



# Security Council

Distr.: General  
15 April 2024

Original: English

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## Assessment of progress achieved on the key benchmarks established in paragraph 2 of resolution [2577 \(2021\)](#)

### Report of the Secretary-General

#### I. Introduction

1. By its resolution [2428 \(2018\)](#), the Security Council imposed an arms embargo on the territory of South Sudan. By its resolution [2683 \(2023\)](#), the Council renewed the arms embargo measures until 31 May 2024, while reiterating its readiness to review them, including through modification, suspension or progressive lifting in the light of progress achieved on the key benchmarks outlined in paragraph 2 of resolution [2577 \(2021\)](#). The present report is submitted pursuant to paragraph 5 of resolution [2683 \(2023\)](#), in which the Council requested the Secretary-General, in close consultation with the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) and the Panel of Experts on South Sudan, to conduct, no later than 15 April 2024, an assessment of progress achieved on the key benchmarks.

2. To that end, an assessment team from the Secretariat visited South Sudan from 19 to 23 February 2024. During the visit, the assessment team undertook consultations with representatives of the Revitalized Transitional Government of National Unity, including the Minister of Cabinet Affairs, the Minister of Defence and Veterans Affairs, the Minister of the Interior, the Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Commissioner and the Head of the Bureau for Community Security and Small Arms Control; the Deputy Chairman of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-Army in Opposition (SPLM/A-IO), the First Deputy Speaker of the Transitional National Legislative Assembly and the Permanent Representative of South Sudan to the United Nations; members of South Sudanese civil society (including women's and faith-based organizations); the reconstituted Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission; the Ceasefire and Transitional Security Arrangements Monitoring and Verification Mechanism; representatives of UNMISS, including the Mine Action Service; members of the United Nations country team, including the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP); members of the diplomatic corps based in Juba, including representatives of the Troika, which comprises Norway, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States of America; as well as representatives of the African Union Mission in South Sudan and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD).

3. In New York, consultations were held with relevant Secretariat entities and members of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution [2206 \(2015\)](#) concerning South Sudan. Remote consultations were held with other



international and regional partners, including the Bonn International Centre for Conflict Studies, the Mines Advisory Group and the Regional Centre on Small Arms, in the lead-up to the visit. In addition, the present report benefited from consultations with the Panel of Experts on South Sudan.

4. In paragraph 6 of resolution 2683 (2023), the Security Council requested the South Sudan authorities to report, no later than 15 April 2024, to the Committee on the progress achieved on the key benchmarks and invited the South Sudan authorities to report on progress achieved on the implementation of the reforms mentioned in paragraph 4 of the same resolution (dealing, inter alia, with public finance management reforms and transitional justice mechanisms).

## II. Context

5. There have been positive developments, albeit with significant delays, in the implementation of the Revitalized Agreement for the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan, signed on 12 September 2018. A first group of graduated Necessary Unified Forces personnel was deployed on 15 November 2023, in accordance with chapter II of the Revitalized Agreement. Further deployments of graduated Necessary Unified Forces have since followed in late November and December 2023.

6. Further positive developments have been observed in the implementation of an agreement on the road map to a peaceful and democratic end to the transitional period of the Revitalized Agreement. The agreement, signed on 4 August 2022, extended the transitional period by 24 months until 22 February 2025, consequently postponing the first elections to be held in South Sudan since independence until December 2024. On 18 September 2023, the reconstituted Transitional National Legislative Assembly passed the National Elections Act, 2012 (Amendment) Act, 2023. However, some members of the parliament from SPLM/A-IO and the South Sudan Opposition Alliance boycotted the vote on the amended Act, which grants the President the authority to appoint 5 per cent of the members of the Assembly. On 3 November 2023, the National Elections Commission, the Political Parties Council and the National Constitutional Review Commission were reconstituted. However, serious disagreements persist among the Revitalized Transitional Government and other signatories to the Revitalized Agreement, particularly regarding the necessary prerequisites for free and fair elections, such as a census, the return of refugees and a permanent constitution.

7. While a number of military engagements between parties to the Revitalized Agreement took place, none were considered to have breached the permanent ceasefire. Clashes resulting in casualties between the South Sudan People's Defence Forces and SPLM/A-IO occurred in Leer County, Guit County and Rubkona County in Unity State and Terekeka County in Central Equatoria State. Operations by the South Sudan People's Defence Forces against elements of the National Salvation Front resurged in Central Equatoria State, resulting in significant violence against civilians. In addition, clashes between communities and cattle-related intercommunal violence also continued, inter alia, in Upper Nile State, involving the Shilluk and Nuer communities, and along the Abyei Administrative Area and Warrap State borders, involving the Dinka Twic, Ngok Dinka and Nuer communities.

8. The humanitarian situation remains dire: approximately a third of the population of South Sudan has been displaced, and more than half is projected to face crisis levels of food insecurity. The conflict that broke out in the Sudan on 15 April 2023 has further exacerbated the security and humanitarian situation in South Sudan. The influx of returnees and refugees fleeing the conflict in the Sudan has placed immense strain on already overstretched humanitarian resources and infrastructure in South Sudan, heightening the risk of further intercommunal tensions and competition for limited resources.

9. In March 2023, the President of South Sudan, Salva Kiir Mayardit, directed the Minister of Defence and Veterans Affairs to prioritize nationwide civilian disarmament. The disarmament exercise undertaken by the South Sudan People's Defence Forces between mid-July and late October 2023 in Terekeka County was marred by excessive use of force against civilians, reminiscent of previous military-led disarmament operations. A disarmament campaign conducted by government security forces in Gondokoro Payam, Central Equatoria State, between late December 2023 and early January 2024 reportedly involved the harassment and arbitrary arrest of civilians, leading to population displacements, while a subsequent investigation by the South Sudan People's Defence Forces led to the release of several detainees, the arrest of some soldiers over allegations of harassment against civilians, and an apology from the Minister of Defence and Veterans Affairs for several "mistakes" made during the campaign.

10. In this fragile context, UNMISS continued to document serious violations and abuses of international human rights law and violations of international humanitarian law across South Sudan in 2023, including killings (1,527), injuries (1,040), abductions (597) and conflict-related sexual violence (130). Despite efforts to hold perpetrators accountable, widespread impunity remains a serious challenge, as highlighted by the February 2024 report of the Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan covering 2023.

11. On 8 February 2024, during the thirty-fourth plenary meeting of the reconstituted Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission, the interim Chairperson, Major General (retired) Charles Tai Gituai, called for, inter alia, the full operationalization of the National Elections Commission, the Political Parties Council and the National Constitutional Review Commission. In addition, he emphasized the need to complete the unification process of the Necessary Unified Forces and provide funding for disarmament, demobilization and reintegration in South Sudan. During the meeting of the African Union Peace and Security Council held on 27 February 2024, the trilateral task force on permanent constitution making and electoral processes support to South Sudan, which comprises the African Union, IGAD and the United Nations, noted the importance of resolving questions impeding progress in constitution making and the conduct of elections, especially those relating to consensus building and inclusivity. The task force stressed the urgency for the Revitalized Transitional Government to complete the training and deployment of the Necessary Unified Forces to support peaceful and credible elections.

### III. Arms embargo

12. An embargo on the transfer of arms and related materiel to the territory of South Sudan was established by the Security Council in its resolution [2428 \(2018\)](#). The embargo measures contained three categories of exemptions: those subject to the approval of the Committee; those requiring an advance notification to the Committee; and standing exemptions for which no prior approval from or notification to the Committee is required. Notably, there are no exemptions applicable to non-State armed groups under the arms embargo in South Sudan, which effectively prohibits them from receiving weapons from any source.

13. Since the imposition of the arms embargo, the Committee has received a total of 11 exemption requests from Member States, 10 of which were approved. These approved exemptions encompassed various applications for the supply, sale or transfer of arms and related materiel, such as helicopters for the monitoring and verification activities of the Ceasefire and Transitional Security Arrangements Monitoring and Verification Mechanism. In addition, requests for technical training

and assistance, including military uniforms and tents, were granted. The Committee has also received a total of 27 notifications, covering non-lethal military equipment intended solely for humanitarian use, such as demining equipment.

14. The scope of the arms embargo measures has been adjusted by the Security Council since its establishment. In its resolution [2683 \(2023\)](#), the Council further eased the arms embargo by deciding that its measures shall no longer apply to the supply, sale or transfer of non-lethal military equipment, solely in support of the implementation of the terms of the peace agreement, and related technical assistance or training on non-lethal military equipment. In March 2024, to facilitate the submission of arms embargo exemption requests, the Committee approved a template for arms embargo exemption requests relating to the supply of lethal military equipment solely in support of the peace agreement.

15. The Revitalized Transitional Government and the African Union have continued to call for the lifting of the arms embargo. In his address to the General Assembly on 21 September 2023, Mr. Kiir called upon the United Nations to lift the embargo to facilitate peace implementation and ensure secure elections. He stated that the embargo had prevented the equipment and, consequently, the deployment of additional graduated Necessary Unified Forces. In a communiqué adopted on 16 November 2023, the Peace and Security Council of the African Union reiterated its call to lift the arms embargo and other sanctions on South Sudan to facilitate implementation of the transitional security arrangements. On 14 December 2023, the representative of South Sudan called upon the Security Council to lift the embargo and other targeted sanctions (see [S/PV.9507](#)).

#### **IV. Progress achieved on the key benchmarks established in paragraph 2 of resolution [2577 \(2021\)](#)**

##### **Progress achieved on benchmark (a): completion, by the Revitalized Transitional Government of National Unity, of stages 1, 2 and 3 of the Strategic Defence and Security Review process contained in the Revitalized Agreement**

16. As cited in the previous report of the Secretary-General of 28 April 2023 ([S/2023/300](#)), drafts of the strategic security assessment, security policy framework and the revised defence policy were completed in 2023, but no further progress in the validation of the documents has occurred since. Drafts of the white paper on defence and security and the security sector transformation road map (two outputs required for stage 3 of the Strategic Defence and Security Review process) were reviewed during workshops of the Revitalized Strategic Defence and Security Review Board held on 27 June and 11 and 12 July 2023, with the support of the reconstituted Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission and UNMISS. The drafting of the two documents is now completed, which is the only positive development since the previous report.

17. These two final outputs, like the other three from stages 1 and 2 of the Strategic Defence and Security Review, had not been validated by the members of the Strategic Defence and Security Review Board at the time of writing. The work of the Board had been stalled for several months due to labour action by its members and secretariat over non-payment of salaries by the Revitalized Transitional Government. The Board members resumed their work in March 2024, only after a partial payment was made. Several interlocutors indicated that the validation process had also been delayed due to a procedural disagreement within the Board and to the lack of political will to advance security sector reform through the Strategic Defence and Security Review. The assessment team was informed that, after the internal validation, the five outputs would be submitted to the principal signatories of the Revitalized Agreement

for their review, amendment and validation, prior to further submission to the Council of Ministers and the Transitional National Legislative Assembly as the final step to complete stage 3 of the Strategic Defence and Security Review process.

**Progress achieved on benchmark (b): formation, by the Revitalized Transitional Government of National Unity, of a unified command structure for the Necessary Unified Forces, the training, graduation and redeployment of the Necessary Unified Forces, and allocation by the Revitalized Transitional Government of National Unity of adequate resources for the planning and implementation of the redeployment of the Necessary Unified Forces**

18. Limited progress has been made in the formation of a unified command structure of the Necessary Unified Forces. According to the reconstituted Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission, following the agreement on ratios reached in June 2023, mid-level commanders of the national security, wildlife, prison and civil defence services have now been appointed. However, appointments of mid-level commanders for the unified army and police are still pending due to a procedural disagreement between the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army in Government (SPLM/A-IG) and SPLM/A-IO.

19. Despite delays in appointing mid-level commanders, some 4,000 elements of the first batch of graduated Necessary Unified Forces, all army personnel, have been deployed. On 12 May 2023, the Revitalized Transitional Government announced an allocation of \$3.6 million (approximately 2.8 billion South Sudan pounds at the time) for the deployment of the first batch of graduated Necessary Unified Forces. On 11 September 2023, all graduated elements were instructed to return to their respective training centres within seven days for readiness assessment prior to deployment. Two days later, the National Transitional Committee provided the Joint Transitional Security Committee with 170 million South Sudan pounds (approximately \$170,000 at the time) to conduct the assessment activities. According to the Ceasefire and Transitional Security Arrangements Monitoring and Verification Mechanism, between November and December 2023, some 4,000 army personnel were deployed to Upper Nile, Western Bahr el-Ghazal, Western Equatoria and Eastern Equatoria States under the command of existing divisions of the South Sudan People's Defence Forces.

20. However, the 4,000 elements deployed represent only approximately 7 per cent of the 55,800 graduated elements constituting the first batch of Necessary Unified Forces personnel, and the timeline for deploying all 55,800 graduates is unknown. Cantonment and training sites continue to be affected by severe food shortages, a lack of medicines, and a lack of shelter and separate facilities for female personnel, leading many graduates of the first batch who were awaiting deployment to leave those sites. Further delays in the deployment of the first batch could hinder the commencement of training for the second batch. Flooding has also rendered several training centres inaccessible and unsuitable. Furthermore, the Ceasefire and Transitional Security Arrangements Monitoring and Verification Mechanism reported that, except for those originating from the South Sudan People's Defence Forces, Necessary Unified Forces personnel had not been paid, while the assessment team was informed that some opposition Necessary Unified Forces personnel had recently been paid.

21. Notwithstanding the challenges described above, the Revitalized Transitional Government is making preparations for the training of the second batch of Necessary Unified Forces elements. In a report to the reconstituted Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission of February 2024, the Revitalized Transitional Government expressed its intention to commence the process for a second batch in the first half of 2024. According to plans previously announced by the Joint Military Ceasefire Commission, all opposition forces were to be cantoned at 17 new sites, while the

South Sudan People's Defence Forces would remain at their existing barracks. In addition, opposition forces were told that they would be permitted to join the training process for the second batch only if they brought their weapons, so as to ensure that those joining the process from opposition forces were indeed soldiers.

22. At the time of writing, however, the assessment team had not received information regarding preparations for the commencement of screening and training for the second batch. Information obtained from the Ceasefire and Transitional Security Arrangements Monitoring and Verification Mechanism suggested that the preparations concerning the cantonment sites and training centres for the second batch remained limited, as only some of the cantonment sites had received instructions to make preparations and no training centre had been given clear orders about the plan for the training process. There was also uncertainty about the number of additional personnel to be trained as part of the second batch. Furthermore, despite the requirements set out by the Revitalized Transitional Government that opposition personnel must register with their weapons to join the training process for the second batch, no information had been provided to the assessment team regarding preparations to receive, store and mark those weapons.

23. Lastly, continued defections from opposition forces to government forces, as well as ongoing recruitment by government and opposition forces outside the Necessary Unified Forces process, are taking place. Several interlocutors were of the view that the Government and the opposition had recruited more new personnel than those deployed to date as part of the Necessary Unified Forces. In addition, some interlocutors expressed the view that such practices increased distrust among the parties and could be a serious impediment not only in the force unification process but also in the wider context of security sector reform.

**Progress achieved on benchmark (c): progress by the Revitalized Transitional Government of National Unity on the establishment and implementation of the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process, and in particular the development and implementation of a plan for the collection and disposal of long- and medium-range heavy weapons and the development of a time-bound plan for the complete and verifiable demilitarization of all civilian areas**

24. Progress in establishing and implementing the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process remains severely hindered by insufficient funding from the Revitalized Transitional Government, decision-making challenges and the lack of funding from the international community. Representatives of the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Commission informed the assessment team that, as at February 2024, about \$8,000 (approximately 9 million South Sudan pounds at the time) had been received, which is only 10 per cent of the Commission's \$80,000 (approximately 90 million South Sudan pounds at the time) allotment for the fiscal year 2023/24.

25. Despite the challenges faced by the Commission, all personnel belonging to the first batch of Necessary Unified Forces underwent screening to assess their eligibility to serve in the new unified forces or for demobilization and reintegration. While the screening represented a positive step, the 4,700 personnel deemed eligible for demobilization and reintegration had to remain in the training centres due to the continued absence of the necessary transitional facilities. The majority reportedly left the centres owing to the lack of food and other necessary support, before they could be inserted into a demobilization and reintegration process. The Commission further stated that it lacked the capacity to determine the whereabouts of these ex-combatants.

26. To address risks stemming from the absence of a disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process, the international community has continued to support

various projects. In Lakes State, UNDP and its implementing partner assisted the Bureau for Community Security and Small Arms Control in civilian voluntary disarmament activities through the provision of vocational training between September 2023 and January 2024. Vocational training was provided to 200 young people (including 22 young women) from 250 households, who voluntarily surrendered their weapons to the state authorities in exchange for alternative livelihood skills.

27. A community violence reduction project was launched in Wau, Western Bahr el-Ghazal State, on 27 October 2023 by the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Commission, UNDP and UNMISS in partnership with local stakeholders. The ongoing project is intended to benefit 250 ex-combatants and 250 women and children associated with armed forces and groups. A series of activities has been conducted to date, including community dialogues for the reintegration of ex-combatants and communities affected by armed conflict.

28. Lastly, there has been no progress in the development of a plan for the collection and disposal of long- and medium-range heavy weapons, nor has there been progress in the development of a time-bound plan for the complete and verifiable demilitarization of all civilian areas.

**Progress achieved on benchmark (d): progress by the South Sudanese defence and security forces on properly managing their existing arms and ammunition stockpiles, including by establishing the necessary planning documents, protocols and training for the recording, storage, distribution and management of the weapons and ammunition**

29. In February 2024, an ammunition depot exploded at the Giada military barracks of the South Sudan People's Defence Forces in Juba, reportedly resulting in the deaths of six soldiers and injuries to at least eight civilians. In March, a fire erupted at an ammunition depot in Bor, Jonglei State, although no injuries were reported. The assessment team was also informed that over 100 metric tons of artillery ammunition were stored in inadequate conditions in Pagak, Upper Nile State, near the border with Ethiopia, posing a significant hazard for both uniformed personnel and the surrounding civilian population. This underscores the importance of enhancing weapons and ammunition storage facilities in South Sudan, as well as the necessity of providing thorough training to uniformed personnel in the proper management of weapons and ammunition. No progress has been made in that regard since the previous report.

30. Insufficient funding poses a significant obstacle to progress. Like the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Commission, the national coordinating body for weapons and ammunition management remains without adequate funding. The Bureau for Community Security and Small Arms Control, operating under the Ministry of the Interior, has not received adequate resources from the Revitalized Transitional Government, leading to the temporary closure of its offices at the time of writing.

31. According to the information provided to the assessment team, no weapons have been marked and registered since the issuance of the previous report in April 2023. According to the Revitalized Transitional Government, a concept paper for the control, management and stockpiling of arms, ammunition and other military equipment has been developed in collaboration with UNMISS, but the assessment team has not been provided with the concept paper.

32. There are ongoing efforts to train uniformed personnel, in addition to the over 170 security forces personnel already trained by the Regional Centre on Small Arms, the Bonn International Centre for Conflict Studies and the Bureau for Community

Security and Small Arms Control between 2012 and 2021. Twenty-five officers of the South Sudan National Police Service, including five female officers, participated in a training-of-trainers course on the control of small arms and light weapons from April to October 2023. This was part of a Saving Lives Entity fund pilot project, an initiative of the Office for Disarmament Affairs jointly implemented with UNDP and UNMISS. Subsequently, these trained police officers conducted training sessions in 10 state capitals and one administrative area, targeting local police officers, with an emphasis on female officers, of whom approximately 440 were trained on engaging civilians on voluntary disarmament, including through sensitization on firearms laws and regulations. Other achievements of the project include the establishment of firearms registers and procedures to ensure the effective tracking of police-owned weapons. However, the assessment team has not been given copies of those registers. From March to October 2023, five police officers and one army officer attended workshops organized by the Regional Centre on Small Arms and the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining. The workshops covered physical security and stockpile management, and small arms field identification and tracing. In addition, based on a weapons and ammunition management package developed by UNMISS and the Mine Action Service and endorsed by the Inspector General of the Police, a basic training for police officers is scheduled to take place in May 2024, which would include topics such as armoury access and control measures and weapons and ammunition accounting. It is noted, however, that the assessment team has yet to receive information indicating that the previous training sessions have translated into trained personnel being assigned to manage existing arms and ammunition stockpiles.

33. As noted in the previous report of the Secretary-General (S/2023/300), the Office of the Inspector General of the South Sudan National Police Service requested UNMISS to provide assistance in building a state-of-the-art facility in Juba that would house modern weapons, ammunition and other equipment. In response, UNMISS conducted on-site assessment visits to three existing National Police Service armouries in Juba to evaluate the needs of the Service. Several interlocutors expressed the view to the assessment team that the construction of a modern armoury was not advisable unless the requisite weapons and ammunition management processes were in place and sustainably implemented. Physical structures are not likely to be used effectively if there is no demonstration of the basic processes and procedures that need to be implemented for such an armoury.

**Progress achieved on benchmark (e): implementation of the Joint Action Plan for the Armed Forces on addressing conflict-related sexual violence, with an emphasis on the training, sensitization, accountability and oversight of the defence and security forces**

34. Amid direct clashes between the parties to the Revitalized Agreement and sustained subnational violence, sexual violence persists as a systematic tactic that is used to punish and forcibly displace the population. On 26 February 2024, the Chief of Defence Forces and the Co-Chairs of the Joint Defence Board signed an extension of the Joint Action Plan for the Armed Forces on addressing conflict-related sexual violence for the period from January 2024 to December 2026.

35. The assessment team has yet to receive confirmation regarding the extension of the mandate of the Joint Implementation Committee, the entity tasked with monitoring the implementation of the Joint Action Plan, which is composed of 11 senior officials of the South Sudan People's Defence Forces, SPLM/A-IO and the South Sudan Opposition Alliance.

36. The Joint Action Plan consists of six key pillars: (1) mainstreaming of sexual violence considerations in security arrangements under the Revitalized Agreement;



(2) external communication and outreach; (3) training, awareness-raising and sensitization; (4) accountability and oversight; (5) protection of victims, witnesses and judicial actors; and (6) monitoring, evaluation and reporting. Out of the six pillars, there has been little progress on three (pillars 1, 5 and 6). While some progress has been made on the other three pillars (pillars 2, 3 and 4), further efforts are needed to accelerate progress made in the previous years, especially in the areas of accountability and oversight.

37. In the area of training (pillar 3), some progress has been made with the support of UNMISS. The Mission facilitated three 5-day capacity-building training programmes in January, April and June 2023, aimed at enhancing the skills of 50 judge advocates of the Military Justice Directorate of the South Sudan People's Defence Forces, including 5 women, in investigating, prosecuting and adjudicating serious crimes, including conflict-related sexual violence. In addition, in April 2023, UNMISS collaborated with over 10 civil society organizations to host a three-day capacity-building training session. The session targeted members of the security sector women's networks established in 2022 in various security sector institutions, such as the army, police, prison, wildlife and civil defence services, to advocate for the rights and needs of women in uniform. The training focused, among other issues, on sexual and gender-based violence prevention and responses and on risk mitigation and investigation skills.

38. Progress has also been observed in the domain of awareness-raising and sensitization (also pillar 3). On 31 May 2023, the six key messages to end and prevent sexual violence were enacted as standing orders of the army and became legally binding on all military personnel. The key messages are aimed at raising awareness about sexual violence among military personnel, including its illegality, the consequences of committing sexual violence and the significance of a survivor-centred approach. Subsequently, pocket-sized cards containing the key messages in both English and Arabic were distributed to military personnel at the Yei garrison, with UNMISS assistance.

39. In terms of accountability and oversight (pillar 4), some progress has been made through the deployment of a general court martial in Yei County, Central Equatoria State, between 22 May and 16 June 2023. Three members from the specialized conflict-related sexual violence team of the Military Justice Directorate were deployed alongside the general court martial. A total of 14 cases were adjudicated by the general court martial, resulting in the conviction of 11 South Sudan People's Defence Forces soldiers and 1 SPLM/A-IO soldier in 12 cases (the 2 remaining cases were dismissed, 1 due to lack of evidence and the other because the accused were not able to participate in the trial). Four of those 14 cases involved sexual violence and were heard in closed sessions. Three of the convictions resulted in sentences of up to seven years in prison and an order to pay compensation of up to 400,000 South Sudan pounds (approximately \$405 at the time) to the victims. Officers holding the rank of lieutenant were among those convicted; however, the majority were young soldiers. Although general courts martial have been held several times since 2020, cases of conflict-related sexual violence continue to be recorded. There was a significant gap, for example, between the number of adjudicated cases (14) and the number of cases reported by UNMISS (130) in 2023.

40. Pillar 4 of the Joint Action Plan also addresses institutional frameworks relating to the recruitment of military personnel, with a focus on enhancing the recruitment and retention of women, which is critical to ensuring gender equality and the prevention of conflict-related sexual violence. Progress has been made in this area, with the support of UNMISS. Following the establishment in 2022 of the national security sector Women's Network and national-level women's networks within each of the five security forces, subnational-level women's networks have also been

established within the National Police Service in all five counties in Northern Bahr el-Ghazal State, as well as in its capital, Aweil, and are also in the process of being developed across the country. However, the existing national security sector Women's Network continues to face challenges in securing office space to facilitate more frequent meetings and enhance its efficiency.

41. Progress has been made in terms of external communication and outreach (pillar 2) to civilian communities. On 15 March 2023, members of the Joint Implementation Committee participated in an Arabic-language talk show on Radio Miraya, disseminating information about the roles and activities of and the challenges faced by the Joint Implementation Committee in its bid to educate the public about ongoing efforts to combat conflict-related sexual violence. During the general court martial deployment in Yei in May–June 2023, radio announcements and talk shows were used to raise awareness about the general court martial and dispel misconceptions among the community about the legal process. In addition, the Joint Implementation Committee participated in a civil-military dialogue on conflict-related sexual violence organized in Yei on 15 June 2023, with the support of UNMISS, the International Organization for Migration and a national civil society organization. A total of 111 persons, including 30 women and high-level military officials, attended the event. A similar workshop was organized on 7 and 8 July 2023 in Kuacjok, Warrap State, with 22 participants (including 8 women).

42. Lastly, the assessment team has not received confirmed information on the appointment by the South Sudan People's Defence Forces of focal points in relevant units (at the headquarters level), divisions, brigades and colleges to collaborate with the Joint Implementation Committee, as stipulated in the Joint Action Plan.

## V. Conclusion

43. The Revitalized Transitional Government of National Unity has made some progress against two of the five key benchmarks, while no progress has been made against the remaining three benchmarks since my previous report of April 2023. The progress made against the two benchmarks (benchmarks (b) and (e)) needs to be further enhanced by building upon existing achievements, without further delay.

44. On benchmark (b), progress was made in the deployment of the first batch of graduated Necessary Unified Forces personnel, which is a long-awaited positive step and signals the intention of the Revitalized Transitional Government to move forward. However, it also remains a partial deployment, with only about 7 per cent of the graduated personnel deployed to date, and their role in securing the elections is yet unclear. The deployment of the Necessary Unified Forces across the country is crucial for ensuring the successful organization of credible, transparent and democratic elections in December 2024. Therefore, I reiterate my call to the Revitalized Transitional Government to fast-track the harmonization of the middle command structure for the South Sudan People's Defence Forces and the National Police Service, accelerate the provision of required resources to the unified forces, and finalize the redeployment of the first batch of graduated personnel while promptly initiating training for the second batch.

45. Regarding benchmark (e), the extension of the Joint Action Plan for the Armed Forces on addressing conflict-related sexual violence, along with positive developments in some pillars of the Joint Action Plan, represents progress. However, it is important to ensure that the mandate of the Joint Implementation Committee is extended and to strengthen the implementation of the Joint Action Plan, considering that little progress has been made on three of the six pillars.

46. Progress against benchmark (a) has been assessed as limited. The five outputs prepared by the Strategic Defence and Security Review Board must be validated without further delay. The process has stalled due to the issue of outstanding compensation owed by the Revitalized Transitional Government to members of the Board and its secretariat. Alongside the lack of financial resources, several interlocutors have pointed out a lack of political will to advance security sector reform through the Strategic Defence and Security Review, further contributing to delays. I call upon the Revitalized Transitional Government and the Strategic Defence and Security Review Board to move forward and facilitate the commencement of security sector reforms.

47. There has been no progress against benchmarks (c) and (d). I am particularly concerned by the continued lack of funding and political support for the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process. Efforts to reintegrate former combatants into civilian life and prevent them from rejoining armed groups are crucial for ensuring peaceful elections. Therefore, I reiterate my call to the Revitalized Transitional Government to demonstrate its ownership of and commitment to the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process by allocating adequate resources to the implementing mechanisms and institutions. I appeal to both regional and international partners to assist the Revitalized Transitional Government in this endeavour. I am encouraged by initiatives for civilian voluntary disarmament and community violence reduction. However, I remain deeply concerned about the lack of progress regarding a plan for the collection and disposal of long- and medium-range heavy weapons, which underscores the continued lack of trust between the parties.

48. The explosion at an ammunition depot belonging to the South Sudan People's Defence Forces in Juba in February 2024 reconfirmed the critical importance of effective weapons and ammunition management for the security forces in South Sudan. In this regard, I welcome the ongoing collaboration between the National Police Service and UNMISS on weapons and ammunition training. I encourage the Revitalized Transitional Government to continue to work with the United Nations and international and regional partners to enhance efforts aimed at promoting the physical security and stockpile management of weapons and ammunition throughout the country.

49. The implementation of the Revitalized Agreement remains the only avenue towards lasting peace in South Sudan. Progress made against the five benchmarks defined by the Security Council in its resolution [2577 \(2021\)](#) will contribute to the implementation of the Agreement. I express my gratitude to the authorities of South Sudan for the support provided to the Secretariat in conducting the assessment, including the opportunity to meet with the Council of Ministers, which had not been possible during the previous two assessment missions. I encourage the South Sudanese authorities to report to the Committee in accordance with paragraph 6 of resolution [2683 \(2023\)](#).

50. The road map agreed in August 2022 presents an opportunity for the parties to recommit to the full and meaningful implementation of the Revitalized Agreement using the revised timelines, including the holding of credible and peaceful elections. While some progress has been made, more needs to be done to ensure a successful transition within the extended transition period. I call upon the parties to step up their efforts and commitment to expeditiously implement the outstanding tasks and take the relevant decisions. The continued assistance of the United Nations, the African Union, IGAD, the reconstituted Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission and other partners will remain critical.