



Security Council

Seventy-sixth year

8887th meeting

Wednesday, 27 October 2021, 10 a.m.

New York

Provisional

President: Mr. Kimani/Mrs. Toroitich (Kenya)

Members:

China	Mr. Sun Zhiqiang
Estonia	Mr. Lipand
France	Mrs. Gasri
India	Mr. Asokan
Ireland	Mr. Flynn
Mexico	Mr. Sandoval Mendiola
Niger	Mr. Aougi
Norway	Ms. Heimerback
Russian Federation	Mr. Khoroshev
Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	Mr. Bynoe
Tunisia	Mr. Cherif
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Ms. Jacobs
United States of America	Mr. Mills
Viet Nam	Mr. Pham

Agenda

Reports of the Secretary-General on the Sudan and South Sudan

Letter dated 17 September 2021 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2021/805)

Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Abyei (S/2021/881)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Reports of the Secretary-General on the Sudan and South Sudan

Letter dated 17 September 2021 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2021/805)

Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Abyei (S/2021/881)

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of South Sudan and the Sudan to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Mr. Jean-Pierre Lacroix, Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations; Mr. Parfait Onanga-Anyanga, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Horn of Africa; and His Excellency Mr. Thabo Mbeki, Chairperson of the African Union High-level Implementation Panel.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2021/881, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Abyei, and document S/2021/805, which contains the text of a letter dated 17 September 2021 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council.

The Council has before it the text of a statement by the President on behalf of the Council on the subject of today's meeting. I thank the Council members for their valuable contributions to this statement. In accordance with the understanding reached among the members of the Council, I shall take it that the members of the Security Council agree to the statement, which will be issued as a document of the Security Council under the symbol S/PRST/2021/20.

I now give the floor to Mr. Lacroix.

Mr. Lacroix: I am pleased to address the Security Council today on the situation in Abyei and on the

strategic review of the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA).

In the implementation of its mandate over the past reporting period, UNISFA successfully continued its work to protect the people of Abyei through its military and mine action presence and support to intercommunal dialogue, women's participation in political life and the rule of law. UNISFA's humanitarian and recovery work reached more than 103,000 vulnerable people.

It is encouraging that both South Sudan and the Sudan have now established national committees on the question of Abyei. The warming of the relations between the two countries was visible in Abyei when I was there a month ago; most of the threats to the community were of a criminal nature, not of a military one. UNISFA continued to build on that momentum in its engagement with the Governments of the Sudan and South Sudan on all matters of relevance to the Mission. UNISFA — in close coordination with the Department of Peace Operations and the Department of Operational Support at the Secretariat — also spent significant energy and resources on the complex military and logistical planning that will be required as UNISFA transitions from a single-contingent to a multinational peace operation.

Most of the new challenges during the past period related to the mandate of the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism (JBVMM), where representatives of the local community in Gok Machar made it difficult, and eventually impossible, for UNISFA to continue to support the implementation of the JBVMM mandate to a large extent. I will come back to this point when discussing the strategic review, and I appreciated the Security Council's focus on the issue during its closed meeting held on 13 October, followed by a statement in support of UNISFA and the JBVMM dated 15 October (SC/14666).

Allow me to move on to the strategic review of UNISFA. At the request of the Council, a Department of Peace Operations team, jointly with the Office of the Special Envoy for the Horn of Africa, the Department of Operational Support and the Department of Safety and Security, conducted in-person consultations with stakeholders in the Sudan, South Sudan and Ethiopia from 18 to 30 June. The recommendations on the way forward for UNISFA were shared with the Council in a letter from the Secretary-General dated 17 September.

I will focus today on four main issues.

First, the strategic review followed the request from the Security Council for a possible drawdown and exit strategy for UNISFA as set out in its resolutions 2550 (2020) and 2575 (2021). What guided the team, first and foremost, was the rapidly changed situation in the Sudan and South Sudan over the past 10 years, since UNISFA was established. The improved relationship between the two Governments has started bearing fruit in the border areas as well as in Abyei, and the Secretary-General's recommendations for the future of UNISFA build on that new reality.

Despite the internal challenges that the Sudan and South Sudan each face, their bilateral commitment towards cooperation on outstanding issues remains. The upbeat political tone on the issue of Abyei that my strategic review team heard in Khartoum and Juba in June appears to have remained intact to date. I heard a similar message of hope for an overall peace in Abyei during my visit to the region last month.

Secondly, the review team identified a significant trust deficit that remains between the communities in Abyei, particularly the Misseriya and Ngok Dinka, and noted an important space for United Nations peacebuilding, humanitarian, recovery and development assistance. The United Nations continues to prioritize support for that issue, and it is my hope that the Council will provide UNISFA with a continued, and somewhat strengthened, mandate in that particular area, while slowly but steadily identifying areas where the military and security side of the mission could start preparing for an eventual drawdown.

Thirdly, it is too early to know what the impact of this week's developments in Khartoum will mean for UNISFA on a day-to-day basis, but I am hopeful, as I know that all parties in the Sudan have so far supported the Mission. I am also grateful for the continued cooperation of South Sudan in support of UNISFA. In view of the dynamics on the ground, we urge the parties to ensure effective support for our efforts to replace the contingents in the period ahead while preserving the gains made to date in building trust and providing security. The success of that process will be absolutely critical to make sure that UNISFA is able to continue as a mission and to continue implementing its mandate.

Thus our planning towards a full replacement of the current military contingent with a multinational contingent will continue at full speed. I am grateful to the Government of Ethiopia, and particularly to its

peacekeepers and their families, for their commitment to United Nations peacekeeping. Ethiopia's women and men have done an outstanding job in Abyei over the past 10 years, as evidenced by the improved situation on the ground. I also take this opportunity to express my deepest condolences to the Government of Ethiopia and to the family impacted on the loss of one of Ethiopia's peacekeepers in Gok Machar, South Sudan, on 14 September. Of course, we remember all the Ethiopian peacekeepers who have made the ultimate sacrifice during these 10 years.

With respect to the military side of UNISFA, the strategic review proposes two viable options for the force. One option would keep overall force numbers close to what they are currently; the second option proposes a lightly reduced troop ceiling, a move that will require more operational adjustments but should encourage the Sudan and South Sudan to move forward on outstanding issues with increased urgency. It is also recommended that the United Nations establish a rule-of-law support strategy.

An additional outcome of the strategic review was the need for the JBVMM to remain as is. It is indeed regrettable that there have been serious challenges at three of the JBVMM's five locations, that is, Kiir Adem/Safaha (team site 11); War Abar/As Samaya (team site 12), in the safe demilitarized border zone; and Gok Machar, in South Sudan. I appreciated the 19 October statement by the Government of South Sudan in which it reaffirmed its commitment to the JBVMM and indicated that its work with communities in the Gok Machar area was ongoing. I hope that this will mean a swift return of the JBVMM to those three locations, as a lack of implementation of the Security Council mandate could jeopardize the overall peace and security in the border areas, in breach of the status-of-forces agreement between the Government of South Sudan and UNISFA.

Fourthly, negotiations towards a political settlement concerning the Abyei area, with the Sudan and South Sudan in the lead, remain crucial building blocks towards an exit strategy for UNISFA. As part of defining a strategic vision for the mission, it is important that a set of benchmarks be established in close coordination with the Sudan and South Sudan. Such benchmarks should contain specific requirements for the inclusion of women. In addition, they should be built around the joint mechanisms that the parties

have already established towards the settlement of the Abyei issue.

To conclude, I believe that the UNISFA strategic review has provided important recommendations for the mission's further reconfiguration and contains solid options that will enhance UNISFA's mandate implementation in the near future. I look forward to the Council's further guidance on this matter and to the ongoing cooperation with the Governments of South Sudan and the Sudan in our support for the communities of Abyei.

Finally, since this will be the last Security Council meeting for UNISFA's Force Commander and acting Head of Mission, Major General Kefyalew Amde Tessema of Ethiopia, I wish to thank him for his steadfast leadership of the Mission and for his support as UNISFA transitions to a United Nations multinational peace operation.

The President: I thank Mr. Lacroix for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Onanga-Anyanga.

Mr. Onanga-Anyanga: I wish to thank you, Mr. President, for the opportunity to brief the Security Council on the progress made in the implementation of resolution 2046 (2012), which concerns outstanding bilateral issues between the Sudan and South Sudan and the situation in Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile states. Since I am addressing the Security Council for the first time since Kenya's assumption of the presidency, allow me to warmly congratulate you on your competent handling and skilful stewardship of the business of this body.

Today's meeting takes place against the backdrop of multifaceted challenges posing a serious threat to the stability of several countries in the Horn of Africa and the region. That situation has been compounded by the impact of the coronavirus disease which has exacerbated the already precarious living conditions.

The tragic events unfolding in the Sudan following the unconstitutional change of Government reflect the shaky transitions that many countries in the region are going through. It will therefore be critical to urgently restore the constitutional order in the Sudan, in line with the Constitutional Declaration and the Juba Peace Agreement.

Despite the limitations imposed by the pandemic, I was able to engage with national authorities of both

countries during the review period, in the company of Under-Secretary-General Lacroix in Khartoum and Abyei and here in New York, as well as remotely. We visited Khartoum and Abyei from 6 to 8 September as part of consultations with the Governments of the Sudan, South Sudan and Ethiopia on the future status of the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA). I also discussed bilateral relations between the Sudan and South Sudan.

While most of what I am reporting on may sound a bit removed from the current situation in the Sudan, which could negatively impact bilateral relations, I sincerely hope that the recent positive trend will not be derailed. Encouragingly, the Sudan and South Sudan have been deepening their relations, as epitomized by several high-level visits and initiatives in support of each other's peace processes. They include the start of peace talks in Juba between the Government of the Sudan and the Al-Hilu faction of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM)-North on 26 May, the launch of South Sudan's permanent constitution-making process, as well as efforts to help address the infighting between rival factions of the SPLM-Army in Opposition (SPLM/A-IO), which could unravel the peace process in South Sudan.

Crucially, President Kiir and Prime Minister Hamdok reached an agreement to resume export and border trade. In that regard, they agreed to reopen border crossing points between their two countries. However, the launch did not materialize, having been overtaken by the unfolding events in the Sudan.

The two countries agreed on a road map to review and follow up on implementing all 2012 cooperation agreements, with timelines established by their Ministries for Foreign Affairs. In the meantime, they undertook to remove all barriers to banking transactions and allow banks to establish branches in both countries. They also committed to developing a joint oil and gas strategy at the Joint Political and Security Mechanism (JPSM) meeting of 8 to 9 September in Juba, although no reference was made to that in the decisions of the JPSM meeting. The Sudan and South Sudan further agreed to enhance cooperation on security and intelligence.

The JPSM called for progress on opening the border crossing points; requested that the Sudan and South Sudan ensure the immediate withdrawal of their forces from the Abyei box, to be completed no later than 31 December 2021, tasking UNISFA to report

monthly in that regard; requested that both countries engage with the elements of the SPLM/A-IO still in the Safe Demilitarized Border Zone; and urged the two countries to resume meetings of the Abyei Joint Oversight Committee (AJOC).

Although both countries favour the resumption of AJOC meetings, the last of which took place in 2017, they disagree on its agenda and have yet to set a new meeting date. On the substance, whereas the Sudan advocates for the joint institutions provided for in the agreement on the temporary arrangements for the administration and security of the Abyei Area of 20 June 2011, South Sudan considers discussion of joint institutions, especially the Abyei Police Service, a non-starter, ostensibly over fears that would reinforce Khartoum's position on Abyei.

Those disagreements have consistently dogged AJOC meetings, notably with South Sudan expressing frustration at the continued presence of the Sudanese oil police in Diffra and now hinting at the possibility of deploying forces to Abyei unless the Sudan withdraws its troops. The Sudan, too, maintains that South Sudanese armed elements are still present within the Abyei box. Hopefully, both countries will abide by the deadline of 31 December 2021, set by the JPSM, to withdraw all armed forces so that AJOC meetings, when eventually reconvened, can focus on the Mechanism's mandate of political and administrative oversight of the yet-to-be constituted Abyei Executive Council, providing guidance for the timely implementation of various agreements and facilitating the establishment and sustainability of a secure and stable environment in Abyei. The long-standing deadlock has hindered any progress in Abyei and has left the Area with a poorly defined status, which has continued to stoke instability.

On a positive note, each country has established a high-level committee on Abyei. The two committees are separately reviewing all past agreements on Abyei in view of negotiations facilitated by a third party that would lead to the settlement of the final status of Abyei, an issue to which President Mbeki and his team have dedicated intensive efforts.

To address the 2012 cooperation agreements comprehensively, the two countries met in Juba on 21 October in the first joint meeting of the JPSM and the Joint Border Commission, convened by the African Union Border Programme and opened by South Sudan's First Vice-President, Riek Machar. Mr. Machar urged

the parties to expedite the implementation of the cooperation agreements. The next joint meeting is planned for the second week of January 2022.

With regard to the recent concerning developments in Gok Machar, Kir Adem/Safaha and War Abar/Sumayah, which threaten the security and safety of UNISFA/Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism (JBVMM) personnel and led to the regrettable loss of life of one peacekeeper, I reminded the South Sudanese authorities of their obligations under resolutions 2518 (2020) and 2575 (2021) and the status of forces agreement. In that regard, I welcome the Government's 19 October statement, in which it reiterated its commitment to the JBVMM and expressed its unequivocal support for UNISFA.

On 3 October, South Sudan issued a statement to mark the first anniversary of the Juba Peace Agreement between the Government of the Sudan and the Sudanese armed movements. While commending the progress made by the Sudanese parties in partially forming national and state Governments, the South Sudan Mediation Committee called for the redoubling of efforts to garner political will for the agreement's implementation. It also expressed concern about disagreements among Sudanese political forces within the transitional Government and encouraged them to resolve those differences through dialogue.

As concerns the resolution of the conflict in South Kordofan and Blue Nile states, I note with regret that efforts by the South Sudan Mediation Committee have not yet succeeded in bringing the Government of the Sudan and the Al-Hilu SPLM-North faction back to the negotiating table ever since talks between them were suspended for two weeks, on 15 June, in order to allow the parties time to consult their constituencies on the outstanding issues.

The parties had agreed on most of the issues, but they still disagreed on two key demands of the SPLM-North: first, the adoption of a secular State in the Sudan and, secondly, the disbanding of the Rapid Support Forces within the framework of the security arrangements. Nevertheless, it is heartening that both parties reiterated their commitment to the peace process and hoped to agree on the outstanding issues during the next round of talks. I also note, regrettably, that even though Abdul Wahid Al-Nur, of the Darfur-based Sudan Liberation Movement/Army, was present in Juba on 26 May, he once again resisted President

Kiir's attempts to include his Movement in the Sudan peace process.

Despite lingering disagreements between the Governments of the Sudan and South Sudan on a number of outstanding matters, including over the final status of Abyei, the intensification of high-level contacts between the two countries and the complementarity of their mediation efforts in resolving their respective internal conflicts augur well for their long-term peaceful co-existence. It is crucial for both countries to preserve and build on the progress achieved so far and resolve the conflict in the Blue Nile and South Kordofan states. As they do so, the international community, in turn, should redouble efforts in enabling them to achieve their noble goals.

Given the increasingly tense regional environment, I hope that the current developments in the Sudan will not reverse the commendable achievements already made. My Office will continue to engage with the authorities of both countries and, as appropriate, with key regional actors, including the African Union, especially the African Union High-level Implementation Panel and the leadership of President Mbeki, as well as the Intergovernmental Authority on Development, to encourage parties to defuse tensions, advance the implementation of all cooperation agreements and consolidate their improved bilateral relations.

The President: I thank Mr. Onanga-Anyanga for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Mbeki.

Mr. Mbeki: I thank you, Sir, for this opportunity to address the Security Council. I have been told that I should speak on the final status of Abyei. Let me go into some detail concerning its history.

The Council will recall that the Sudan won its independence in 1956 and that, even five years prior to that, in 1951, the colonial Administration had addressed the issue of where Abyei should be positioned with regard to boundary between what would then have been South Sudan and North Sudan. At that time, Paramount Chief Deng Majok thought that it would be better that Abyei be left as part of Kordofan province, which was then in North Sudan.

He is quoted as having said,

“I am now the thread of the Arabs and the south.
I am a thread like the threat with which clothes

are mended. If I pull away, the country will break apart”.

I hope that the Council will bear in mind that particular statement, which is a recurring theme as to the place of Abyei with regard to both the Sudan, in the north, and South Sudan.

The civil war between the north and the south broke out in 1955 and ended in 1972 with an agreement signed in Addis Ababa. That agreement discussed the matter of Abyei and basically stated that the people of Abyei must be given the opportunity to decide where Abyei belonged — in the north or the south. The agreement was more or less a referendum among the people of Abyei to discuss that matter, effectively meaning the inclusion of the area covering Abyei's nine Ngok Dinka chiefdoms. The 1972 agreement was never implemented.

The Comprehensive Peace Agreement of 2005 includes the Protocol on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Abyei Area, which repeats what was stated in the 1972 agreement — that there must be a referendum among the people of Abyei to decide where it belongs. The Abyei Protocol echoed the sentiment, which, as I mentioned earlier and as originally expressed by Paramount Chief Deng Majok, Abyei is a bridge between the north and the south, linking the people of the Sudan. The Protocol provided the possibility of a referendum, which did not take place. I believe that, in that context, we must bear in mind that both the Ngok Dinka and the Misseriya believe that they have a historical right to claim Abyei as their territory.

As the African Union High-level Implementation Panel, we had to present a proposal to the Governments of the Sudan and South Sudan as to how they might resolve the unresolved matter of the final status of Abyei, which was raised in 1951, 1972 and 2005. We did indeed prepare a proposal, which we presented in 2012. Prior to that, however, in 2011, we presented the parties with an agreement on temporary arrangements for the administration and security of the Abyei Area, which provided for the establishment of various institutions to manage the Area pending its final status. I must say that those temporary agreements have not been implemented.

In the end, the two Governments asked whether the Panel could assist them by making a proposal with regard to the matter of the final status, which we did. The result was that the Government of South Sudan accepted the proposal, but the Government of the Sudan

rejected it. The African Union Peace and Security Council accepted the proposal, while the Security Council gave its backing. However, it has never been implemented. The matter is now back before us: what should be done with regard to the matter of the final status of Abyei?

As to what we are doing, we have to go back to the Governments of the Sudan and South Sudan to discuss the matter. We must say to them that they both signed a commitment concerning the Abyei Protocol, which is included in the Comprehensive Peace Agreement of 2005. That Agreement states that there must be a referendum in Abyei and that the Ngok Dinka and other Sudanese residents of Abyei will be allowed to vote. That is the agreement. The challenge they face is how to do it and what is to be done, in practice, to make sure that they meet the commitment they made, as reflected in the Abyei Protocol of 2005. That is what our proposal therefore tries to do.

Nonetheless, the matter has not been agreed upon. Therefore, we have to go back to those two Governments and go through with them the draft agreement proposal, as it is the only document on the table. It is a comprehensive proposal on the steps that might be taken in order to determine the final status of Abyei. Each Government must go through the document to determine the elements on which they agree and disagree. In instances where they disagree, what are the elements that can be replaced?

We decided that, before we engage the Governments, which we will do, we should also get the opinions of other stakeholders. For during the whole course of interactions on the matter of Abyei, it was obvious that there are several individuals from the two communities, Misseriya and Ngok Dinka, who stood out as people who are particularly interested in resolving the matter. We thought that we should engage those people first and then, having listened to their views, proceed to engage the Governments, in a sense empowered by the views of people from the communities as to what they think should happen.

The purpose of the special status of Abyei is to ensure peaceful coexistence and friendly cooperation between the Ngok Dinka and Misseriya communities of the Area. There is also the matter of the soft borders between Abyei and surrounding areas, such as South Kordofan. There is also the issue of pastoralist rights. The Misseriya are pastoralists and must graze their

cattle. They pass through Abyei, even further into South Sudan, in search of pasture and water. Whatever happens to Abyei, the rights of those pastoralists need to be guaranteed.

There are matters pertaining to revenue-sharing and the economic development of the Abyei Area. The Abyei Joint Oversight Committee has been mentioned. It continues to exist but needs to convene. It will continue to exist.

There is also the matter of the referendum, which is a bit tricky. A difficult issue in that regard has to do with who the voters should be — who would be eligible to vote in the referendum? The Abyei Protocol cites members of the Ngok Dinka community and other Sudanese residing in the Abyei Area. The African Union High-level Implementation Panel added that the criterion for qualifying to vote shall be a permanent abode within the Abyei Area — that is, other Sudanese residing in the Abyei Area and, of course, members of the Ngok Dinka should have a permanent residence in the Abyei Area.

That matter is very central to the differences between the two Governments, even with regard to temporary arrangements. For instance, the temporary arrangements provided for an Abyei council — a type of legislature. How do we compose that legislature? There will be various views on the issue. With regard to the matter of the referendum, who are the residents of Abyei? The issue of those eligible to vote in the referendum is a very thorny matter. I am referring to the various paragraphs in that proposal to indicate the scale of the consultations that must take place between ourselves and stakeholders, and with the Governments of the Sudan and South Sudan.

We are in the process of consultations of that kind. At some point in the past, we had thought that we would have completed that process by September — last month — but that proved impossible. We have to continue that process and find a way to forge some consensus between the two Governments. I hope that the consensus between the Governments will be consonant with the views of the Ngok Dinka and Misseriya communities so that the agreement made would guarantee the stability of Abyei. Our next step will be to engage the two Governments in detail.

In the meantime, it is important that the Security Council mandate the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA), or a similar force, to

continue. As Mr. Lacroix said, UNISFA has played an extremely important role in maintaining stability. As members can see, there is a great deal of sensitivity about the matter in both South Sudan and the Sudan. Therefore, we would like to avoid, at all costs, a situation where tensions surrounding the matter increase to the extent that there is a conflict between the two countries. Therefore, the continuation of UNISFA becomes very important.

I would like to assure you, Mr. President, and the Security Council that the Panel is determined to do that detailed work so that we again produce some consensus among the parties so that they implement what they agreed under the Abyei Protocol.

The President: I thank Mr. Mbeki for his briefing.

I shall now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements.

Mr. Mills (United States of America): I would like to thank the Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations, the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Horn of Africa and Chairperson of the African Union High-level Implementation Panel, Mr. Mbeki, for their comprehensive briefings today. What we heard today from each of them will inform us as we consider modifications to the mandate of the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA) before it expires on 15 November.

Let me begin by reaffirming the support of the United States for UNISFA, particularly as the mission undertakes to fulfil its mandated tasks, in spite of many constraints. We want to thank all UNISFA personnel, both uniformed and civilian, for their dedicated efforts to bring peace, security and stability to the region.

As I mentioned earlier, I cannot ignore the fact that the renewal of UNISFA's mandate is happening, as we have heard, against a backdrop of alarming developments in the Sudan, which the Security Council discussed yesterday in consultations. The United States has condemned the military takeover of the transitional Government in the Sudan. That contravenes the Constitutional Declaration and the democratic aspirations of the Sudanese people and is utterly unacceptable. As we have repeatedly stated, any changes by force to the transitional Government in Khartoum puts United States assistance at risk.

Let me also take a moment to express the United States deepest condolences for the loss of life of a UNISFA peacekeeper from Ethiopia on 14 September. As the Council affirmed through its press statement on 15 October (SC/14666), the safety and security of its peacekeepers is of the highest importance. It is unacceptable that a United Nations peacekeeper lost his life following the denial of flight clearances for urgent medical care. It is also, frankly, unconscionable that individuals in Gok Machar blocked food, water and medical supplies from reaching United Nations peacekeepers stationed in the area.

We call on the Government of South Sudan to urgently re-admit supplies to allow United Nations peacekeepers to fulfil the Council's mandated tasks and to immediately take steps to de-escalate tensions, prevent violent attacks against UNISFA personnel and ensure the safety of United Nations personnel. We call on the Governments of both the Sudan and South Sudan to authorize all landing clearance requests that are related to medical and casualty evacuations.

The United States is also increasingly alarmed by attempts by the community in Gok Machar to force UNISFA and the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism (JBVMM) from its Sector 1 headquarters. The lack of political will from the Government of South Sudan to intervene and engage with those local actors resulted in UNISFA's relocation and the closure, as we heard, of team sites 11 and 12.

That severely undercuts the mission's ability to carry out its mandate, as well as the operation of the JBVMM. We strongly urge the Government of South Sudan to take immediate action to re-operationalize the JBVMM, facilitate the redeployment of UNISFA personnel to Gok Machar and take actions to facilitate the mandates of UNISFA and the JBVMM.

The United States is pleased to see the many security measures that have been undertaken by UNISFA to reduce the threats to civilians. Those have included establishing checkpoints along the main supply route, conducting search and seizure operations, long-range patrols and routine aerial patrols, as well as developing an early-warning system to respond swiftly to violence. We certainly encourage the Governments of the Sudan and South Sudan to support the mission in those efforts.

We also call for greater support in strengthening the role of the United Nations police to address the increase in criminality and armed elements. United

Nations police exercises an important role through engagement with the local communities in Abyei through interactive patrols and community awareness campaigns that are related to crime, safety and gender-based violence.

It is important for the authorities to address the growing threat of crime in Abyei and prevent increasing insecurity. They can do so by facilitating the deployment of UNISFA's formed police units. We call on the Government of the Sudan to swiftly issue visas for the remaining United Nations police and other personnel.

I also want to commend UNISFA for its work to improve living conditions in the communities that are gravely impacted by a lack of access to water, sanitation, basic public health, food and Government services. UNISFA's efforts to facilitate conditions for several humanitarian organizations has helped to provide life-saving assistance to more than 100,000 vulnerable people. Meanwhile, women's participation is gradually increasing in political spaces in Abyei thanks to UNISFA's efforts.

Let me end by saying that the United States remains committed to cooperating closely with the Governments and the people of the region, our fellow Council members and all stakeholders to deepen the prospects for peace, security and prosperity in the Sudan and South Sudan.

Mr. Cherif (Tunisia): I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the three African members of the Security Council — Kenya, the Niger and Tunisia — as well as Saint Vincent and the Grenadines (A3+1).

I thank the former President of South Africa and Chair of the African Union High-level Implementation Panel, His Excellency Mr. Thabo Mbeki; the Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations, Mr. Jean-Pierre Lacroix; and the Special Envoy for the Horn of Africa, Mr. Parfait Onanga-Anyanga, for their comprehensive briefings. I also welcome the representatives of the Sudan and South Sudan to this meeting.

The A3+1 would like to begin by paying tribute to the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA) peacekeeper who lost his life on 14 September in Gok Machar pending medical evacuation. That tragic loss highlights not only the often non-permissive environment within which UNISFA operates, but also the continued relevance of

its mandate, including its support for the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism (JBVMM), in ensuring stability in the Abyei Area and along the Sudan-South Sudan border.

The African Union, along with its High-level Implementation Panel, remains engaged with the Governments of the Sudan and South Sudan as they further their political and economic ties in order to promote a lasting resolution of the final status of Abyei and put the region and its people resolutely on a trajectory towards comprehensive peace and sustainable development. In that connection, we commend the Sudan and South Sudan for their willingness to inject fresh impetus into the Abyei peace process through the recent appointment of their respective national committees on the final status of Abyei.

The increasing rapprochement between the Sudan and South Sudan, while commendable, has yet to be matched with perennial stability in the Abyei Area and along the border. The A3+1 reiterates its concern at the growing communal tensions registered during the reporting period, which culminated with the forced relocation of UNISFA personnel and equipment from JBVMM team site 11 in Kiir Adem and team site 12 in War Abar and, subsequently, from JBVMM Sector 1 headquarters in Gok Machar, amid threats to peacekeepers' lives and United Nations property.

We stress the critical importance of UNISFA and its component in support of the JBVMM being able to fully perform their security and protection tasks, unimpeded and undeterred, while safeguarding their safety, well-being and freedom of movement, particularly in line with the relevant Security Council resolutions. Furthermore, we recall the outcome document of the meeting of the Joint Political and Security Mechanism held on 8 and 9 September in Juba on the issue. In that respect, we urge for consistent efforts by the Government of South Sudan in sensitizing and engaging local governments and communities towards restraint, a return to calm and respect for the mandates of UNISFA and the JBVMM in their areas of responsibility.

We further call on the Sudan and South Sudan to convene future meetings of the Joint Political and Security Mechanism to iron out difficulties and facilitate the mandate of the JBVMM and its redeployment, where appropriate, as well as to foster conditions that enable progress on the border demarcation process.

I now turn to the developments in Abyei, as set out in the Secretary-General's report (S/2021/881), alongside additional aspects regarding UNISFA's mandate going forward, pursuant to the relevant Security Council resolutions.

Despite the persistent tensions along communal lines, also owing to economic mobility and livelihood motives, the A3+1 commends the encouraging prospects for peace, peacebuilding and trust-building processes that are especially sensitive to the Abyei local, traditional and intercommunal realities.

In that connection, we express our appreciation for the steady engagement of the United Nations vis-à-vis local and traditional leaders and key communities, which enabled a consultative process to commence this month with a view to reaching a joint peace agreement in the near future.

We also appreciate UNISFA's efforts aimed at advocating and empowering women's participation in the civic space, which is critical to promoting inclusive and lasting peace, local governance and decision-making, as well as gender issues.

On the humanitarian front, we note that significant challenges, compounded by the coronavirus disease pandemic and economic stress, continue to impact the daily lives of populations in the Area, particularly the most vulnerable, especially with respect to access to basic needs and services.

We stress the importance of enhancing humanitarian assistance, as well as recovery and resilience programmes, for people and communities throughout the Area, and tailoring interventions in accordance with an approach based on needs, vulnerabilities and the promotion of livelihoods.

Finally, revitalizing joint implementation mechanisms in Abyei remains a mutually agreed task that has yet to be fully materialized. We emphasize that progress in the establishment of joint governance institutions, including police, and the courts would have a direct and positive impact on the reigning of the rule of law in the Area.

In that regard, we look forward to the re-energizing of the Abyei Joint Oversight Committee meetings and to the support of the African Union High-level Implementation Panel to that end.

Furthermore, we stress the importance of organizing and appropriately endowing UNISFA's capacity, particularly as it relates to law-and-order tasks, in the light of the growing populations and economic activity in the main areas. It is of equal necessity that UNISFA can rely on a reasonably stable environment on the way towards its redesign in the coming period.

Finally, on the way forward for the United Nations presence in Abyei and UNISFA's strategic review, the A3+1 would like to endorse the recommendation of the Secretary-General in his report on the extension of UNISFA's mandate and its support to the JBVM for a further period of six months.

Mr. Flynn (Ireland): Let me start by thanking Under-Secretary-General Lacroix, the Special Envoy and former President Mbeki for their insightful briefings. I would also like to welcome the representatives of the Sudan and South Sudan here with us today.

Ireland had been encouraged by the continued improvement in relations between the Sudan and South Sudan. However, we are deeply concerned about the developments in the Sudan and condemn the military coup, which endangers the transition in the Sudan and, indeed, the progress made in the wider Horn of Africa region. The civilian leaders who have been detained must be released immediately and the democratic transitional institutions and framework fully restored. The actions of the military represent a betrayal of the revolution, the transition and the legitimate requests of the Sudanese people for peace, justice and economic development.

Sustaining the rapprochement between the Sudan and South Sudan is crucial to sustainable peace for the people of Abyei. We urge the Sudan and South Sudan to find a peaceful and lasting solution to the final status of Abyei and the demarcation of the border.

Despite the troubling reports of intercommunal violence, we are encouraged by the commitment of the Ngok Dinka and Misseriya communities to peace. Young people in Abyei face many challenges and their inclusion at all levels in the peace process is critical. We commend the efforts of the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA) in that regard.

We are also heartened to read of UNISFA's engagement with civil society organizations on gender issues and of the Ngok Dinka Paramount Chief's pledge to further the participation of women in traditional

leadership structures and to address the issues of early marriage and gender-based violence. Yet we know that major obstacles to women's participation in decision-making and political processes remain, with just a single woman now serving as a minister in the Juba-appointed administration in Abyei. We reaffirm the need for all parties to recognize the invaluable and critical contributions that women make and to ensure their full and unfettered participation.

As we discussed just last week, we are concerned by the deterioration of the security environment in Gok Machar and at United Nations team sites, including threats to the safety and security of peacekeepers.

Sadly, unacceptable breaches of the status-of-forces agreement resulted in the death of an Ethiopian peacekeeper on 14 September after the refusal of medical evacuation. We express our deepest condolences to the family of the deceased and to the Government of Ethiopia. In that regard, we urge the Government of South Sudan to honour its obligations under the status-of-forces agreement with UNISFA.

We encourage the Government of South Sudan to intensify its mediation efforts with members of the local community in Gok Machar, engage constructively with UNISFA and facilitate the urgent redeployment of UNISFA personnel to team sites 11 and 12. I also encourage UNISFA to address community concerns in a timely and transparent manner.

We also call on the Sudan to facilitate implementation of the mandate. As we have done before, Ireland echoes the calls of the Secretary-General for the operationalization of the Athony airstrip, the issuance of visas for United Nations Police personnel and the deployment of human rights expertise to UNISFA.

The security situation in Abyei remains tense and unpredictable. We sincerely thank Ethiopia for its crucial contribution over many years to the UNISFA peacekeeping mission. Any shift in the make-up of the UNISFA force requires careful planning and sequencing to ensure a smooth rotation.

Lastly, Ireland welcomes the recent strategic review of UNISFA, which included recommendations for the potential reconfiguration of the mission and a viable exit strategy. We also take careful note of the options presented in the strategic review, and we thank Under-Secretary-General Lacroix for his additional insights today. It is clear that a political process, led

by the stakeholders involved and actively supported by the African Union and its High-level Implementation Panel for the Sudan, will be crucial for sustainable peace. We commend UNISFA for the important work that it is doing in extremely challenging circumstances, and we look forward to constructively engaging on the upcoming mandate renewal.

Mr. Lipand (Estonia): I join others in thanking the briefers for their insightful presentations. I also welcome the presence of the representatives of the Sudan and South Sudan at today's discussion.

Hearing a description of the previous lack of implementation of different agreements today has been insightful. As highlighted by the Special Envoy, the most recent disruption to implementation was only two days ago. Estonia strongly condemns the military coup of 25 October in the Sudan. It is a great setback for the Sudanese people, who have worked so hard towards democratic transition, but it also has potential destabilizing effects on the wider region. We call on the Sudan's military authorities to refrain from violence and immediately return to the road map for transition to civilian rule, as laid out in the Constitutional Document and the Juba Peace Agreement.

We are concerned about the serious deterioration of the operating conditions of the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA) and strongly condemn the recent attacks on UNISFA in Gok Machar and the team sites. The situation has already claimed too high of a toll with the death of one peacekeeper. We offer our sincere condolences to the family of the deceased. Such incidents must not happen again.

We call on the Government of South Sudan to facilitate the unimpeded implementation of UNISFA's mandate. At the same time, we also call on UNISFA to address the concerns of local communities. Simultaneously, we continue to call for the operationalization of Anthony airstrip and the timely issuance of visas for UNISFA personnel, including the police component, which is crucial for the effective implementation of UNISFA's mandate.

Estonia is concerned about the continued cycle of intercommunal violence and its negative impact on civilians. The increase in cases of sexual violence over recent months is alarming. We encourage authorities to join efforts for more accountability to deter further violations. To better address these issues, we echo the Secretary-General's call for the inclusion of

human rights expertise in the mission. Additionally, in order to create an environment more conducive for the rule of law, Estonia fully supports the integrated approach to the protection of civilians promoted by the strategic review. On this note, we thank the Secretary-General for the strategic review, and we are giving it careful consideration.

Lastly, we call on the Sudan and South Sudan to take steps to build a viable political process to resolve the final status of Abyei. This political process could be aided by strengthening the civilian component of the UNISFA mission, including by the appointment of a civilian deputy head of mission. We also encourage regional actors to actively engage the parties on the Abyei question, as their support could make a significant contribution.

My statement today is probably the last time that Estonia will speak on the question of Abyei as a member of the Security Council. I would like to thank United Nations peacekeepers for their long-standing commitment and sacrifice in support of peace in Abyei. I would also like to emphasize that Abyei people deserve better than the current status quo. We therefore call on the parties to capitalize on their improved relationship to push for progress on the question of Abyei, and on the Council to take decisions that are in the best interests of the people of Abyei.

Mr. Sun Zhiqiang (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): The Chinese delegation thanks Under-Secretary-General Lacroix, Special Envoy Onanga-Anyanga and President Mbeki for their briefings and welcomes the representatives of the Sudan and South Sudan to today's meeting.

For some time now, the relationship between the Sudan and South Sudan has continued to improve. The two countries continue to maintain communication on the Abyei issue and hold meetings on the Joint Political and Security Mechanism, which China welcomes. We encourage both parties to continue to adhere to the political settlement and actively implement the agreements reached, stay committed to resolving outstanding issues, maintain peace and stability in the Abyei Area, and continue to promote the settlement of the final status of the Abyei Area. China continues to support the African Union (AU) and the AU High-level Implementation Panel in their mediation roles.

Communal conflicts remain the main problem for the security of the Abyei Area. China supports

the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA) in effectively protecting civilians in line with its mandate. At the same time, law enforcement alone cannot completely resolve communal conflicts. Only by continuously improving the relationship between the Ngok Dinka and Misseriya can the long-term stability in the Area be achieved. China welcomes the new dialogue between the two communities and encourages them to continue to resolve their differences through negotiation to achieve peaceful coexistence. China calls on UNISFA and the Governments of the Sudan and South Sudan to play a constructive role in this regard.

UNISFA performs its duties diligently despite difficulties and has played an important role in maintaining peace and stability in the Abyei Area. China supports in principle the extension of UNISFA's mandate. A Chinese helicopter unit has been deployed to UNISFA and will contribute to UNISFA's enhanced capabilities.

We are concerned about the recent death of a UNISFA peacekeeper owing to the lack of timely treatment. As a major troop-contributing country to peacekeeping operations, China has always maintained that the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) be effectively implemented for the safety of mission personnel, freedom of movement and unhindered access for supplies. This unfortunate incident once again shows the importance of gaining the understanding and support of the local people. China hopes that the Secretariat, the authorities of the countries concerned and UNISFA will strengthen communication and coordination and properly address the issues in implementation of the SOFA.

Just now, some Council members mentioned the recent developments in Khartoum, as China did yesterday during Council consultations. China sincerely hopes that all parties of the Sudan will act in the interests of the nation and its people and carry out dialogue and consultation to address differences appropriately, maintain political and social stability, and continue to promote an orderly political transition within the framework of Constitutional Document and the Juba Peace Agreement. I believe that the Sudanese people have the wisdom and capability to resolve their domestic affairs.

Mr. Asokan (India): I thank Under-Secretary-General Lacroix and the Special Envoy for the Horn

of Africa for their briefings. I welcome His Excellency Mr. Thabo Mbeki, Chairperson of the African Union High-level Implementation Panel to today's meeting and thank him for his briefing. I also welcome the representatives of the Sudan and South Sudan to this meeting.

Let me begin by conveying our sincere condolences to the family of the peacekeeper from Ethiopia who lost his life on 14 September while serving in the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA) in the Gok Machar area. The safety and security of United Nations peacekeepers needs to be accorded the highest priority. We also express our concern over the recent developments in Gok Machar area, including actions that threaten the safety and security of peacekeepers.

We welcome the continued rapprochement in recent months between the parties towards peace and trust-building, including the convening of joint bodies related to the management of the border and the Joint Political and Security Mechanism. The African Union has also continued its mediation efforts and offered support to parties to resume the meeting of the Abyei Joint Oversight Committee, which has not taken place since 2017. Peaceful resolution of the final status of Abyei in conformity with the Comprehensive Peace Agreement of 2011 remains fundamental to lasting peace, stability and development in the region.

However, the ongoing developments of concern in the Sudan can have an impact on the implementation of UNISFA's mandate. While the overall security situation has remained calm, the continuing violent incidents involving the Ngok Dinka and Misseriya communities are a matter of concern. In this regard, we commend UNISFA's efforts in holding meetings between the two communities. We need to be cognizant of the fact that these welcome developments have taken place amid the prevailing challenges presented by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19). We need to encourage both sides to continue their efforts in the coming months. These efforts need to focus on the early convening of the Abyei Oversight Committee and on promoting intercommunal dialogue, which are essential to the peace process in Abyei. The humanitarian situation in the Abyei Area also remains challenging, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. We appreciate the efforts of UNISFA and humanitarian agencies.

UNISFA has carried out tasks related to the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism

in a commendable manner despite the operational challenges. We also welcome the innovative technological initiatives to improve the mission's performance. For the mission's sustenance and ability to fulfil its mandate, every effort needs to be made for better coordination with the host Governments.

With regard to operational issues concerning the mission, we call on both the Sudanese and South Sudanese authorities to facilitate early resolution of long-standing pending issues, such as visas for police personnel, an agreement on the appointment of a civilian deputy head of mission and operationalization of the Anthony airstrip. We once again underscore the importance of adhering to the status-of-forces agreement by the South Sudanese authorities.

We have taken note of the lack of consensus in the report of the Secretary-General on the drawdown of UNISFA (S/2021/881) after intensive regional consultations with the Sudan, South Sudan and Ethiopia. We concur with the Secretary-General's assessment that, in view of a pending consensus on that sensitive issue among the three countries, a final decision should be deferred for the time being.

In conclusion, let me highlight that India has long-standing and friendly relations with both the Sudan and South Sudan. We have contributed to the development of both countries by means of bilateral assistance and projects in various sectors, such as energy, transport and agriculture. Our capacity-building, training and scholarship programmes have been deeply appreciated by both countries. India's Minister of State for External Affairs, Shri Muraleedharan, paid an official visit to Khartoum and Juba last week and held meetings with the political leadership to further strengthen India's relationship with both countries.

As a long-standing partner, India will continue to support Juba and Khartoum on their journey towards peace and development.

Ms. Heimerback (Norway): I thank Under-Secretary-General Lacroix, His Excellency Mr. Mbeki and Special Envoy Onanga-Anyanga for their insightful briefings.

We feel that it is appropriate to state again, as others have done in this meeting, that we are deeply alarmed by the current situation in the Sudan, where the gains made in the transition are now at serious risk. We condemn the ongoing military coup and we

call for the immediately release of all those who have been detained.

Norway also remains deeply concerned about the relocation of the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA) from Gok Machar, as well as the violation of the status-of-forces agreement in connection with the serious incidents in September. We acknowledge the press statement issued by the South Sudanese Minister for Foreign Affairs of 19 October and encourage South Sudan to urgently engage with the local communities in Gok Machar to address and resolve misunderstandings about the role of UNISFA and the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism.

Let me add three points to today's discussion on UNISFA and the situation in Abyei.

First, Abyei is a contested area with a troubled past. There is no doubt that UNISFA plays an invaluable role in providing security and stability, including in its ongoing efforts in building dialogue and trust between the Ngok Dinka and Misseriya communities ahead of the joint peace conference to be held later this month. We strongly encourage the continued engagement of UNISFA in supporting women-led peace initiatives as they form an integral part of the grassroots peace process.

Secondly, we welcome the continued strengthening of relations between the Sudan and South Sudan. A long-term and sustainable solution to the status of Abyei cannot be found without the political will and courage of the parties. The leaders of the Sudan and South Sudan should seize the opportunity of their close and friendly relations to craft an agreement on the final status of Abyei, and any a sustainable solution must also take into the account the views of the local populations.

Thirdly, until the parties agree on all pending issues, UNISFA, with its strong and clear mandate, is still needed. The implementation of joint mechanisms, as stipulated in the June 2011 agreement, remains important. That will strengthen cooperation and build trust between the communities on the ground.

We welcome the recent meeting of the Joint Political and Security Mechanism and urge the parties to resume meetings of the Abyei Joint Oversight Committee. Another significant step would be for South Sudan to nominate personnel to the joint police service. The protection of civilians and the rule of law are the bases for peaceful development. It is also

critical that outstanding visas for the formed police units of UNISFA be issued, that the Athony airstrip be operationalized and that the deployment of a civilian deputy head of mission be approved.

We note the Secretary-General's proposal for a reconfiguration of UNISFA. While we agree that lately there has been a realistic opening for joint approaches and a political solution, we believe that it is too early to introduce significant changes to the current force deployment and posture.

In conclusion, Norway strongly supports the renewal of UNISFA's mandate. We urge the parties to implement the joint mechanisms and we call on the leaders of the Sudan and South Sudan to redouble their efforts towards an agreement on the final status of Abyei.

Mr. Khoroshev (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank today's briefers — Under-Secretary-General Jean-Pierre Lacroix, Special Envoy Parfait Onanga-Anyanga and the Chairperson of the African Union High-Level Implementation Panel, Thabo Mbeki — for their comprehensive briefings.

We are pleased to note that, according to the most recent report of the Secretary-General (S/2021/881), the situation in Abyei remains generally stable. At the same time, it is worrisome that threats to security persist, especially for civilians, from armed groups and intercommunal clashes.

In order to make progress towards an inter-Sudanese settlement that results in a determination of the final status of Abyei, the parties must pool their efforts. In that connection, we welcome the resumption of contact among representatives of the Sudan and South Sudan at various levels and the willingness demonstrated by the parties to establish mutually beneficial cooperation. We note the dialogue between the parties on opening border crossings and establishing free-trade zones along the border. The Joint Political and Security Mechanism met for the first time in almost a year. That represents progress, albeit modest, towards reaching the so-called benchmarks. Efforts aimed at their implementation must continue. We hope that the dialogue that has begun will become more regular, which would help in reaching agreement on defining the final status of Abyei. Progress on the political track will help to improve the difficult humanitarian situation of the people.

Mr. Thabo Mbeki delivered a very inspiring briefing today. We trust that the African Union High-Level Implementation Panel will continue engaging meaningfully with the Sudanese sides.

We attach great importance to the activities of the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA) in establishing constructive relations among communities on the ground and promoting national reconciliation. We believe that the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism (JBVMM) is the linchpin for preventing incidents among the parties and UNISFA support for the JBVMM is crucial to the security architecture.

In that regard, we are concerned by information about the situation of UNISFA peacekeepers in Gok Machar. We trust that the Blue Helmets will soon return to their positions. We note the importance of respecting the status-of-forces agreement. At the same time, we believe it important to determine the causes of the tension and to work with the parties to avoid similar incidents in the future.

In view of the imminent extension of the UNISFA mandate, we note the importance of the presence of Blue Helmets in Abyei at this stage. However, we believe that it is important to consider the Secretariat's proposals on the configuration of the mission, including its national composition, in a manner that takes into account the views of Khartoum and Juba.

Mr. Pham (Viet Nam): I thank Under-Secretary-General Jean-Pierre Lacroix, Special Envoy Parfait Onanga-Anyanga and His Excellency Mr. Thabo Mbeki for their insightful briefings. I welcome the participation of the representatives of the Sudan and South Sudan.

Since the beginning of 2021, the bilateral relations between the Sudan and South Sudan have continued to improve. However, such positive rapprochement between the Sudan and South Sudan has yet to bear fruit in Abyei. Furthermore, the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA) has been facing new challenges in the implementation of its mandate in recent months. The current developments in the Sudan do not inspire optimism with regard to the prospects of the issue.

In that regard, I wish to emphasize the following four points.

First, we reiterate our call for the Sudan and South Sudan to resolve the issue through peaceful means in a timely manner, in accordance with international law and the Charter of the United Nations.

While it is encouraging that the two countries have resumed dialogue and engagement on this matter, practical actions and progress on the ground have remained very limited. Further concrete progress must be made with regard to the benchmarks of the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism (JBVMM).

In addition, we encourage further efforts on the part of UNISFA in promoting confidence among the relevant parties as well as among the various tribes and communities in Abyei.

Secondly, it is equally important to ensure stability and security in Abyei. The continued incidents related to intercommunal violence, crime and the presence of armed groups remain sources of concern.

We share the concerns of fellow Council members about the situation of UNISFA's team sites, particularly in Gok Machar. We express our deepest condolences to the Government of Ethiopia and to the family of the peacekeeper who passed away on 14 September. In that regard, it is imperative that the status-of-forces agreement with UNISFA be fully respected.

We urge all relevant sides, including the Sudan and South Sudan, to effectively ensure the safety and security of United Nations personnel and to create favourable conditions for UNISFA to carry out its mandate effectively, including activities relating to preparations for adjustment.

We also call on both the Sudan and South Sudan to continue to support the appointment of a civilian Deputy Head of Mission and the establishment of joint security institutions, in line with the relevant Security Council resolutions.

Thirdly, strengthened efforts are needed to address the increasing humanitarian challenges in Abyei due to the impact of the coronavirus disease pandemic and natural disasters. We call on the two Governments to continue ensuring unhindered access to humanitarian assistance in the area and creating favourable conditions for the people living in Abyei.

We also commend the efforts of UNISFA, the United Nations Mine Action Service and partners in

facilitating mine-clearance and risk-education activities in Abyei in the past months.

Fourthly, the presence of UNISFA will continue to be essential in maintaining stability in Abyei and providing support to the JBVMM. We support the renewal of UNISFA's mandate, as recommended by the Secretary-General, and will engage actively with Council members in the upcoming discussions.

Enhancing UNISFA's ability to fulfil its mandate in an effective, efficient, objective and impartial manner should remain one of our top priorities.

In conclusion, we would like to commend the efforts of the United Nations, UNISFA, the Special Envoy for the Horn of Africa, the African Union, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development, neighbouring countries and international partners for their engagement with the relevant sides in finding a peaceful solution to the Abyei issue and resolving the ongoing challenges relating to UNISFA.

Ms. Jacobs (United Kingdom): I wish to thank our briefers, Under-Secretary-General Lacroix, the Special Envoy and His Excellency Thabo Mbeki, for their insightful updates and reflections as well as their combined efforts over the past six months to support peace and peacekeeping in the region.

First, the United Kingdom joins Council members in condemning the actions of the Sudanese military this week to detain civilian members of Government and dissolve transitional institutions. We call on the military to course-correct and release those detained, refrain from violence and allow peaceful protest.

The United Kingdom welcomes the decision of the African Union this morning, which sends a strong message that the Sudanese military cannot subvert the Sudan's democratic transition without consequence.

The United Kingdom is further concerned at the impact that those events may have on the situation in Abyei and the already difficult operating circumstances for the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA). The Council has repeatedly welcomed the recent rapprochement between the Governments of the Sudan and South Sudan. This welcome shift in bilateral relations has led to the temporary reopening of border crossings, corridors and the establishment of free-trade zones along the border. We hope that despite the unilateral acts by the Sudanese military in Khartoum, this cooperation will continue.

More broadly, while the United Kingdom welcomes efforts to strengthen bilateral relations, it is regrettable that renewed engagement has not translated into tangible improvements in Abyei, where ordinary citizens continue to suffer. We urge both countries to work together to reach a resolution on the final status of Abyei.

The United Kingdom remains deeply concerned by the situation in Gok Machar and repeats its condolences on the death of a UNISFA peacekeeper last month. The members of the Council delivered a unified message on 15 October (SC/14666) reiterating their full support for UNISFA and demanding that the Government of South Sudan facilitate the unimpeded implementation of UNISFA's mandate.

The situation in Gok Machar is another example of the operational challenges that UNISFA continues to face in fulfilling its mandate. There has been limited progress made on the Council's repeated requests to facilitate the operationalization of Athony airstrip, the issuing of outstanding visa requests and the appointment of a civilian Deputy Head of Mission. We reiterate our call for both parties to address those long-standing limitations, particularly as we consider the reconfiguration of the peacekeeping mission in Abyei.

In that regard, the United Kingdom takes note of the options for reconfiguration proposed in the Secretary-General's strategic review of UNISFA. We commend the men and women of UNISFA on their ongoing efforts to address the evolving security challenges, including the facilitation of community dialogue and local peacebuilding and women's empowerment initiatives.

The United Kingdom would also like to commend the dedication of Ethiopian peacekeepers in their support for peace and security in Abyei throughout the past decade. It is our sincere hope that the interests of the people of Abyei remain at the forefront of decision-making on the future configuration of UNISFA.

We also call for regional tensions to be resolved through dialogue and encourage regional partners as well as the United Nations to ensure that current disputes do not damage the effectiveness of UNISFA.

Finally, the United Kingdom urges all parties to fully respect international humanitarian law and allow humanitarian actors to deliver aid to those in need in all parts of Abyei without hindrance.

Mrs. Gasri (France) (*spoke in French*): I, too, wish to thank Mr. Jean-Pierre Lacroix, Mr. Parfait Onanga-Anyanga and President Mbeki for their briefings. I also welcome the presence among us of the representatives of the Sudan and of South Sudan.

I wish to emphasize three points.

First, the attacks targeting United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA) team sites in the demilitarized border zone and in Gok Machar are unacceptable. We take note of the commitment of South Sudan to UNISFA, as confirmed in the 19 October declaration as mentioned by the Special Envoy. We call on South Sudan to translate those words into action and to ensure security and freedom of movement for UNISFA, in line with its obligations under the status-of-forces agreement.

Moreover, we expect that both the Sudan and South Sudan will clarify their expectations as concerns a component of UNISFA's mandate — support for the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism.

Secondly, with respect to the situation in Abyei, France takes note of the conclusions of the strategic review, which reflects the consequences of the evolving regional context. We support a reconfiguration of the mission that reflects the opportunities presented by the rapprochement between Khartoum and Juba while safeguarding the mission's capacity to deliver on its civilian-protection mandate. We remain troubled by the persistent intercommunal violence, specifically the resurgence of sexual violence.

Beyond the role of UNISFA, there is a vital need for the Sudan and South Sudan to facilitate the resumption of dialogue at the local level, which is necessary to deal with security questions and to make headway towards the establishment of joint administrations in the area.

Thirdly, France reaffirms its support for the Special Envoy for the Horn of Africa at a time when crises in the region are proliferating. We, too, condemn the coup d'état in the Sudan. We voice our support for the Sudanese transitional Government. We take note of the return of the Prime Minister to his home, and we reiterate our call for his release and for respect for his physical safety as well as that of his spouse and civilian leaders.

France welcomes and supports the decisions taken by the African Union Peace and Security Council. This coup d'état seriously undermines the balance of the

transition, as defined in the Constitutional Document of August 2019 — the only framework allowing the international community to maintain its support for the country. Moreover, the coup is taking place in a region already weakened by tensions in Abyei, the Al-Fashaqah triangle area, the Renaissance Dam and Tigray. We call on the countries of the region to prevent these vulnerabilities from being exploited.

Dialogue and regional cooperation are essential to overcome these challenges. We welcome in particular the engagement of the African members of the Security Council and support the efforts of the Special Envoy and the Secretary-General, together with the African Union, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development and all relevant partners.

Mr. Sandoval Mendiola (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Under-Secretary Lacroix, Special Envoy Onanga-Anyanga and Mr. Thabo Mbeki, Chairperson of the African Union High-level Implementation Panel, for their briefings. We also welcome the representative of the Sudan and South Sudan.

The past few months have been characterized by multiple outreach efforts by both the Sudan and South Sudan, culminating in the summit in Juba in August. Such meetings are essential for the consolidation and formalization of cooperation and dialogue. We hope that the recent events in the Sudan, which we condemn, will not have a negative impact on stability and security in the Abyei region.

However, there are two main challenges. First, there are multiple tools and mechanisms that must be operationalized, such as the Joint Political and Security Mechanism, whose decisions remain unimplemented, and the Abyei Joint Oversight Committee, which has not met since 2017. We hope that the Sudan and South Sudan will make use of those spaces and tools. Secondly, mistrust among Abyei communities constitutes one of the main challenges for the two Governments and the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA). We call on the Sudan and South Sudan to redouble efforts in their interactions to facilitate a dialogue with a view to reducing tensions between the Misseriya and the Ngok Dinka.

With regard to the Secretary-General's assessment of recent political developments between the Sudan and South Sudan and his recommendations on a possible reconfiguration of the mission and the establishment

of a road map for its eventual exit, we share his view that peacekeeping tools are not enough and that the nature of the challenges in Abyei require a peacekeeping approach. Only rapprochement among the Abyei communities and confidence-building can create conditions for peace and stability in the region. We will closely follow the discussion on the possible establishment of benchmarks with the objective of agreeing on a solution to the final status of the Abyei region. The participation of women in decision-making processes is critical to achieving stability.

Mexico recognizes the work of UNISFA, especially in the context of the complex situation it has faced in recent weeks. We regret that the deterioration of security in Sector 1 of the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism (JBVMM) forced the relocation of a significant part of its personnel to Gok Machar. That dramatically limits the Force's ability to support the JBVMM. We call on South Sudan to raise awareness in Abyei communities about the United Nations presence and the importance of UNISFA's work.

The Secretary-General's latest report (S/2021/881) concludes that one of the main challenges is law and order. In that regard, it is regrettable that rule of law efforts have been undermined by the absence of a police service in Abyei. The United Nations Police is the only entity that provides that service. We call on the authorities to authorize the deployment of police units, as they are key to de-escalation and stabilization.

The Force's success lies in its ability to operate. Blocking medical evacuation services and not permitting aircraft to land, the lack of progress in operationalizing the Athony airstrip, the issuing of visas to police and violations of the status of forces agreement are unacceptable. We call on the parties to ensure that UNISFA is able to carry out its mandate fully, safely and effectively.

The main security threat and the greatest challenge to the protection of civilians continues to be the presence in the region of armed elements, who are also primarily responsible for the proliferation of arms in Abyei. Illicit trafficking of small arms negatively impacts peace and security in Abyei and the region. Effective controls are needed to prevent the diversion of such weapons. I conclude by noting the volatile situation in the region. We urge all parties to exercise maximum restraint and avoid any action that could exacerbate tensions and destabilize both Abyei and the wider region. The

leadership of the African Union, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development and the African Union High-level Implementation Panel, among others, are more important than ever.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Sudan.

Mr. Mohammed (Sudan) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to begin by congratulating you, Mr. President, on your presidency of the Security Council for the month of October. We commend the vitality of the Council's agenda during the presidency of your friendly country. We also express our appreciation to Her Excellency the Permanent Representative of Ireland for her successful presidency of the Council last month.

We thank Mr. Jean-Pierre Lacroix, Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations, for his briefing on the implementation of the mandate of the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA). We also thank Mr. Parfait Onanga-Anyanga, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Horn of Africa, and Mr. Thabo Mbeki for their briefings.

The Sudan notes the Secretary-General's report (S/2021/881) on the situation in Abyei.

Bilateral relations between the Sudan and South Sudan have continued to improve in recent months. Regular visits among officials of the two countries at various levels are but one example of that progress. At the top of the list of visits is that undertaken to Juba in August by the Sudanese Prime Minister. During his visit, he reaffirmed the importance of building the strategic relationship between the two countries. Moreover, three memorandums of understanding — on transport, trade and oil — were signed during the visit. The two parties reached agreements on opening passages to borders, discussed signing agreements on trade and the economic free zone, traffic arrangements and the resumption of moving goods and passengers by land, river and railway. They also reached agreements on eliminating all obstacles to banking transactions between the two countries.

Abyei was the subject of important discussions during the visit, when an agreement was reached to closely follow the situation in Abyei through the joint security committees. In that context, another meeting by the Joint Political and Security Mechanism was held in Juba on 4 and 5 September, during which the Mechanism, under the presidency of the two Ministers

of Defence of the Sudan and South Sudan, reviewed the implementation of the results of the preceding meeting held in Khartoum. They also reviewed a UNISFA report and a report of the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism in the Safe Demilitarized Border Zone.

The Joint Political and Security Mechanism, which is the highest body responsible for the agreements on the joint cooperation between the Republic of the Sudan and the Republic of South Sudan, reached positive decisions that will strengthen relations between the two countries and support security and stability. The two parties agreed that the next meeting of the Mechanism would be held in January 2022.

The positive environment of rapprochement between the two countries has cast a positive light on negotiations on the final status of Abyei, which the Sudan has repeatedly emphasized. The Sudan is committed to building on the development in bilateral relations between the two brotherly neighbours so as to enhance peaceful and social coexistence in Abyei, expedite discussions and reach an understanding on the final status of Abyei.

In this regard, I would like to stress the following five points.

First, the Sudan is counting greatly on friendly relations with the State of South Sudan and on benefiting from the positive momentum to resolve all outstanding issues between the two countries, foremost among which is the situation in Abyei. That includes the establishment of temporary administrative and security mechanisms called for in the 20 June 2011 agreement, signed by both parties.

Secondly, while the Sudan reaffirms its commitment to maintaining peace, stability and security in Abyei, we note with concern the events that have taken place in the region in recent weeks, leading to the withdrawal of team members of the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism from sites, which resulted in the closing of those sites and the evacuation of personnel to Abyei. The Sudan therefore calls for de-escalation, a reduction in tensions in the region and refraining from taking unilateral measures that could threaten stability in the UNISFA area of operations. In this regard, I offer my condolences to the family of the peacekeeper who lost his life during these events.

Thirdly, we welcome the holding of the consultative meetings organized by the UNISFA community liaison office, which included Abyei community leaders. We hope that the various social components will take initiatives to maintain cooperation and peaceful coexistence so as to ensure peace and security for the communities in Abyei region.

Fourthly, the Sudan reiterates its commitment to fully cooperating with the Secretariat regarding the smooth replacement of the current forces of UNISFA with a neutral and multinational peacekeeping force that is better qualified and meets the conditions of the elements working in peace missions. We will commit ourselves to cooperating with the departing forces in accordance with our obligations under the status-of-forces agreement and our well-known customs and traditions, as well as in adherence to all other obligations dictated by other contractual or humanitarian considerations.

Fifthly, we welcome the recommendation of the Secretary-General that the mandate of UNISFA be renewed for six months.

I reaffirm the commitment of the Sudan to strengthening cooperation with South Sudan in order to enhance the work of the Joint Political and Security Mechanism and the Joint Oversight Committee in Abyei. We are also committed to establishing joint mechanisms between the two countries, based on the terms of the agreements signed between the two parties leading to a solution to the final status of Abyei in accordance with the agreed references.

In conclusion, some delegations have voiced their concern about what is currently happening in the Sudan. While we understand such concern, we reiterate the need for the international community, and the Security Council in particular, to continue supporting the people of the Sudan during this critical and decisive period. The Council must play a constructive role in bringing closer together the positions of various Sudanese civil and military parties so that the country can pursue its democratic transition, which will be worthy of the sacrifices made by Sudanese women and youth and maintain the gains of the past two years, while preserving the security and stability yearned for by the Sudanese people and achieving freedom, peace and justice, in line with the principles contained in the Constitutional Declaration and Juba Peace Agreement. The Council's support to the Sudan is very important

in these circumstances in order to bring together the divergent points of view of the various Sudanese parties.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of South Sudan.

Mr. Malwal (South Sudan): Although only a few days remain before the end of your presidency of the Security Council, Sir, allow us to express our appreciation for the way you and your team have run a very busy and relevant programme during your presidency. It has been a successful presidency by all accounts.

I should like to acknowledge the presence of and thank His Excellency President Thabo Mbeki, Chairperson of the African Union High-level Implementation Panel; Under-Secretary-General Jean-Pierre Lacroix; and my dear friend, Mr. Parfait Onanga-Anyanga, for their briefings today.

We take note of the report of the Secretary-General of 15 October (S/2021/881) on Abyei. Although the report is generally fair and accurate, our delegation, after careful reading, found that with better consultations on the ground, a few inaccuracies and omissions could have been avoided.

We would also like to acknowledge the Security Council press statement of 15 October (SC/14666) on the unfortunate situation in Gok Machar. Our delegation would like to take this opportunity to reiterate our deepest sympathy and condolences to the family of the peacekeeper who, sadly, lost his life and to all the personnel of the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA) for that untimely and senseless loss of life. While we mourn the loss of life of the peacekeeper, we must all learn a lesson here so that such an unfortunate event does not occur again. One of the lessons we must glean from this sad situation is that better and early communication between the United Nations and South Sudanese authorities, and between the two authorities and the relevant community leaders, is crucial.

Yes, we are committed to the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism and the Joint Political and Security Mechanism, but we must always take time to inform the community leaders of any

movements of troops in any given area. That should not be just the responsibility of the Government in Juba; it should be a joint responsibility.

A few weeks ago, we started holding meetings with departments concerned within the Secretariat on the replacement of the Ethiopian peacekeepers in UNISFA, to which Under-Secretary-General Lacroix alluded to in his briefing. Sadly, with the unfortunate political events in the Sudan that have taken place since Monday, 25 October, we think that a reconsideration of those plans is in order.

I know that we are in diplomacy, but I think that we know how these things work these days. The rapprochement between the Sudan and South Sudan happened because of the system that was in Khartoum after the revolution. Since Monday, that system no longer exists. Although we hope things will continue, sadly, it will take time. That is why the African Union (AU) suspended the regime in Khartoum today.

While we hope the Sudanese political leaders will resolve their political differences amicably and peacefully, we would like to request the United Nations and the AU to seriously and positively consider the following proposals.

First, we propose the immediate suspension of the planned replacement of the Ethiopian peacekeepers and engagement with the Ethiopian Government on how best to rotate existing troops in Abyei.

Secondly, we propose that the Government of South Sudan, the AU and the United Nations embark on legal negotiations that would lead to the development of a new interim legal framework that would allow and regulate the movements and operations of international organizations in the Abyei area. For example, the issuance of visas ought not be the monopoly of Khartoum.

Thirdly, the Government of South Sudan and the international community should engage and agree on a programme to be implemented that will return and resettle the Ngok Dinka, who have been living as refugees and internally displaced persons, to their original homes and villages, and provide those communities with social and economic services and opportunities for livelihood in their area, under the protection of the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA).

Those few proposals can be added to and/or improved upon. However, the purpose is to make sure that the people of Abyei are not held hostage to unforeseen political events all the time. Here, we welcome the re-engagement of President Thabo Mbeki's Panel and look forward to receiving and welcoming his proposal on the final status of Abyei.

In conclusion, the replacement of Ethiopian peacekeepers in UNISFA was reluctantly accepted by some in Juba because they do not want to create a security vacuum in Abyei with the departure of the Ethiopian troops. With the current unfortunate political situation in the Sudan, we urge the international community, with the guidance of the United Nations and the African Union, to engage the Government of South Sudan in order to prevent the people of Abyei

from being victimized by events that are beyond their control or not of their own doing.

Juba is ready to work with the international community to see to it that the people of Abyei are not forgotten, while we try to resolve other situations around the region. We look forward to receiving His Excellency President Mbeki and his team so that the international community can engage in how to ease the suffering of the Ngok Dinka in the area.

The President: There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers. I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 12.05 p.m.