



# Security Council

Seventy-fifth year

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New York

*Provisional*

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*President:* Ms. Evstigneeva . . . . . (Russian Federation)

*Members:*

Belgium . . . . .	Mrs. Van Vlierberge
China . . . . .	Mr. Dai Bing
Dominican Republic . . . . .	Mrs. Cedano
Estonia . . . . .	Mr. Jürgenson
France . . . . .	Mrs. Broadhurst Estival
Germany . . . . .	Mr. Sautter
Indonesia . . . . .	Mr. Djani
Niger . . . . .	Mr. Aougi
Saint Vincent and the Grenadines . . . . .	Mr. Bynoe
South Africa . . . . .	Mr. Van Shalkwyk
Tunisia . . . . .	Mr. Ladeb
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

Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Abyei (S/2020/1019)

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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**

#### **Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Abyei (S/2020/1019)**

**The President** (*spoke in Russian*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of 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 the meeting: Mr. Jean-Pierre Lacroix, Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations; and Mr. Parfait Onanga-Anyanga, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Horn of Africa.

Mr. Lacroix and Mr. Onanga-Anyanga are joining today's meeting via video-teleconference.

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/2020/1019, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Abyei.

I now give the floor to Mr. Lacroix.

**Mr. Lacroix:** I thank you, Madam President, for this opportunity to brief the Security Council on developments pertaining to the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA), including its support to the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism (JBVMM) and response to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. I shall also update the Council on the latest developments since the publication of the report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Abyei (S/2020/1019).

The reporting period was marked by enhanced collaboration between the Sudan and South Sudan. On 3 October, a historic peace agreement was signed between the transitional Government of the Sudan, the Sudanese Revolutionary Front and the Sudan Liberation Movement-Minni Minnawi in Juba, South Sudan. The South Sudanese authorities facilitated the negotiation process that led to the signing of the

agreement. Also, in a positive development, the Sudan and South Sudan have broached their intention to relaunch the political process, with senior officials from South Sudan travelling to Khartoum to meet with Sudanese authorities to discuss the final status of Abyei and border areas.

However, despite this continued rapprochement between the Sudan and South Sudan, the peace process has made little progress in Abyei. The main developments at the local level were the appointments by Juba and Khartoum of their respective chief administrators. On 29 June, President Kiir Mayardit appointed Lieutenant General Kuol Diem Kuol as Chief Administrator for the Abyei Special Administrative Area. On 20 August, the Chairman of the Sudan's Sovereign Council, Lieutenant General Abdel Fattah Abdelrahman Al-Burhan, signed a decree appointing engineer Gumaa Dawood Musa Hamdan as Chief Administrator for the Abyei Administrative Area. This constitutes an unprecedented political development as it is the first time Abyei has two appointed chief administrators.

The general security situation in Abyei during the reporting period remained rather volatile, with four attacks against UNISFA personnel being of particular concern and four instances of intercommunal violence, including armed attacks on villages. Two of the attacks against UNISFA personnel occurred on 24 April, and the third attack on 12 May, when two soldiers from the Force Protection Unit assigned to the JBVMM headquarters in Kadugli were fired upon while driving from the Kadugli base to Murta. In the fourth attack, an unknown armed group opened fire on an UNISFA convoy between Goli and Todach in Sector North, injuring three peacekeepers, one of them critically, who was subsequently airlifted to Addis Ababa for treatment.

UNISFA continued to engage Ngok Dinka and Misseriya authorities and community leaders to further the local-level peace efforts. However, the incidents at Nainai and Kolom on 19 and 22 January, respectively, as well as the incident in Mabok on 13 April and the Ngok Dinka attack on Ibrahim village on 8 August 2020, compounded intercommunal tensions and negatively impacted peace efforts at the local level. UNISFA's efforts to have community representatives engage within the framework of the joint community peace committee were unsuccessful.

In order to address potential violence at the local level during the migration season, a technical committee

of the 2020 pre-migration conference was formed, comprising UNISFA, the International Organization for Migration and the non-governmental organization Concordis International, to discuss the pastoralist movement along the three migration corridors in Abyei. The pre-migration conference is aimed at resolving issues that could lead to conflict between herders and host communities along migration routes. On 17 October, members of the team met with officials of the Juba-appointed local administration in Abyei. The discussion centred around the need for the resumption of the joint community peace committee meeting and the proposed pre-migration conference for the forthcoming season. On 19 October, the team met with members of the Misseriya joint community peace committee at the Amiet market as part of the consultations towards the proposed pre-migration conference. The Misseriya warned that any delay in reaching an agreement between the two sides might lead to clashes and loss of lives along the migration corridors. They urged UNISFA to convene the traditional leaders conference before 1 November. UNISFA has emphasized the need to resume regular joint community peace committee meetings for the sake of peace and security within the communities.

During the reporting period, minimum progress was made on JBVMM benchmarks and the Joint Political and Security Mechanism (JPSM) decisions, due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. That affected progress in the opening of the crossing corridors as agreed in the JPSM resolution of 19 February and border demarcation activities by both the Joint Border Commission and the Joint Demarcation Committee. The JPSM was unable to hold meetings as scheduled. Furthermore, planned JBVMM operational activities and meetings were suspended. Aerial and ground monitoring missions were also put on hold due to COVID-19-related restrictions imposed by the host countries. While ground monitoring missions resumed on 27 July, the onset of the rainy season rendered most areas inaccessible.

Under resolution 2519 (2020), the Security Council mandated the deployment of 640 police personnel, including three formed police units of 160 members each and 160 individual police officers. Currently, the staffing of the United Nations police stands at 35, out of which 16 officers are finishing their two-year assignment in October or November. Since no visas have been issued for any new officers who could be

deployed as replacements, the strength of the police component will decrease to 19 officers. Consequently, this situation will inevitably lead to the closure of some team sites in UNISFA and have a very negative impact on mandate implementation.

The process of generating and deploying the three authorized formed police units has been hampered by the travel restrictions related to the COVID-19 outbreak, as well as the non-issuance of entry visas for the officials from those identified police-contributing countries (PCCs) intending to visit the Mission. On 4 October, two notes verbales were sent to the relevant authorities of the Sudan, requesting entry visas and travel permits to Abyei for the members of the reconnaissance teams from China and Tanzania. Those reconnaissance visits are mandatory for the PCCs, within the process of the deployment of their formed police units. The reconnaissance visit for the Chinese official delegation was scheduled from 18 October and the Tanzanian official delegation is expected to conduct its field visit from 1 November. So far, the entry visas and travel permits to Abyei have still not been granted by the Sudanese authorities.

Regarding COVID-19, the mission has reported 11 COVID-19 confirmed cases since the pandemic started, including one national civilian staff member, four international staff, two international contracted staff, two military staff officers and two members from troop-contributing countries. There was one suspected death of a female soldier. Locally, on 6 October, the Abyei Health Cluster meeting for COVID-19 was held at Ameth-bek Hospital. The Minister of Health of the Juba-appointed administration chaired the meeting, which was attended by representatives of UNISFA, the GOAL non-governmental organization and Save the Children. During the meeting, it was reported that 2,702 people had been screened within the Abyei Area to date and the cumulative number of confirmed cases since the outbreak of the pandemic was 52, while the cumulative number of related deaths was five. Since July to date, no new positive cases have been recorded in the Abyei Area.

UNISFA has continued to engage with the Government of the Sudan and the Government of South Sudan to facilitate the implementation of the pending aspects of their previous agreements, despite the obstacles posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. The newly appointed acting Head of Mission/Force Commander has visited Khartoum to address a number

of substantive issues pertaining to UNISFA's mandate and the peace process. He has also visited Juba, where he interacted with the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Minister of Defence and the South Sudan People's Defence Force Chief of Staff, as well as with the Deputy co-Chair appointed by South Sudan of the Abyei Joint Oversight Committee. He is committed to continuing his engagement with both parties.

In conclusion, I would like to express my thanks for the continued support by the Security Council to UNISFA and seek the Council's support for the Secretary-General's recommendation to extend the mandate of UNISFA for a further period of six months, until 15 May 2021.

**The President** (*spoke in Russian*): I thank Mr. Lacroix for his briefing.

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

**Mr. Onanga-Anyanga**: I thank you, Madam President, for this opportunity to brief the Security Council on progress in the implementation of resolution 2046 (2012), which concerns outstanding bilateral issues between the Sudan and South Sudan and the situation in South Kordofan and Blue Nile states.

The global coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has continued to impact health and human and socioeconomic developments in Sudan and South Sudan. With the closure of airspaces and land borders and the continuous enforcement of other restrictive measures to contain the spread of the virus, even our in-person engagements with the authorities were severely limited. Nevertheless, thanks to virtual communication, I was able to engage substantively with a significant number of high-level officials in the two countries and the region.

The drastic preventive measures applied by countries of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development at the start of the pandemic appear to have been successful in weakening the spread of COVID-19 in the region. The focus of the response has now shifted to economic recovery and restoring people's livelihoods. With the reopening of airports, I was able to visit the Sudan from 13 to 16 October. I held very fruitful consultations with Government officials, including Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok; the Chairperson of the Sovereign Council, General Abdel Fattah Abdelrahman Al-Burhan; and with the Ministers for Foreign Affairs, of Defence and of

Irrigation; the Chairman of the opposition National Unionist Party; the Deputy Chairman of the Sudan People's Liberation Army/Movement -North; the chief negotiator of the Justice and Equality Movement; and the Peace Commissioner. A projected visit to South Sudan could not take place before this briefing. I was nevertheless able to speak with Minister Deng Alor, who is responsible for the Abyei file, in South Sudan.

I am happy to report that the relationship between the Sudan and South Sudan continues to strengthen. It is in that context that at the beginning of September, the Sudan and South Sudan agreed to review all their 2012 cooperation agreements with immediate effect. Following a 2 September meeting, South Sudan dispatched a high-level mission to Khartoum on 6 September to initiate bilateral discussions, including on Abyei. While neither party disclosed the outcomes, there was an understanding that further talks on Abyei would take place alternately in both countries. I would like to take this opportunity to recognize the pivotal role that the Interim Security Force for Abyei continues to play in maintaining stability in Abyei under very challenging circumstances.

The flagship event during the reporting period was the signing in Juba of a peace agreement on 3 October between the Government of the Sudan, the Sudanese Revolutionary Front alliance and the Sudan Liberation Army-Minni Minawi faction. The agreement was the culmination of a peace process launched in Juba in October 2019 under the auspices of President Kiir, who is also its guarantor, alongside President Idriss Deby Itno of Chad. Among other things, the agreement covers key region-specific and national issues related to governance, security arrangements, land ownership, transitional justice and the return of displaced persons.

During my visit to Khartoum, I gathered that there is a strong will to make the Juba agreement a real success. There is commitment and clear political will to accelerate the implementation process and demonstrate to the non-signatory movements of Abdel Aziz Al-Hilu and Abdel Wahid Al-Nur that peace is the only way forward for a prosperous, stable and just Sudan that caters for all its people.

While in Khartoum, I was also able to meet with the deputy chief mediator for the Juba process, Mr. Dhieu Mathok of South Sudan. He expressed optimism that the core demands of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North faction under Abdel Aziz Al-Hilu

are being considered for resolution. Building on Prime Minister Hamdok's peace efforts and the signing in Addis Ababa with Al-Hilu of a joint declaration subsequently endorsed by the High Council of Peace in the Sudan, informal workshops to flesh out the details of the issues of secularism, the status of the Sudanese People's Liberation Army during the transition, self-determination in case the peace agreement is not honoured and terms for a national constitutional conference to endorse those provisions will start soon in Juba, I am told next week, between the Government of the Sudan and Al-Hilu.

Furthermore, during my meetings in Khartoum, the Chair of the Sovereign Council, the Prime Minister, members of the negotiation team, the Peace Commissioner, the leadership of the Forces for Freedom and Change, and the South Sudanese mediators all vowed to spare no effort to bring onboard the Sudan Liberation Movement faction led by Abdel Wahid Al-Nur, so as to ensure a fully comprehensive agreement.

One immediate effect of the Juba agreement will be the reactivation of the four freedoms between the Sudan and South Sudan, namely, freedom of residence, freedom of movement, freedom to undertake an economic activity and freedom to own and dispose of property. That will enable citizens to move, conduct business, settle and transfer or own assets in either country freely or with minimal transaction costs.

The Sudanese Minister of Defence pledged that the Sudan would meet its commitment to open the border crossing points on 27 October. I am told, as we speak, that the two Ministers of Defence are currently meeting in Khartoum. Measures taken to open the dry port in Kosti and to relaunch commercial river transport operations and other crossing points would allow for the free movement of goods and services between the two countries. They would also enable the Sudan to accelerate trade with South Sudan and compete in this market with other neighbouring countries. In the meantime, the African Union has indicated its intention to convene the Joint Border Commission soon and has encouraged both countries to resume high-level meetings such as the Joint Security Committee and the Joint Political and Security Mechanism.

In his address at the agreement-signing ceremony on 3 October, President Kiir reiterated that he agreed to mediate the conflict also because he was aware that peace in the Sudan would have a positive bearing

on South Sudan's security. As the countries are now strengthening their relationship, they are no longer likely to pursue activities that undermine each other's stability. On the contrary, I am aware that, building on the Rome peace efforts led by the Sant'Egidio community, the Sudan is currently embarking on an attempt to mediate between General Thomas Cirillo of the National Salvation Front and the Government of South Sudan. Authorities in both countries are confident that all outstanding bilateral issues between their countries, including Abyei and the resolution of the situation in South Kordofan and Blue Nile states, will benefit from the friendly relationships and the mutual trust they are now enjoying.

Meanwhile, the two countries have continued to develop fruitful cooperation in the area of oil. On 28 September, they signed a protocol to resume oil production in the Unity and Toma South fields, with 15,000 barrels per day expected to be produced very soon. The deal includes details on the transfer of crude oil to the Sudan for its domestic use. In return, the Sudan will provide technical support. Before the agreement, South Sudan was providing 30,000 barrels per day of crude oil to the Sudan. The deal is in line with South Sudan's plan to return to its pre-conflict production level of 350,000 barrels per day from its current 150,000 per day.

To conclude, the warm relations that I have outlined between the Sudan and South Sudan also provide an opportunity for the international community to strengthen further its engagements with both countries as they continue to grapple with their internal challenges, which have always constrained their bilateral relations.

In South Sudan, the implementation of the peace agreement remains deadlocked on several substantive issues on which the parties may need some support to move forward.

For its part, the Sudan has embarked on the right path and demonstrated the political will to resolve its multiple conflicts. Now more than ever before, it also needs our collective support to overcome some of the obstacles that are likely to hinder a smooth transition and the implementation of the peace process. It is in that context that we welcome the announcement by the United States Government on 20 October to initiate the removal of the Sudan from the States sponsors of terrorism list. Nowhere is such support more vital than on the economic front, in order both to advance

much-needed reforms and meet the basic needs of the population. I left Khartoum last Friday with mixed feelings — hopeful about the unprecedented drive for peace and deeply concerned about the sight of endless fuel and bread queues. Without concrete peace dividends, the legitimate aspirations for freedom and shared prosperity of the Sudanese people may be in jeopardy.

My Office will continue to engage with the authorities of both countries and, as appropriate, with key regional actors, including the African Union and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development, to encourage further progress on the implementation of all cooperation agreements and the peace processes in both countries.

**The President** (*spoke in Russian*): I thank Mr. Onanga-Anyanga for his briefing.

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

I welcome Mr. Mills to the Security Council. We congratulate him on his first Council meeting and wish him every success.

**Mr. Mills** (United States of America): I thank you, Madam President, for that warm welcome. I am pleased to be here with my colleagues today. As the new Deputy Permanent Representative of the United States Permanent Mission to the United Nations, I am very pleased that my first appearance in the Council is on this very important topic — the situation along the Sudan/South Sudan border. Let me thank Under-Secretary-General Lacroix and Special Envoy Onanga-Anyanga for your briefings and for all your efforts to date.

In recent years, we have seen a dramatic improvement in relations between South Sudan and the Sudan, as we have just heard. The signing of the Juba peace agreement, on 3 October, was a significant milestone, and we believe that, if implemented, it can help stabilize not only the Sudan but the entire region. The United States commends South Sudan for its role in mediating the negotiations that led to the agreement. Now the Sudan and South Sudan should maintain that positive momentum and turn their attention to resolving the political status of Abyei and agreeing to security and administrative arrangements that can be implemented in the near future.

Security in Abyei remains fragile. We have previously stated, in the Council, that the people of Abyei deserve better. That remains true today. We commend the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA), the most remote peacekeeping mission in the world, for supporting stability and security in Abyei and along the border between the Sudan and South Sudan. We also want to recognize Ethiopia's leadership role in supporting UNISFA.

The United States calls for the Sudan and South Sudan to lift restrictions that negatively impact UNISFA's ability to carry out its mandate. Denying visas for United Nations police and a civilian deputy for the mission, blocking UNISFA's access to the Athony airstrip and refusing to provide national police to join Abyei's joint police service is simply counterproductive. We very much regret the limited progress on those issues and expect additional steps to be undertaken by the parties in the coming weeks in that regard.

The Under-Secretary-General just reported to us that, out of a total of 640 mandated United Nations police officers for UNISFA, only 35 officers are present, due to delays by the Sudan in granting visas. The lack of police is causing community policing sites to close. Denying access to Athony airstrip also poses a risk to peacekeeping, as it hinders medical- and casualty-evacuation capabilities. Those restrictions together are undermining stability in Abyei and endangering both civilians and peacekeepers.

We look forward to working together with our fellow delegations to renew UNISFA's mandate. While the mission's presence should continue, given the warming relations between the Sudan and South Sudan, we believe that now is the time to consider a future in Abyei that does not require an international peacekeeping operation — either because there is a final resolution or because the parties themselves develop joint security and administrative mechanisms on their own.

A transition from UNISFA will need to prioritize the safety and security of civilians and support communities to achieve a more peaceful coexistence. The concerns of women must be at the forefront of such efforts. South Sudan and the Sudan should look to build on UNISFA's leadership in promoting women's participation in decision-making processes, which, as many of us know, recently led to community leaders nominating women for positions in the local

administration. Those are important steps if we are to build a durable peace in the region.

UNISFA was created as an interim force. Almost 10 years later, the Council, the Sudan, South Sudan, Ethiopia, the United Nations and the African Union (AU) should all re-evaluate how Abyei's status can be resolved and how security can be provided. In my delegation's view, the mission's indefinite continuation, especially while the Sudan and South Sudan place restrictions on its operations and staffing, is untenable.

In the near term, the AU and the United Nations should strengthen their support in order to develop administrative and security arrangements for Abyei. They should also encourage the parties to support local communities to engage in meaningful dialogue. Regular meetings of the Joint Political and Security Mechanism should inform that process.

In conclusion, let me state that the United States will continue to support stability in the Sudan, South Sudan and the greater Horn of Africa. I was pleased to hear Special Envoy Onanga-Anyanga mention President Trump's recently announced decision to remove the Sudan from the United States State Sponsors of Terrorism list. We agree. This is a tremendous step forward for the Sudan and a recognition of the clear progress made on the ground. We hope that progress in the region continues and the parties come together to provide the people of Abyei the opportunity to live free from violence.

**Ms. Jacobs** (United Kingdom): I thank Under-Secretary-General Lacroix and Special Envoy Onanga-Anyanga for their comprehensive updates.

I would like to start by welcoming the improvements in bilateral relations between the Government of the Sudan and the Government of South Sudan. The United Kingdom also wishes to commend the role that the Government of South Sudan played in facilitating the negotiations that led to the signing of the Juba peace agreement on 3 October. The United Kingdom calls for the swift implementation of that agreement, including in the two areas.

We also welcome the resumption of negotiations between the Government of the Sudan and the Al-Hilu faction of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North. We continue to urge all parties to engage constructively, without preconditions, in order to deliver a peaceful and swift resolution.

We are also encouraged that last month saw a high-level meeting between representative of the Sudan and South Sudan to discuss the final status of Abyei and other border areas. The indicated willingness of both Governments to seize this opportunity is long overdue. However, it is disappointing that this rapprochement has yet to translate into progress on the ground in Abyei. We call on both countries to build on this renewed engagement at the senior and local levels towards resolving the final status of Abyei.

Turning to the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA), the United Kingdom commends the role that the mission has continued to play in supporting peace and security in Abyei. We welcome UNISFA's ongoing engagement with the Government of the Sudan and the Government of South Sudan, the implementation of the quick-impact projects, the removal of explosive hazards and the continuation of humanitarian support. UNISFA's continued efforts to support women's empowerment in Abyei are also critical.

We regret, however, that the mission continues to face obstacles to delivering its mandated activities. It is clear that those blockages are severely affecting the stability and security of the region. This comes at a time when there have been increasing incidents of violence, including attacks on peacekeepers and criminal acts, alongside the continued appalling rates of sexual and gender-based violence in the region. We urge both parties to work with the mission to make progress on the establishment of the Abyei police force as a mechanism to ensure that stability and security issues are addressed.

There is a clear need to boost the civilian and police components to empower UNISFA to best support the local community. We therefore repeat our call on the Government of the Sudan to facilitate the issuance of all outstanding visa requests, especially those for police personnel. The Security Council has also repeatedly called for the Governments of both the Sudan and South Sudan to facilitate the operationalization of Athony airstrip.

The coronavirus disease has served to underline the importance of ensuring the provision of swift medical evacuations for United Nations personnel. This is particularly the case for UNISFA, given its remoteness. The continued denial of this request unfortunately shows the disregard for safety of United

Nations personnel. We repeat our call for all parties to fully respect international humanitarian law and allow humanitarian actors to deliver aid to those in need without hindrance.

In conclusion, the United Kingdom commends the vital role UNISFA plays in the maintaining the stability of Abyei and the assistance it provides to the achievement of a final settlement on its status. We urge the Governments of the Sudan and South Sudan to see the United Nations as a key partner in supporting their efforts on this matter.

**Mr. Dai Bing** (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Under-Secretary-General Lacroix and Special Envoy Onanga-Anyanga for their respective briefings.

The political settlement of the Abyei issue, which has the consensus support of the Security Council, requires the Sudan and South Sudan to reach a solution through dialogue and negotiation. I would like to make the following three points.

First, China welcomes the continued rapprochement between the two countries. The Sudan and South Sudan have demonstrated their willingness to resolve the final status of Abyei and appointed their respective chief administrators for the Area. China acknowledges those developments. The Security Council should fully respect the leadership of the Sudan and South Sudan on the Abyei issue and encourage both parties to engage in closer consultations and direct dialogue. The international community should support mediation efforts of the African Union, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development and other regional and subregional organizations and their good offices and facilitate cooperation between the Sudan and South Sudan in the establishment of administrative, judicial and security institutions in Abyei.

Secondly, China is concerned about the ongoing intercommunal clashes in Abyei and hopes that all the parties concerned will put peace and stability first and refrain from taking any actions that may increase tensions. China urges all local communities to actively respond to the Secretary-General's appeal for a global ceasefire, commit to silencing the guns in Africa by 2020 and promote intercommunity consultations and dialogue among traditional leaders, with the support of the United Nations.

The coronavirus disease pandemic has exacerbated the already grim humanitarian situation in Abyei.

Tens of thousands of people have been displaced, and hundreds of thousands are in dire need of humanitarian assistance. The international community should provide targeted aid to help the Sudan and South Sudan alleviate the plight of the people in Abyei.

Thirdly, the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA) is an important force for the maintenance of peace and stability in the Abyei Area and plays an indispensable role in the political settlement of the Abyei issue. China supports UNISFA's continued discharge of its mandate.

Attacks against UNISFA personnel have occurred from time to time, seriously threatening the safety of peacekeepers. We hope that UNISFA will make every effort to minimize the security risks to peacekeepers.

Medical evacuation remains a major challenge that hampers UNISFA's capabilities, and therefore requires timely remedial measures. We call on the Government of the Sudan and the Government South Sudan to facilitate the performance of UNISFA's mandated activities. The mission should also maintain close communication with the two Governments and enhance mutual trust. China supports the extension of UNISFA's mandate as recommended by the Secretary-General.

**Mr. Djani** (Indonesia): First of all, I would like to welcome our new colleague, the Deputy Permanent Representative of the United States of America, Ambassador Richard Mills. We are of course looking forward to working closely with him.

I would like to make a joint statement on behalf of the member countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in the Security Council, namely, Indonesia and Viet Nam.

Allow us to begin by thanking Under-Secretary-General Jean-Pierre Lacroix and Special Envoy Parfait Onanga-Anyanga for their important briefings.

We commend the peace agreement signed earlier this month in Juba, which was possible due both to the active engagement between the Sudan and South Sudan in facilitating each other's transitions and to effective mediation. That is a testament of the tremendous progress that could be achieved by the engagement of the two countries. We look forward to the continuation of such engagement and momentum in resolving the Abyei issue, thereby contributing to long-term peace, stability and development in both countries. On that note, I would like to highlight three important issues.



First, on improving law and order, we emphasize that the absence of the rule of law in Abyei remains one of the contributing factors to persistent violence, including intercommunal clashes, in the Area. We are also concerned about the security and humanitarian situation in the Area due to the impact of coronavirus disease (COVID-19). Our two delegations therefore urge all parties to accelerate the deployment of the remaining authorized additional United Nations police and formed police units. We highlight what the Secretary-General has emphasized, namely, that this deployment is critical in maintaining the capability of the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA) to maintain the rule of law in the Area.

Our two delegations also attach great importance to UNISFA's provision of capacity-building to the community protection committees in the absence of an Abyei police service and its support for traditional justice mechanisms. It is also important to strengthen efforts in addressing the COVID-19 pandemic as well as facilitating mine-action activities.

The second issue is on promoting peaceful dialogue. As members of ASEAN, we firmly believe in the virtue of peaceful dialogue in nurturing trust and confidence between all parties. We would like to commend, and reiterate our support for, the efforts of the United Nations, UNISFA, countries of the region and regional organizations, particularly the African Union, in supporting peaceful dialogue on Abyei.

Our two delegations welcome UNISFA's active engagement with local communities, including its intention to convene a peace meeting between community representatives before the end of the year. We call for all parties to support and encourage that peace meeting as part of confidence-building measures among all communities ahead of the migration cycle in Abyei. We therefore emphasize the dire need to maintain and further enhance this role in the coming UNISFA mandate renewal.

The third issue is that of the safety and security of UNISFA personnel. Our two delegations firmly believe that UNISFA's presence is essential to maintaining stability in Abyei. We commend UNISFA for its work in maintaining security and stability in Abyei, including through its continued engagement with Area residents and the community protection committees. As police- and troop-contributing countries to many United Nations missions, Viet Nam and Indonesia

join the Secretary-General in condemning the attacks that target UNISFA personnel in Abyei. Such attacks are unacceptable. Enhancing the ability of UNISFA to fulfil its mandate should remain our utmost priority, especially the safety and the security of its personnel. To that end, we call for all parties to maintain and facilitate their support to UNISFA, including the operationalization of the Athony airstrip, as well as other outstanding issues.

Ultimately, our delegations reaffirm their long-standing support for the Sudan and South Sudan in finding a timely and peaceful solution in Abyei as an inseparable part of their journey towards peace. We support the renewal of the UNISFA mandate, as recommended by the Secretary-General, in order to continue promoting long-term stability in Abyei and facilitating dialogue, cooperation and friendship between the Sudan and South Sudan.

**Mr. Sautter** (Germany): I very much thank Under-Secretary-General Jean-Pierre Lacroix and Special Envoy Parfait Onanga-Anyanga for their briefings. I, too, would like to extend a warm welcome to Richard Mills here back in New York.

We see light and we see shadow for Abyei. Let me start with the light. With regard to the political process, we see some major positive regional developments. The signing of the Juba peace agreement between the transitional Government of the Sudan and the armed groups is a historic achievement. There is a huge potential to move the Sudan towards comprehensive peace. We urge those that continue to stand outside that process to become part of the solution.

In that context, we commend the role of South Sudan in helping to bring about the peace deal. We believe that the Sudan and South Sudan should now take advantage of the high level of confidence in bilateral relations to seriously engage in joint talks that would lead to improving the situation in Abyei, especially at the intercommunal level.

In the meantime, the presence of the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA) remains key to ensuring peace and security. That brings me to the shadow to which I referred. The security situation in Abyei remains tense. We have heard that in the briefings. The deadly intercommunal clashes in recent months and attacks against peacekeepers underscored that. Like other speakers before me, I strongly condemn any violence. That includes all

attacks against peacekeepers. In that context, let me make it very clear that the host nation must investigate any attacks against UNISFA, and it has an obligation to hold those responsible to account. We thank Ethiopia for its long-standing commitment as a troop contributor to UNISFA in that context.

Let me make some remarks on the UNISFA mandate and its implementation.

First of all, we agree with the recommendation of the Secretary-General that the mandate should be extended by six months. However, it is important for us that there be no business as usual. The Security Council has sent a clear message that UNISFA needs to adapt. It is therefore with disappointment that we note that the adjustments to the mandate made by the Council have not yet been implemented on the ground.

The recent report of the Secretary-General (S/2020/1019) shows that the mission is not fit for purpose. That is mainly due to obstruction by the host nation. The mission must be able to fulfil its mandate and respond to emerging challenges. A stronger police component within UNISFA is essential for that. We therefore again strongly urge the Sudan to issue visas without further delay, particularly to allow the mandated increase in the UNISFA police personnel. Mr. Lacroix strongly underlined that point in his briefing, and we fully share that reading. Without an effective police capacity, we simply run the risk of a deteriorating security situation.

Furthermore, we support the call of the Secretary-General and urge the Sudan and South Sudan to work together with UNISFA on a road map to establish an Abyei police service. Tangible progress in the establishment of joint interim institutions, such as the Abyei Area administration and the Abyei police service, is crucial to building enhanced national capacities. We also see a continued need to strengthen the civilian component of the mission in order to support the efforts of the communities in Abyei to reconcile and create enduring peaceful relations.

On the positive side, we note the efforts of the South Sudan co-Chair of the Abyei Joint Oversight Committee and the Juba-appointed Chief Administrator in promoting women's participation in the peace process. We encourage further steps by both sides towards the full, effective and meaningful participation of women at all stages of the peace process. Above and beyond, we highly recognize the crucial and visible role

of Abyei's women in the prevention of the coronavirus disease at the local level.

Let me conclude by drawing the Council's attention to human rights monitoring. The mandate needs to ensure continued and effective human rights monitoring, including of any sexual and gender-based violence and violations and abuses of human rights, including those committed against women and children. We therefore welcome the Secretary-General's recommendation to deploy human rights expertise to UNISFA, as mandated by the Council.

**Mr. Jürgenson (Estonia):** I also join other speakers in thanking the briefers for their insightful overviews.

Estonia warmly welcomes the continued improvement of relations between the Sudan and South Sudan. We commend the important role that South Sudan played in facilitating the Sudan peace talks, which led to the signing of the Sudan peace agreement on 3 October. We recognize that the political transitions in both countries require much of the attention of the respective Governments. However, we also urge the parties to use the momentum created by the historic peace agreement to facilitate progress towards resolving the question of Abyei.

The Secretary-General said in his report (S/2020/1019) that the status quo cannot continue, and we agree. The people of Abyei deserve better than the status quo, as they continue to suffer from numerous episodes of violence, a lack of access to basic State services and dire socioeconomic conditions. For anything to change on the ground, there is no substitute for a meaningful political process between the parties. Therefore, we welcome all the steps taken in that direction, and we call on the Sudan and South Sudan to continue to build a viable political process that leads to the implementation of security and administrative arrangements to which both can agree. The political process could be significantly aided by the appointment of a civilian Deputy Head of Mission, and we call on all parties to help to make that a reality. We also encourage regional actors to actively engage the parties on the Abyei question.

We are concerned about the increased violence and criminality, including the recent trend of attacks on United Nations troops and contractors. Six months ago when speaking in the Council on the Abyei question (see S/2020/351, annex VI), the representative of Estonia articulated three specific asks: to expedite the

deployment of the police component; to conduct joint investigations into the deadly incidents of violence with the purpose of bringing the perpetrators to justice; and to deploy human rights expertise to United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA). These asks remain as valid today as they were six months ago.

Estonia supports the Secretary-General's recommendation to extend the mandate of UNISFA for the next six months. Moving forward, we need to start the discussions of how the United Nations can be most helpful, given the current realities.

In conclusion, at the heart of our deliberations must be the fact that any delays in resolving the Abyei question will only continue to prolong the plight of the people Abyei. Therefore, we call on the parties to capitalize on their improved relationship to push for progress on the question of Abyei. We also call for the removal of any impediments to the implementation of the mandate of UNISFA. Finally, I would like to express our gratitude to UNISFA and Ethiopia for their invaluable contributions.

**Mrs. Cedano** (Dominican Republic) (*spoke in Spanish*): We thank Under-Secretary-General Lacroix and Special Envoy Onanga-Anyanga for their briefings.

The signing of the agreement in Juba on 3 October was a milestone for the people of the Sudan and an important step towards the stabilization of the region. We welcome the appointment of the chief administrators by Juba and Khartoum, and we take this opportunity to commend the parties, and in particular South Sudan, for the arduous work undertaken in making this a reality.

We also welcome the conversations that took place in Khartoum in September. We know that the final status of Abyei and border demarcation are delicate issues that have often been overlooked in the face of more pressing bilateral issues. However, we understand that these broader considerations of relations between the two countries should not prevent the definitive establishment of the status of Abyei.

Therefore, we join the Secretary-General in calling for a resumption, as soon as possible, of discussions in the framework of the Abyei Joint Oversight Committee, as well as the meetings of the Joint Political and Security Mechanism. It is imperative to encourage discussions on border demarcation and facilitate the implementation of the decisions of the Joint Mechanism, including the establishment of checkpoints and the reactivation of

the Joint Military Observer Committee and the joint military observer team.

We commend United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA) for providing bilateral forums for conflict prevention and its willingness to jointly draft a road map for the establishment of the Abyei police service. We encourage both Governments to participate actively in this initiative.

It is essential that UNISFA be equipped with the appropriate tools. To that end, the appointment of the civilian Deputy Head of Mission and other civilian and police personnel, the operationalization of the Athony airstrip and the issuance of the pending visas for the police units are essential.

We remain very concerned about incidents of intercommunal violence and the presence of armed elements in the Area, which have had devastating effects for the civilian population. We applaud the efforts of UNISFA, in collaboration with the community protection committees, to keep Abyei free of weapons, despite the restrictions imposed by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. We reiterate the need to ensure sustainable and unimpeded humanitarian access to alleviate the needs of that population.

We also recognize the commitment of UNISFA with the authorities to promote and defend the women and peace and security agenda. Those efforts have resulted in the identification and nomination of women for possible appointments to local administrations. The collaboration between UNISFA and Concordis International to strengthen gender and youth issues in the Abyei Area is an important step in this direction.

We remain concerned about the increase in sexual and gender-based violence involving minors. The establishment of a joint office and a service with a direct telephone line for victims is a fundamental tool to protect them.

We congratulate UNISFA for its handling of the COVID-19 pandemic and the support it has given to communities, together with humanitarian personnel, non-governmental organizations and United Nations agencies.

Lastly, we urge both countries to recognize their geographic and historic links. There is no shortcut to lasting peace. Both countries must affirm their bonds and develop good economic, social, political and security relations. To do that, they must be willing to

make a commitment and honour those commitments for the benefit of their peoples.

**Mrs. Broadhurst Estival** (France) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank Mr. Lacroix and Mr. Onanga-Anyanga for their briefings.

I will be brief, and focus on three points.

First, France regrets that the political process today remains deadlocked and calls for the resumption of dialogue between the parties. Although both parties named their chief administrators for Abyei last summer, the same issues have seen no progress. The absence of local governance has prevented the resolution of disputes and the efforts of United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA) are hampered by the lack of cooperation among the parties. I recall that this peacekeeping operation was conceived as an interim force and is not intended to permanently entrench a situation devoid of political prospects for conflict resolution.

Turning to my second point — and this has been emphasized by a number of speakers — the current dynamic between Khartoum and Juba is encouraging and should be crystallized in Abyei. The signing of agreements in Juba on 3 October, as part of a process facilitated by Southern Sudanese mediation, is an example of this. The resumption of discussions in September between the two parties on the final status of Abyei is also positive. We therefore hope that these positive signals between capitals will soon be concretely reflected on the ground. We call on the African Union in particular to encourage the parties in that regard through its political mediation efforts. We also welcome the efforts of UNISFA to maintain dialogue between the communities and the conditions for a lasting settlement of the conflict. The mission is operating in particularly difficult circumstances and the coronavirus disease crisis has further exacerbated the constraints.

In this context, and I will conclude on this point, the recommendations made by the Secretary-General in his latest report (S/2020/1019) provide a real opportunity for the parties to provide assurances of their re-engagement. The resumption of dialogue at the local level to address security-related issues and move towards the establishment of joint administrations in the area is essential. Coordinated action by both parties is also necessary to successfully carry out the investigations into the violence that broke out

in Nainai and Kolom on 19 and 22 January. Finally, the operationalization of the Athony airstrip and the issuance of visas necessary for the deployment of police units, and the arrival of a Deputy Head of Mission are equally important and reflective of the willingness of the parties to bolster the action of UNISFA.

**Mr. Ladeb** (Tunisia): I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the African members of the Security Council — the Niger, South Africa, Tunisia — and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines (A3+1).

I would like at the outset to thank the Under-Secretary General for Peace Operations, Jean-Pierre Lacroix, and the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Horn of Africa, Parfait Onanga-Anyanga, for their comprehensive briefings. I wish also to welcome to the Council the Permanent Representative of the Sudan.

The A3+1 commends the stabilizing role of the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA) in the Area and along the Sudan-South Sudan border, including its support to the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism. We also express our appreciation to Ethiopia and its peacekeepers for their commitment and dedication to ensuring security and building confidence in the area and the Safe Demilitarized Border Zone.

The African Union recognizes these commendable efforts and continues to stand by the Governments of the Sudan and of South Sudan and their people as they move along the path to comprehensive peace and sustainable development, while relying on the partnership and support of the Security Council and the wider international community.

The A3+1 notes with appreciation the mutually reinforcing relations between the Governments of the Sudan and of South Sudan, in light of the signing of the peace agreement between the Sudanese parties on 3 October in Juba, as well as the Sudan's constructive engagement as the incumbent Chair of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development in the peacebuilding process in South Sudan. We believe that it remains useful for the Sudan and South Sudan, and for the Security Council, to capitalize on such dynamism so that the pursuit of just and lasting peace in both countries extends to the Abyei Area and reciprocally.

We urge the two Sudans to continue to foster rapprochement and mutual trust with a view to fully implementing their cooperation agreements and

reaching a positive-sum settlement to the final status of Abyei. In this regard, the A3+1 is encouraged by senior-level visits held over the last two months in Juba and Khartoum, and the commitment expressed by both sides to reinvigorating the peace process and addressing the final status issue. We look forward to joint and swift progress on the issue.

We are further encouraged by the novel designation by Khartoum and Juba of their respective chief administrators for Abyei. We stress the paramount importance of swiftly resuming, in the coming months, regular meetings of the Abyei Joint Oversight Committee, as per the decision reached at the 19 February Joint Political and Security Mechanism meeting.

The A3+1 takes note that the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has ground to a halt a number of UNISFA-mandated activities, affected meaningful engagement of the mission at the local and traditional-leader levels, and circumscribed progress on Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism benchmarks and Joint Political and Security Mechanism decisions, as outlined in the Secretary-General's report (S/2020/1019).

We express our support for UNISFA's ongoing efforts aimed at energizing local peace processes and monitoring intercommunal reconciliation. Further, we praise UNISFA's role in empowering women and youth participation at the local and grass-roots levels so as to enhance prospects for preventing conflict, COVID-19 and human rights abuses.

We underline the necessity of heeding potential new cycles of hostilities along communal lines, and of working together to address the drivers of such violence and defuse tensions. It is essential, too, that the utmost efforts be made to ensure that Abyei and its Safe Demilitarized Border Zone become free of crime and of weapons.

We further stress the importance that UNISFA's mandate and operational activities be facilitated and its personnel protected so that it may perform its tasks at full capacity and in an efficient manner.

On the way forward for the United Nations presence in Abyei, the A3+1 sees continued relevance for the UNISFA mandate in stabilizing the Abyei area and along the border, and in bringing certainty amid these uncertain times. Accordingly, we 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 Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism for a further period of six months

**Mrs. Van Vlierberge** (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I thank Mr. Lacroix and Mr. Onanga-Anyanga for their very comprehensive briefings.

Recent events have proven just how much relations between the Sudan and South Sudan have improved. I am, of course, referring to the peace talks among Sudanese authorities and groups held in Juba.

Belgium also welcomes the discussions concerning the Abyei Area held in Khartoum in September. They were a further positive signal that the will exists to find a political solution for the status of the Abyei. However, these signals are not enough. A number of discussions must resume on several levels to achieve progress on certain points. I am thinking, in particular, of the decisions taken by the Joint Political and Security Mechanism, the points relating to the Athony airstrip, as well as the pending visas for police units.

The situation in the Abyei Area remains fragile. Belgium condemns the attacks on the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA) and the intercommunity violence. These incidents, as well as those related to criminal activity, underline the importance of maintaining the current force strength of security and police forces within the mission so as to uphold the rule of law and protect civilians. This situation amplifies our concern already mentioned regarding the issuance of the visas pending for the three formed police units and the 108 police officers in addition to those formed units. Despite numerous appeals from the members of the Security Council in this regard, the risk of a situation of understaffing and an absence of police in most operational bases remains.

We commend the Mission's efforts to promote dialogue towards conflict resolution, for example, involving local leaders. We also welcome the actions in favour of an increased role for women and young people in local political life. The European Union is also active in this field — for instance, in the peacebuilding project it funds, carried out in collaboration with the International Organization for Migration and the non-governmental organizations Concordis International and the Green String Network. It has recently made it possible to organize training courses for women and young people in conflict resolution and negotiation. We are also

pleased to note the commitment of UNISFA in the area of sexual violence, with several prevention activities.

In conclusion, we cannot envisage the drawdown of UNISFA without a solution to the Abyei issue, but the mission cannot play the role of the State indefinitely. We call on the parties to redouble their efforts to close this chapter in the history of the Sudans.

**The President** (*spoke in Russian*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as representative of the Russian Federation.

We thank Under-Secretary-General Jean-Pierre Lacroix and Special Envoy Parfait Onanga-Anyanga for their detailed briefings. We are pleased that the gradual improvement in bilateral relations between Khartoum and Juba. The mediation efforts of the South Sudanese authorities, specifically those of President Salva Kiir, in the conduct of negotiations between the Government of the Sudan and opposition groups led to the signing, on 3 October, of peace accords. This stands as a further testament to the effectiveness of the formula "African solutions to African problems". We hope that, in resolving the Abyei question, the parties will be guided by that very same principle.

We welcome the gestures made by both capitals to signal their readiness to generate new momentum in contacts between their Governments, including on Abyei. We hope that the African Union High-level Implementation Panel will continue working with the Sudanese sides. We value the efforts of the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA) in the establishment of constructive relations with local communities.

At the same time, it is worth bearing in mind that for a number of years already there has been considerable friction between the communities. Our hope is that the Blue Helmets will pursue their efforts towards the advancement of national reconciliation. We believe that the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism (JBVMM) is an integral component of the mechanism for the prevention of incidents between the parties; support for the JBVMM by UNISFA plays an important role in terms of the entire subregional security architecture.

We have taken note of what the Secretary-General set out in his most recent report (S/2020/1019) with respect to the reasons for a certain degree of inertia in the mediation efforts of UNISFA and the

implementation of the JBVMM benchmarks, which have been linked largely to the coronavirus disease restrictions. We appreciate those difficulties and are confident that the efforts will be revitalized as soon as the situation allows.

In that connection, we support the recommendation of the Secretary-General to extend the mandate of UNISFA, including support for the JBVMM, for a period of six months. At the same time, we trust that consideration of the proposal of the Secretariat on the civilian component of the mission should be done in a way that reflects the opinions of Khartoum and Juba, as stipulated in the core principles of peacekeeping.

I now resume my functions as President of the Security Council.

I give the floor to the representative of the Sudan.

**Mr. Siddig** (Sudan): Allow me to congratulate you, Madam President, on leading the deliberations of the Security Council this month. I wish also to congratulate the Niger for the exemplary role that it played in steering the work of the Council last month. I should also like to commend the Permanent Representative of the Niger for the excellent job he did last month and also to thank the Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations, Mr. Lacroix, and the Special Envoy for the Horn of Africa, Mr. Onanga-Anyanga, for their briefings. I also thank the members of the Security Council for their statements regarding the situation in Abyei.

Over the past month and since the formation of the Transitional Government in the Sudan, the bilateral relations between the Sudan and South Sudan have been improving steadily. Some features of that progress are reflected in the regular exchange of visits between the two countries at various levels, as well as by the cross-border movement of people, goods and services. In addition, South Sudan hosted the peace talks between the Government of the Sudan and the armed groups, which led eventually to the significant signing of the peace agreement earlier this month.

The continued rapprochement between the two countries is something that reflects positively on the Abyei final-status negotiations. Just three weeks ago, a Sudanese delegation led and headed by the minister of East African Community Affairs visited Khartoum for talks on Abyei. In a statement issued after the meeting, the Deputy President of the Sudanese Sovereign Council pledged the readiness of the Government of the

Sudan to resolve the Abyei issue in the same spirit in which the Juba negotiations were conducted among the Sudanese parties.

The Government of the Sudan is committed to building on the new political dispensation in the bilateral relations between the two brotherly neighbours so as to promote communal peaceful coexistence in the area and expedite discussions to reach an understanding on the final status of Abyei.

That being said, I would like to highlight the following points.

First, the political and legal terms that govern the current and future agreements and arrangements in Abyei, including the existence of the Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA), are based on the agreement on temporary arrangements for the administration and security of the Abyei Area reached on 20 June 2011. The terms of that agreement should be strictly respected and followed by the two countries as well as by regional and international partners. For its part, the Sudan reaffirms its commitment to the letter and the spirit of the agreement.

Secondly, the agreement of 20 June 2011 provides for the temporary local mechanisms and institutions to administer the Area. That includes local executive and legislative bodies and a local joint police force. The Sudan has always been ready to adhere to the terms of the agreement. In that context, my Government appointed last month its representative in the Abyei joint oversight committee, a move widely welcomed by the local communities in the area, especially the community leaders of the Ngok Dinka. In addition, the Sudanese authorities are ready to take part in forming the local joint police force to combat criminality in and around Abyei.

Thirdly, we commend UNISFA's personnel for their efforts to preserve peace and stability in Abyei and condemn any attacks against or directed at peacekeepers in Abyei. We call on the mission to further improve civilian protection, protect the Area from incursions by unauthorized armed elements, ensure security and stand at an equal distance from all communities in the area.

Fourthly, I would like to bring to the attention of Council members that the issue related to the operationalization of the Athony airstrip was discussed at the most recent meeting of the Joint Political and Security Mechanism, which was held in Juba last February. It was agreed among the parties that this matter should be referred to the presidencies of the two countries to take a decision on it. It is to be noted that in order to improve UNISFA's logistical capacities, the Sudan agreed a couple of weeks ago to the transfer of two helicopters from the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur to UNISFA, in Abyei. The secretariat was duly notified of that approval.

To conclude, the Government of the Sudan reiterates its commitment to strengthening cooperation with the Government of South Sudan and UNISFA with a view to enhancing the work of the Joint Political and Security Mechanism and the Abyei Joint Oversight Committee as well as establishing the remaining joint mechanisms between the two countries based on the terms of the agreement signed by both sides on 20 June 2011.

I wish to end by welcoming the extension of the mandate of UNISFA for six months, as proposed by the Secretary-General.

*The meeting rose at 11.30 a.m.*