime. Extensive advocacy to improve traditional conflict-resolution mechanisms was carried out with traditional chiefs, intercommunal justice representatives, youth, women and members of the community protection committees and the joint protection committee. The focus was on the role and responsibility of all segments of society in protecting human rights, especially the rights of women and children. The engagement with the Joint Traditional Court at Amiet led to calls by practitioners for the review and reform of the current use of restorative justice principles involving payment of blood money, and to calls for their replacement with other means of punishment, including criminal prosecution of offenders to stem the increased criminality in the Area.

15. The United Nations police component conducted 559 joint patrols, 500 co-locations as community interactive and confidence-building mechanisms, 128 independent security observation patrols and 13 air reconnaissance patrols in collaboration with the military observers and national monitors from both the Sudan and South Sudan. A total of 759 crimes were committed during the current reporting period, compared with 586 during the previous. United Nations police conducted a total of 39 crime awareness-related activities, including meetings with community protection committees and campaigns against drug abuse, on environmental awareness, on the prevention of fire outbreak, on the prevention of sexual and gender-based violence, and on gender awareness in schools, villages and marketplaces. They also conducted 95 visits to the three detention facilities in Abyei, Agok and the Amiet common market together with members of the community protection committees and of the joint protection committee, advising and mentoring on best practices in the management of detention centres. They were also able to gather and share with the UNISFA military component information that shortened the response time for incidents.

16. United Nations police, in collaboration with the International Organization for Migration, continued to conduct the assessment that had started on 5 November 2019, in all 13 community protection committees and the joint protection committee station located at the Amiet common market. Given that community protection committees and the joint protection committee comprise volunteers, the aim of the assessment is to understand the challenges they face while performing law and order tasks. The results of the assessment will inform UNISFA and other stakeholders of the needs of the community protection committees and the joint protection committee so that their efficiency can be enhanced.

17. The current strength of the United Nations police component is 37 personnel, comprising 11 women and 26 men, against an authorized total of 640, comprising 148 police officers and three formed police units, in accordance with paragraph 5 of Security Council resolution [2497 \(2019\)](#). Nine police officers left the mission during March 2020. The tour of duty has been extended until 30 June for those whose tour of duty ends in April, owing to restrictions of movement in and out of the Area imposed by the Government of the Sudan as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. During the reporting period, 23 police officers, out of the initial pending list of 130, were issued Sudanese visas. On 17 March, UNISFA sent a note verbale to the Government informing it of the list of 107 pending Sudanese entry visas. UNISFA also sent a note verbale to the Government requesting visas for 25 of the 107 police officers in order to maintain a ceiling of 50 following the end of tour of duty of some of them. This represents the police ceiling established by the Security Council in its resolution [1990 \(2011\)](#) and approved by the Government of the Sudan.

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

18. Limited or non-existent basic services coupled with new armed attacks on the civilian population and large-scale floods continued to create further humanitarian

needs in the Abyei Area. Agencies, funds and programmes of the United Nations system, in coordination with non-governmental organizations, continued to provide humanitarian and recovery assistance to 202,000 vulnerable people within the Area. This included 107,000 people from the Ngok Dinka community, 9,000 people displaced from the neighbouring states in South Sudan, 37,000 people from the Misseriya community, 6,000 other South Sudanese (mainly Nuer), 38,000 seasonal Misseriya pastoralists and 5,000 Falata nomads who had entered the Area since October 2019. It has been observed that the late arrival of Misseriya pastoralists and the late harvest, owing to the possible effects of climate change, have heightened existing community resource-based tensions.

19. In the aftermath of the Nainai-Kolom incidents, about 800 families (approximately 4,000 people) were displaced from the surrounding areas of Noong, Dokura and Amiet villages in Sector South. In the wake of the attack, humanitarian partners provided relief aid to the displaced persons across all sectors in Abyei town.

20. Some 8,000 families (approximately 40,000 people) who had been registered earlier under the flood response, received shelter and non-food items, emergency food, and health and nutrition assistance from the humanitarian community in Abyei. In addition to the emergency food security response, the humanitarian community continued to build resilience against food insecurity for 75,000 farmers in central, eastern and southern parts of the Abyei Area. Such support will continue in order to strengthen the ability of local communities to withstand shocks and reduce poverty. Moreover, 2,000 flood-affected families have benefited from further assistance within a resilience building framework.

21. More than 111,000 vulnerable people benefited from various food assistance-related activities, including general food distribution for internally displaced persons and school meals for children in central and southern parts of the Abyei Area. Efforts to support community livelihood activities continued, with over 110,000 livestock vaccinated against various diseases and over 20,000 livestock treated, benefiting over 6,000 households. Training was provided in the following: basic animal health, handling and processing of fish, beekeeping and honey production, poultry production, post-harvest handling, establishment of fruit tree nurseries, vegetable production and business skills.

22. In terms of health and nutrition coverage, a total of 13 primary and 2 secondary health-care facilities throughout the Abyei Area remained operational. Four health facilities in the north of the Area were not fully operational due to operational challenges. Moreover, the work conducted by some of the health facilities in the south-east and north-west were interrupted owing to insecurity and the presence of armed elements. A small new health facility was constructed in the Amiet common market. In addition, humanitarian organizations provided routine immunizations and health support, including consultations and the provision of essential drugs, benefiting some 120,000 people. Nutrition screening and support for patients with moderate and acute malnutrition in the Area were provided to an average of 11,000 children under 5 years of age per month, as well as pregnant and lactating women. The health and nutrition services in most facilities continued to be supported by awareness-raising and capacity-building activities, on-the-job training for clinical staff, the training of elementary health-service personnel at the village level and sessions on health.

23. The installation of 15 new handpumps and drilling of boreholes provided enhanced access to water. In addition, 10 handpumps were rehabilitated and 7 handpumps were upgraded to mini-solar water reservoirs. These efforts benefited 20,000 people, including new internally displaced persons in Abyei town. A total of 28 temporary latrines were also built for the new internally displaced persons in Abyei

town. In order to mitigate the challenges of lack of ownership and proper management of water points, the humanitarian community, in consultation with local communities, identified water management committees for most water reservoirs and provided training on water systems, the roles and responsibilities of committee members, leadership and conflict management. Plans were put in place to conduct technical training on the basic maintenance of water taps and generators once the rehabilitation work of all water reservoirs is completed.

24. The school feeding programme provided meals for over 23,000 schoolchildren in 34 primary and secondary schools in southern and central Abyei. Psychosocial support to school children through child-friendly schools and the upgrading of schools in the north of Abyei Area continued. The rehabilitation of some schools was postponed because of floods and the presence of armed elements. Once that work has been completed, the feeding programme will be introduced in those schools, together with the provision of recreational activities and individual psychosocial support and home visits.

25. Owing to heavy rains and floods, recovery initiatives undertaken during the reporting period were limited to the development of the Abyei joint programme proposal and four infrastructure projects in accessible areas. Protection, in particular of children and against gender-based violence, remained the key challenge owing to the limited implementation capacity in the area.

#### **Women and peace and security**

26. Women in the Abyei Area have remained absent from decision-making processes. To promote women's participation, UNISFA engaged and empowered women through regular consultations, meetings and training and by facilitating access to information. Other efforts included targeted training and advocacy with traditional and local leaders to promote women's participation at all levels of decision-making, including conflict prevention and resolution processes. A positive result of this engagement was that a woman was again appointed to the new membership of the 14 Ngok Dinka joint community peace committee in November 2019. UNISFA efforts also resulted in the wider involvement of women in awareness campaigns on women's rights, enabling them to voice their opinions on issues affecting them and to demand change. In meetings with diplomats and members of the international community visiting Abyei (diplomats of the United States of America, based in New York and in Khartoum, on 11 December 2019; and officials of the Korea International Cooperation Agency, on 13 January 2020), women drew attention to how the conflict had impacted them disproportionately and called on the international community to pay attention to women's specific needs. They also called for political engagement to find a solution for Abyei.

27. During the reporting period, UNISFA recorded seven cases of sexual and gender-based violence involving seven victims, five of whom were minors. The cases of rape involved six victims, including four minors, while one case, involving a minor, was an attempted rape. Women also reported an increase in the number of primary school dropouts among girls from the Ngok Dinka community as a result of pregnancies and economic hardships. Most of the cases appear to have been unreported due to stigma and cultural barriers as well as a preference for settling cases between families as opposed to reporting them to the community protection committees. In response to the situation, UNISFA enhanced its engagement with local communities on the prevention of and response to sexual and gender-based violence. UNISFA also followed up on cases of sexual and gender-based violence that are transferred to traditional courts to ensure observance of international human rights standards.

28. UNISFA supported women civil society organizations in commemorating the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence campaign in both the Ngok Dinka and Misseriya communities. Activities included an awareness-raising campaign across the Abyei Area on the prevention of sexual and gender-based violence and two events to launch the campaign that attracted about 600 persons from both communities. The activities targeted local community members, including traditional and local leaders who made concrete commitments to promote and protect women's rights, including the promotion of women's participation at all levels of decision-making.

29. Other activities targeting traditional and local leaders, women and youth included two workshops on HIV/AIDS, a workshop on women and development and two workshops on sexual and gender-based violence, highlighting the legal framework for both the Sudan and South Sudan in the context of women's rights. Positive outcomes of the 16 days of activities included the engagement of women leaders from the Ngok Dinka community in primary school campaigns on pregnancy prevention and the prevention of related expulsions from schools, in conformity with the South Sudan legal framework. In addition, women and youth from the Ngok Dinka community identified traditional customs and practices in the Abyei Area that were inconsistent with the South Sudan legal framework. This effort prompted women leaders from the Ngok Dinka community to call on their traditional leaders to abide by the national legal framework in the adjudication of cases involving women and children. The Misseriya highlighted women's rights in the Sudan Constitutional Declaration of 2019 which contains specific references to the implementation of Security Council resolution [1325 \(2000\)](#) with regard to women's participation and calls for repealing all national laws that discriminate against women. As a result, Misseriya women reference the Declaration when advocating their rights, in particular in the context of their participation at the decision-making level.

30. UNISFA continued to strengthen accountability for the implementation of the women and peace and security agenda and continued to systematically document and monitor its implementation in the mission. These efforts translated into greater awareness of the agenda and strengthened capacity to mainstream gender into various areas of work across the mission. Specific activities included the ongoing drafting of a mission-wide action plan for gender mainstreaming which, when finalized, will promote coherence and direction in the implementation of the women and peace and security agenda.

#### **Mine Action Service operations**

31. Mine Action Service teams conducted route assessment, verification and clearance and assessed 278.8 km of routes as being safe from explosive hazards. Ten explosive remnants of war were recovered in the Abyei Area and subsequently destroyed in controlled demolitions. The Mine Action Service assessed 1,367,238 m<sup>2</sup> of land in the Abyei Area as safe from explosive hazards. Areas assessed included UNISFA dry season temporary operating bases, new routes for Force mobility and the Amiet common market expansion. The Mine Action Service also destroyed 11 AK-47 assault rifles and 319 rounds of small arms ammunition confiscated by UNISFA troops in line with the UNISFA mandate.

32. The Mine Action Service delivered 74 mine-risk education sessions that reached 2,864 men, women and children living in the Abyei Area. In addition, 27 awareness-raising sessions on explosive remnants of war were conducted as part of the induction training provided by UNISFA, enhancing the awareness of 332 UNISFA personnel (278 men and 54 women).

33. The Mine Action Service remained essential for the operations of the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism. Teams cleared 93,824 m<sup>2</sup> in the Abu Qussa area to establish the team site there and assessed 36.1 km of patrol routes as being as safe from explosive hazards. During operations, two explosive remnants of war and five unexploded ordnance were found and destroyed. The Service deployed patrol support teams with 106 ground monitoring missions.

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

34. The Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism demonstrated some progress on the benchmarks specified by the Security Council in its resolution [2497 \(2019\)](#). Standing clearance and full freedom of movement were maintained for all air and ground patrols. Of the 46 aerial monitoring missions planned, 5 were cancelled mainly as a result of flight recovery, bad weather or lack of air assets. Of the 127 planned ground monitoring missions, 14 were cancelled owing to bad weather and the refusal by the national monitors, who claimed lack of proper facilities at team site 21 (Tishwin), to participate in these activities. In that regard, 89 per cent achievement of patrols was recorded. Both parties have fully deployed the complete number of national monitors in accordance with the agreement.

35. After engagements with both parties and sensitization of local authorities and Sudan People's Liberation Army in Opposition elements at Abu Qussa, the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism managed to deploy and establish team site 22 (Abu Qussa) on 13 January 2020. The Sudan People's Liberation Army in Opposition elements, who were deployed there have withdrawn from the Safe Demilitarized Border Zone. The conduct of operational and administrative activities such as landing clearance is coordinated with these elements. Operational activities have not yet commenced due to the absence of South Sudanese national monitors who were not deployed because of security concerns stemming from the presence of the Sudan People's Liberation Army in Opposition in the general area.

36. Clear guidance for the operational activities of the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism was provided in the outcome documents of the ordinary sessions of the Joint Political and Security Mechanism held in Juba on 13 October 2019 and 19 February 2020. A directive was issued again for the complete withdrawal of forces from the Safe Demilitarized Border Zone, in particular the 14 Mile Area. At its most recent session, the Joint Political and Security Mechanism reaffirmed its readiness to provide the necessary assistance for the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism to achieve full operational capacity.

37. With regard to the redeployment of forces currently within the Safe Demilitarized Border Zone, the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism reported that it had not received any notification of the withdrawal of forces. At the meeting of the 14 Mile Area ad hoc committee held at Sector 1 headquarters at Gok Machar on 12 October 2019, South Sudan confirmed the presence of South Sudan People's Defence Forces in the Safe Demilitarized Border Zone. A second meeting of the committee was to be convened in Gok Machar in March 2020 to verify troop redeployment and report to the Joint Political and Security Mechanism. The second meeting was postponed as the South Sudan People's Defence Forces representatives encountered logistical difficulties. Owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Joint Political and Security Mechanism meeting scheduled for 25 March had to be postponed.

38. The Joint Demarcation Committee met in Addis Ababa on 15 November 2019. On 14 February 2020, a joint assessment was also conducted at the Meiram-Aweil

border crossing corridor to determine the requirements for its reopening. However, the decision of the Joint Political and Security Mechanism meeting on 18 March 2019 to officially reopen the border crossing corridors within 30 days of that date was not implemented. All 10 crossing corridors are working but not officially opened. Therefore, there are no immigration and customs officials at the crossing corridors. Out of a total of 10, 6 were to be opened during the initial operating capacity phase.

#### **IV. Administrative aspects and mission support**

39. UNISFA remains the most remote mission headquarters in an extremely non-permissive environment, in which long and difficult supply chains with multiple single points of failure must be overcome by perseverance, creativity and a flexible approach to problem-solving. Force mobility, the environmental footprint, sustainable living conditions, real-life support and improved connectivity remain the mission support's focus.

40. As at 31 March 2020, the overall gender balance in UNISFA stood at 10.9 per cent women, with women accounting for 18.8 per cent of the civilian component, 10.16 per cent of the military component and 29.73 per cent in the police component. UNISFA routinely reaches out to female candidates for all vacancies to encourage applications, and all qualified female applicants are short-listed and interviewed. Living conditions, opportunities for promotion, training and welfare concerns are rigorously addressed in order to attract and retain female staff.

41. As at 31 March 2020, the UNISFA military component stood at 3,760 personnel, comprising 3,378 men and 382 women (3,486 troops, 145 military observers and 129 staff officers). During the reporting period, the mission completed the repatriation of 376 personnel (including the Aviation Support Helicopter Unit) in accordance with Security Council resolution [2469 \(2019\)](#). With regard to the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism, the UNISFA military component stood at 584 personnel, comprising 508 men and 76 women (555 troops, 16 military observers and 13 staff officers). The police component strength stood at 37 officers, comprising 26 men and 11 women, against an authorized total of 640 police personnel (148 police officers and 492 formed police unit personnel). This low rate of deployment is attributed to the non-issuance of visas to the police personnel. As at 31 March 2020, the number of civilian staff stood at 157 international staff and 78 national staff, against authorized totals of 166 international staff, 31 United Nations Volunteers and 86 national staff. The vacancy rate stood at 5.45 per cent for international staff and 8.43 per cent for national staff.

42. The Government of the Sudan issued 162 visas for UNISFA personnel during the reporting period, while 154 visas remained pending (7 for international staff members, 13 for military personnel, 102 for police personnel, 12 for official visitors, 5 for consultants and 15 for other contractors).

43. 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, Tejelei and Agok (Sector South). Temporary operating bases for dry season deployment were established at Shegeg (Sector North); Alal (Sector Centre); Rumamir and Leu (Sector South); Aganitok (quick reaction force). UNISFA also supports Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism team sites 11 (Kiir Adem/Safahah) and 12 (War Abar/Sumayah) in Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism Sector 1 (Gok Machar) as well as team site 21 (Tishwin) in Sector 2. In addition, Team Site 22 (Abu Qussa) has been moved from the temporary location of El Amira to its settled location of Abu Qussa/Wunkur in Sector 2 (Kadugli).

44. Infrastructure and environmental installations are being upgraded at all UNISFA camps. The new mission headquarters is now occupied, and the old mission headquarters is being reconfigured for backfilling, principally by the expanded police component. To address the often-impassable road conditions, UNISFA has contracted a third-party operator service for its heavy equipment in order to augment the military engineering unit capabilities to increase the mission's capacity to improve accessibility and Force mobility. This effort has been a significant success, and the mission is further increasing its capacity for Force mobility, including the transfer of heavy equipment from the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID). Negotiations on obtaining a site for test firing of weapons are on hold owing to issues related to COVID-19.

45. The mission continues to face shortages of laterite, gravel and other materials, and its contractors are often subjected to delayed road clearances from the Sudan, leading to the suspension of additional infrastructure work.

46. As indicated in my previous report, a third fixed-wing, long-term air charter is being sourced by United Nations Headquarters in support of medical evacuations, passenger operations and cargo on the northern route to Khartoum. Following the two military helicopter accidents in February and May 2019, and the subsequent suspension of their operations by the United Nations Headquarters and repatriation of the personnel, the mission continues to operate with only civilian helicopters. Thus, the Force still lacks the capability to mount military air operations utilizing military pattern helicopters.

#### **Culture of performance**

47. UNISFA tracks and reports mission performance through metrics and targets that it has developed as part of a performance management system. The mission measures and improves outcomes related to Force mobility, environment, infrastructure development and mandate implementation. Results are regularly reported to mission leadership, managers, relevant end-users and United Nations Headquarters. The metrics used are specifically designed to better inform decision-making on such matters as infrastructure, environmental issues and Force deployment.

48. The mission has appointed a COVID-19 Coordinator who is assisted by a task force comprised of all elements of the mission. The mission's COVID-19 task force has developed a plan approved by the mission leadership team to adopt a rigorous but graduated approach to protecting personnel while ensuring that the core mandate activities of UNISFA continue unabated. An important part of the plan is the communications strategy that is aimed at informing and reassuring UNISFA personnel about the robustness of the mitigations employed and also at assuring the population that UNISFA is doing everything possible to ensure that the mission is not a vector. It also reassures the population that the mission remains fully committed and completely capable of discharging its duties with regard to the protection of civilians. A significant challenge facing the mission, however, is the fact that it only has a level II hospital and that COVID-19 cases are unlikely to be accepted by countries in which the mission has contracted hospitals. UNISFA has already reduced its footprint of personnel, as a result of honouring the requests of those who have underlying medical conditions to leave the mission, and is in the process of lightening the footprint further.

49. UNISFA recorded no allegations of sexual misconduct during the reporting period. In response to the challenges posed by COVID-19 and as part of the UNISFA COVID-19 task force, the conduct and discipline strategy continues to comprise outreach to communities and reminders to staff members of the heightened need to

maintain the highest standards of integrity, professionalism and respect for diversity under the challenges.

## **V. Financial aspects**

50. The General Assembly, by its resolution [73/311](#) and decision [73/555](#), appropriated the amount of \$260.2 million for the maintenance of UNISFA for the period from 1 July 2019 to 30 June 2020. As at 3 April 2020, unpaid assessed contributions to the Special Account for UNISFA amounted to \$83.5 million. Total outstanding assessed contributions for all peacekeeping operations at that date amounted to \$3,151.4 million. Reimbursements of troop costs and for contingent-owned equipment have been made for the period up to 30 September 2019, in accordance with the quarterly payment schedule.

## **VI. Observations and recommendations**

51. In the last few months of the reporting period, positive strides have been made both in Khartoum and in Juba, and I am optimistic that peace dividends from the transitions in both countries, as well as interaction between the two, will have a positive impact on peace and development. However, these developments have also highlighted the need to ensure that the mechanisms established in 2012 in the cooperation agreements are fully implemented so that outstanding bilateral issues between the two countries can be addressed. Furthermore, the Governments of the Sudan and South Sudan have paid limited attention to their responsibilities regarding Abyei as they have had other pressing priorities. I call on both parties to renew efforts to address the issues that have remained unresolved for too long, including the implementation of their Agreement of 20 June 2011. For the consolidation of peace and security in Abyei, it is paramount that the parties revive a viable political process that will lead to the implementation of the Agreement.

52. UNISFA has discussed with the Sudan the need to facilitate the deployment of the remaining authorized additional United Nations police and formed police Units so that its forces are not overstretched at a time when criminality remains a concern. I am also encouraged by engagement on such matters as the appointment of a civilian Deputy Head of Mission and the operationalization of the Athony airstrip to improve UNISFA medical evacuation capability and reduce transport costs and logistical challenges. Some of logistics, visa and reconfiguration-related concerns of UNISFA were raised in a letter dated 13 December 2019 from the Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations addressed to the Permanent Representative of the Sudan, as well as at meetings that the Under-Secretary-General held with Sudanese officials in Khartoum on 13 February 2020, following his one-day visit with my Special Envoy for the Horn of Africa to UNISFA and Abyei on 12 February 2020. UNISFA has also engaged with South Sudan, including on the need for a road map for the establishment of the Abyei police service.

53. I am also encouraged by the outcomes of the meeting of Joint Political and Security Mechanism held on 19 February 2020, during which UNISFA presented its plans to readjust its deployment, establish checkpoints and reactivate the Joint Military Observation Committee/joint military observer teams in order to curb incidents of violence, including those perpetrated by armed groups. Such measures are particularly pressing in the light of the mission's reconfiguration and of the need to help to curb the acts of violence that continue to occur in the Abyei Area. In this connection, I am particularly saddened by the tragic events that unfolded in the Kolom area on 19 and 22 January and call on the parties to jointly investigate these events

and take action to bring the perpetrators to justice. The results of such investigations, as well as the remedial action taken, will go some way towards bringing both communities closer together.

54. I wish in this connection to commend the efforts of the UNISFA leadership to convene peace conferences in the Abyei Area to bring together the traditional leaders of both the Ngok Dinka and the Misseriya and I urge the parties to support these efforts. Such conferences are paramount in easing tensions as they arise, in particular during the period of the annual transhumance. In this context, the United Nations will also engage with the Sudanese and South Sudanese authorities regarding the deployment of human rights expertise to UNISFA, in accordance with Security Council resolutions. As a result, the mission will be provided with additional expertise and local authorities and communities will benefit from technical assistance that will help them to prevent and better address human rights violations and abuses. The United Nations intends to seek to deploy other key civilian staff, within existing resources and as requested by the Council in its resolution [2497 \(2019\)](#), to enable UNISFA to strengthen local capacities to assist with the management of law and order, ensure the humane and dignified treatment of suspects and other detainees, and facilitate accountability for serious violations.

55. I call on the members of the Security Council to draw the attention of the Abyei stakeholders to the need for the positive momentum in their bilateral relations and to make progress towards resolving the issue of Abyei since an open-ended mandate for UNISFA is not acceptable or affordable for the international community in the long run. Postponing discussions on a final settlement on the status of Abyei deprives UNISFA of an exit horizon, places on it the burden of tackling issues that should otherwise be discussed within the Abyei Joint Oversight Committee. The absence of an agreed administration for Abyei, including an Abyei police service, prolongs the plight of the people of Abyei, who are deprived of administrative and public services, as well as economic and development opportunities.

56. I remain hopeful, however, that a resolution to the Abyei question will be found. UNISFA remains fully committed to supporting the African Union High-level Implementation Panel's every effort to facilitate an agreement between the parties on the future of Abyei. I look forward to the African Union also increasing its involvement and playing fully its role as the main political mediator. I also encourage enhanced interaction between the African Union and the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism on border-related issues, in particular border demarcation. Progress on the Abyei question goes in tandem with progress on demarcation. UNISFA also remains fully committed to supporting the parties in the establishment of joint institutions in Abyei, should they consider such a solution to be the most effective stepping stone towards a final resolution of the Abyei question.

57. While I encourage both parties to continue to engage on the Abyei question, I am concerned that as the COVID-19 pandemic spreads, engagement in the foreseeable future may need to take on new modalities. As I have underscored in my appeal for a global ceasefire, it is paramount that differences be resolved with a view to dedicating all efforts to curbing the spread of COVID-19. The United Nations and non-governmental organization humanitarian actors are engaged in preparedness activities relating to the threat of COVID-19, including through a public awareness campaign and local community sensitization, although the availability of funding is a challenge. Discussions are also ongoing between humanitarian actors and UNISFA on additional support required, including in relation to areas with high population movement, in particular the Amiet common market.

58. UNISFA has not recorded any case of COVID-19 yet within the mission. UNISFA medical teams continue to visit all the battalions and other United Nations

locations to sensitize personnel on the coronavirus, including with regard to preventive measures, such as social distancing and hygiene, and have been practising working remotely since 31 March. In addition, the mission has suspended passenger flights from outside its area of operation and, in the event that troops might exhibit symptoms of COVID-19, has established quarantine areas for them. It increased the bed capacity for patients at its level II hospital. Furthermore, it has reduced the footprint of staff, in particular those with underlying health conditions by helping them to leave the mission. UNISFA has made leaflets and distributed them to the joint market committees, the members of the joint community peace committee, civil society actors and the public and has reassured the local community that UNISFA is not a vector and will continue its protection of civilians mandate. The United Nations police have also met with Amiet traditional court officials and members of the joint protection committee at the Amiet common market to sensitize them about the COVID-19 pandemic and to discuss ways of reducing the number of detainees at the Amiet detention centre.

59. In the light of delays in the deployment of the three formed police units, the fragile security situation following the attacks of 19 and 22 January 2020 in the area of Kolom and, more recently, the severe restrictions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, I have suspended the withdrawal of the 295 troops scheduled for 15 May, until the end of June.

60. In conclusion, I would recommend the extension of the mandate of UNISFA for a further period of six months, until 15 October 2020. I also wish to extend my gratitude and appreciation to Major General Mehari Zewde Gebremariam, the Acting Head of Mission and Force Commander of UNISFA, and all UNISFA personnel for their tireless efforts to maintain peace and security. 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.

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