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# Security Council

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## Situation in Abyei

### Report of the Secretary-General

#### I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to paragraph 7 of Security Council resolution [2630 \(2022\)](#), in which the Council requested to be informed of progress in implementing the mandate of the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA). It covers the period since the issuance of the previous report ([S/2022/316](#)) of the Secretary-General, from 15 April to 3 October 2022. The report provides updates on the transition of UNISFA to a United Nations multinational peacekeeping force, as well as on, inter alia, political, security, human rights, rule of law and humanitarian developments.

#### II. Abyei

##### Political developments

2. While relations between South Sudan and the Sudan continued to reflect the improvements of recent years, intercommunity relations in Abyei during the reporting period remained tense, with positions entrenched. In June, both the Co-Chairs of the Sudanese and the South Sudanese Abyei Joint Oversight Committee separately indicated to United Nations counterparts their interest in holding a Committee meeting in the “near future”, and both requested United Nations support. This would be the first Committee meeting since 2017. Separately, in August, my Special Envoy for the Horn of Africa and the Chair of the African Union High-level Implementation Panel continued their respective consultations with the leadership of the Misseriya and Ngok Dinka communities on the way forward regarding the settlement of the final status of Abyei.

3. The Joint Political and Security Mechanism convened in Khartoum on 24 and 25 May. The parties reiterated their agreement on several issues, such as the opening of border crossing corridors, and referred such matters as Diffra oil protection and the operationalization of the Athony airstrip to their respective presidencies. The parties also urged the resumption of regular Abyei Joint Oversight Committee meetings. The Mission continued to advocate enhanced dialogue between the parties.

4. The acting Head of Mission and Force Commander of UNISFA engaged with South Sudanese authorities in Juba from 12 to 16 July. He addressed issues related to the peace process, Ngok Dinka and Twic Dinka tensions, and rule of law matters,



including the delayed establishment of the Abyei Police Service. He also raised matters pertaining to the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism, in particular the need for Juba to facilitate the rapid re-establishment of the Mechanism presence in its Sector 1, including the Sector headquarters in Gok Machar and the team sites in Safahah/Kiir Adem and Sumayah/War Abar. Interlocutors expressed appreciation to UNISFA for its work in Abyei, including the facilitation of the Joint Traditional Leaders' Peace Conference, which was held in Entebbe from 17 to 19 May. The acting Head of Mission and Force Commander also impressed on Juba the need to facilitate the conflict-sensitive implementation of joint programmes in the Abyei Area.

5. The acting Head of Mission and Force Commander engaged with Sudanese authorities in Khartoum from 31 July to 4 August. Discussions were focused on the Abyei peace process, Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism issues, and law and order matters, including the strengthening of the community protection committee presence and civil-military cooperation activities in the north of Abyei. Discussions also addressed delays in the deployment of UNISFA formed police units and additional individual police officers as authorized by the Security Council, the appointment of a civilian Deputy Head of Mission, the operationalization of the Athony airstrip and other operational matters. Sudanese authorities expressed appreciation for the role of UNISFA in the Abyei Area, including its support of the local peace process and support for the resumption of Abyei Joint Oversight Committee meetings.

6. Representatives of the Misseriya and Ngok Dinka communities were amenable to the convening of a pre-transhumance conference, or "seasonal peace conference", to be jointly organized by UNISFA and the International Organization for Migration ahead of the next dry season, with a view to decreasing intercommunity tensions linked to seasonal movements. UNISFA continued its engagement with communities in the Abyei Area to reach an agreement on the holding of this conference.

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

7. The security situation in the Abyei Area was mostly calm, with some incidents of concern. Robberies, killings, animal rustling, shootings and sexual and gender-based violence, including rape, were the main threats to security and protection of civilians. The presence of armed South Sudan People's Defence Forces and Sudan Armed Forces personnel, as well as civilian armed elements, threatened the general security in the Abyei Area. Armed attacks on UNISFA troops and violent confrontations between Ngok Dinka and Twic Dinka also occurred.

8. Of the 31 arms-related incidents recorded during the reporting period, 19 were direct attacks against civilians, reportedly killing 28 civilians and injuring 33. These figures are higher than the ones for the same period in 2021, during which 17 civilians were killed and 27 were injured between April and October, but they mark a decrease compared with 2020, when the number of civilians killed was 42 between April and October, with 26 wounded. The two attacks with the most casualties concerned violence between the Twic Dinka and Ngok Dinka communities triggered by land and boundary disputes. On 24 June, at Mading Achueng, a Ngok Dinka village in Sector South, an attack by armed elements resulted in seven civilian deaths, including that of a 4-year-old boy, and the injury of five people. Four *tukuls* (thatched huts) were torched by the assailants. The armed elements fled prior to the arrival of UNISFA troops. On 23 and 25 September, two additional incidents involving the Twic and Ngok communities near Agok, Sector South, reportedly left at least two persons killed and eight injured. As a result, 223 internally displaced persons, mostly from the Nuer community, sought protection at the UNISFA company operating base in Agok on

23 September. As at 28 September, the number of internally displaced persons had decreased to 132, including 37 women and 84 children.

9. The two attacks were among several involving the Twic Dinka and Ngok Dinka communities in violation of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement signed by the two communities on 4 April. On 16 April, three persons attacked a Ngok Dinka village near Joljuk (Sector South), with one man shot and killed. On 21 April, some 100 suspected Twic Dinka armed elements attacked the Ngok Dinka village of Agan Tok (Sector South), with both sides exchanging fire, but no casualties were recorded. The Mission responded quickly, causing the attackers to flee. On 14 May, a man was shot and killed following an attack by a group of 10 persons in the Ngok Dinka village of Wunpeth (Sector South). On 16 and 17 May, violence between the Twic and Ngok Dinka communities in Kadhian and Agok villages in Sector South resulted in four civilian deaths, including that of one woman. During the attacks, rocket-propelled grenades and machine guns were used, and 22 thatched houses were torched. Some 288 civilians, including 102 women and 161 children, were displaced.

10. On 23 May, some 2,000 members of the Ngok Dinka community protested outside the UNISFA compound in Abyei town to denounce the “coordinated attacks on Ngok Dinka communities by Twic Dinka and Misseriya”. In a letter signed by Abyei civil society organizations, they called upon the Security Council as well as the African Union Peace and Security Council to urge both Governments to address the final status of Abyei.

11. UNISFA troops were under attack seven times during the reporting period. On 7, 8 and 9 May, UNISFA troops responding to attacks at Amiet market (Sector North), Athony (Sector South) and Malual Aleu (Sector South) came under direct fire. On 5 May, two UNISFA observation posts near Amiet market were targeted by rocket-propelled grenades. On 9 May, troops at the UNISFA Athony company operating base came under direct fire during routine physical training activities. On 11 and 17 May, the UNISFA bases at Tajalei and Marial Achak (Sector South) were targeted by armed elements, with no casualties.

12. Between June and August, five incidents of cattle rustling at Leu, Rumbek, Minyang and Ayak Thony, in Sector South, as well as Rumajak, in Sector Centre, left one person dead and four injured. The perpetrators allegedly came from Unity and Warrap States in South Sudan. UNISFA troops helped to recover some of the rustled cattle.

13. Since 15 April, seven incidents of armed robbery have been recorded, leaving 4 victims dead and 11 injured, mostly along the main supply route. Furthermore, nine arrests were made at UNISFA checkpoints, and 11 assault rifles, 354 rounds of ammunition, a rocket-propelled grenade primer and the main assembly of a grenade launcher have been seized.

14. Armed members of the Sudan Armed Forces and the South Sudan People's Defence Forces were sighted within the Abyei Area, in violation of the demilitarized status of the Area. Between April and July, there were four instances of presence of South Sudan People's Defence Forces at Athony, Agok, Kadhian and Abathok, in Sector South. A Sudan Armed Forces patrol was also sighted at Farouk (Sector North), later exiting the Abyei Area at the insistence of UNISFA troops. Suspected Twic Dinka armed elements were sighted at Wunkum, Awang Thou and Lort, in Sector South.

#### **Reconfiguration of the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei**

15. The reconfiguration of the UNISFA military component is close to completion. As at 31 August, all 570 troops from Pakistan and their contingent-owned equipment had arrived and were fully operational, as were the full 77-troop headquarters support

unit of Nepal, the 67 troops staffing the level II hospital from Ghana and the 184 troops of the Military Engineering Company of Viet Nam. A total of 570 troops from Ghana had arrived, albeit without their complete contingent-owned equipment, and a further 307 of 570 troops from India, as well as 86 members from China of the military utility helicopter unit, were present in the Abyei Area. With regard to the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism, the full complement of 491 troops from Bangladesh is deployed and operational in the Mechanism's Sector 2. All former Ethiopian peacekeepers have completed repatriation, with the exception of a three-person rear party to remain with its contingent-owned equipment and some who chose to remain in the Sudan. Some Ethiopian contingent-owned equipment has yet to be repatriated, complicated by the tensions near the Ethiopia-Sudan border.

16. Of the 135 authorized military observers, 111 had been deployed as at 31 August. The remaining 24 awaited the issuance of visas or to be nominated. Of the 125 authorized staff officers, 95 were present at the Mission.

### **Freedom of movement violations**

17. Since 15 April, eight freedom of movement violations against UNISFA have been recorded. Of the three violations within the Abyei Area, two affected UNISFA personnel and one was against a UNISFA-contracted logistics company. One violation occurred within the Safe Demilitarized Border Zone, and four violations consisted of blocking the UNISFA base at Kadugli. On 5 June, a UNISFA water truck from team site 21 (Tishwin) was denied access to a water point at Heglig by members of the Sudan Armed Forces. On 11 August, a UNISFA third-party logistics contractor convoy of 78 trucks was stopped at a checkpoint near Amiet market by members of the local community demanding payment of taxes by the drivers who held the vehicles for several days. On 13 August, following an armed robbery the previous day along the Todach-Goli main supply route that resulted in the deaths of three persons, some 250 members of the Misseriya community from the general area of Amiet market, Todach and Goli protested against UNISFA at the main gate of UNISFA Sector North headquarters in Todach. Relatedly, on the same day, some 50 Dari young people, led by the deputy youth leader, organized a peaceful protest at the Diffra company operating base main gate. On 30 August and 3, 5 and 18 September, access in and out of the logistics base at Kadugli was blocked for a few hours by local community members requesting payment of rent for the land hosting the base and expressing concerns about the recruitment process for security guards and workers of UNISFA contractor Imdad. UNISFA engaged with them and explained employment modalities as well as land use terms.

### **Intercommunity dialogue**

18. On 14 April, UNISFA convened a virtual meeting between the Ngok Dinka Paramount Chief, Bulabek Deng Kuol, and the Misseriya Paramount Chief, Nazir Mukhtar Bobo Nimir, during which they agreed in principle to resume face-to-face consultations. As a result, UNISFA convened, in Entebbe, Uganda, from 17 to 19 May, a Joint Traditional Leaders' Peace Conference under the theme "Peace through dialogue". The Ngok Dinka delegation was led by Chief Bulabek Deng Kuol. Chief Elsadig Hireka Ezza El Din led the Misseriya delegation. Delegations consisted of traditional leaders and representatives of women and young people from both sides, as detailed in paragraph 42 of the present report. United Nations agencies, funds and programmes based in Khartoum and Juba were also represented.

19. The Mission facilitated discussions during the three days, at the end of which the communities agreed on matters of principle, including: (a) to advocate intercommunity dialogue aimed at better protecting women and children; (b) to ensure that traditional leaders be seen as actively promoting peace; (c) to support the two

Governments' initiatives towards resolving the Abyei issue; (d) to meet regularly in the quest for peace; and (e) to call for the immediate release of the investigation report on the killings of 2013.

20. The communities agreed that political matters should remain under the purview of the Governments of the Sudan and South Sudan and requested that UNISFA share with the Joint Political and Security Mechanism its proposed list of pending matters, including: (a) the signing of a cessation of hostilities agreement; (b) the establishment of joint Government-led institutions; (c) the full demilitarization of Abyei and the presence of State authorities in the Area; (d) the relocation of the Amiet market to Abyei town; (e) full freedom of movement for the communities; (f) UNISFA support to agencies, funds, programmes and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to operate in the north of the Area; (g) the recognition by the Ngok Dinka of the Misseriya's status as co-owners in Abyei; and (h) the issue of the use of "Ajaira" as a legitimate clan designation for the Misseriya. Communities disagreed on adding an item to the agenda on the perceived illegal settlement of Misseriya within the Area. Lastly, the Ngok Dinka community demanded that the Permanent Court of Arbitration award and the Abyei Protocol serve as the basis for peaceful coexistence between the two communities. As requested by the communities, the Mission informed the Mechanism of the above-mentioned points.

21. UNISFA continued to engage with local representatives of both parties in Abyei on several occasions, including the Abyei Youth Association leadership on 6 and 18 July to discuss mandate implementation and the Abyei crisis. Meetings were also held with the Juba-appointed Chief Administrator, Kuol Deim Kuol.

22. On 1 July, the Ngok Dinka civil society organization Abyei Voice for Security and Stability, comprising members from the local community and the diaspora, issued the report of a month-long consultative workshop that analysed the crisis and made a set of recommendations on the future status of Abyei. The document includes a reiteration of points made in earlier publications, aimed at charting a different path to the resolution of the Abyei issues through the proposal that the people of Abyei govern themselves as a "self-governing state that will remain connected to both countries" for a specific interim period, with institutional and security arrangements agreed with Juba and Khartoum and international guarantees. On 23 August, the Abyei Area Executive Council, chaired by the Juba-appointed Chief Administrator, unanimously rejected the proposal and called for, inter alia, the endorsement of the results of the Abyei Community Referendum of October 2013, the endorsement by the Security Council of the proposal of the African Union High-level Implementation Panel of 2012 and the acceleration of the determination of the final status of Abyei. On 11 and 15 September, crowds of approximately 1,500 and 2,000 persons, respectively, led by the Ngok Dinka Paramount Chief and other traditional leaders, gathered peacefully in front of the UNISFA main gate in support of the proposal. They read out a summary of the proposal and handed over their petition to UNISFA.

23. The Mission worked on a total of 17 quick-impact projects in the Abyei Area for the budget year 2021/22. Aimed at lightening the burden for underserved communities and further strengthening the population's confidence in UNISFA, they were received positively by the relevant communities. They included seven projects in the North (classrooms and toilet blocks at primary and secondary schools), nine projects in the South (water handpumps, livelihood shops, a kitchen at a detention centre and projects at the Abyei main hospital) and a joint project (a traditional court) at Amiet market, to be used by both communities. Each project is estimated to benefit an estimated 400 to 500 people on average. All the projects in the northern part of Abyei and six of the nine projects planned for the southern part of Abyei have been completed. The three projects initially planned in Agok (southern Abyei) could not

commence owing to intracommunity violence in the area. In coordination with the local administration, replacement projects have been selected and approved.

### **Rule of law**

24. Despite the absence of the Abyei Police Service, United Nations police, through community protection committees and the joint protection committee, continued to support and enhance the rule of law in the Abyei Area. United Nations police received immediate information from community protection committees and shared it with the UNISFA force for their timely response to many incidents, including public disorder, armed attacks, intercommunal violence and other civil disturbances.

25. Through continuous engagements with the local community and traditional leadership in Sector North, United Nations police supported the establishment of a new community protection committee, which was inaugurated on 30 June with a total of 161 members, of which 7 were women. That number, which increased to 377 in early October, includes 64 women. Community protection committee/joint protection committee stations in Sectors North, Centre and South now stand at 53, of which 33 community protection committee stations are in Sectors Centre and South, where the population density is higher. The total number of volunteer community protection committee members within Abyei Area is 1,223, including 181 women. A total of 52 people, 4 of whom are women, volunteer on the joint protection committee. Both committee members are profiled and vetted by United Nations police in close collaboration with the traditional leaders and local administrations.

26. United Nations police continued to engage actively with stakeholders in Abyei, including traditional leaders, religious leaders, the Abyei Women's Association, young people and local authorities, to enhance participation in rule of law matters and strengthen the capacity of the community protection committees and joint protection committees in Sectors Centre and South and at the Amiet common market. The community protection committees in Sectors Centre and South recorded a total of 549 general crimes since 15 April, representing a decrease of 521 cases compared with the previous period. United Nations police worked to strengthen the capacity of both committees through the provision of portable rechargeable flashlights, raincoats, reflector jackets, T-shirts, caps and stationery, the construction of a kitchen in the Abyei detention centre and the construction and renovation of detention facilities in Agok and Abyei. UNISFA corrections officers conducted 355 visits to the three detention facilities in Abyei, Agok and the Amiet common market to provide advice on best practices and on compliance with international human rights standards.

27. United Nations police conducted 2,227 activities related to law and order in Noong and Abyei (Sector Centre), Todach and Diffra (Sector North) and Banton, Tejalei and Agok (Sector South). A total of 136 awareness-related activities were conducted, focusing on crime prevention and reduction and road safety, while 67 were conducted to raise awareness of accountability for sexual and gender-based violence and the protection of the rights of women and children. Furthermore, some 277 pupils in three schools, including 127 girls, benefited from campaigns on the prevention of child abuse, including child marriage and female genital mutilation.

28. United Nations police conducted 742 community interactive patrols to mobilize members of the public to participate in peacebuilding initiatives. They also conducted 469 patrols, 267 independent security observation patrols and 7 air reconnaissance patrols in tandem with military observers and national monitors from the Sudan and South Sudan.

29. A corrections expert from the Justice and Corrections Standing Capacity of the Department of Peace Operations was deployed to UNISFA from 19 February to 17 May. The expert supported the Mission in the development of strategic and

operational corrections support, including recommendations regarding the improvement of the security and living conditions in detention facilities. The expert also conducted capacity-building activities among community protection committee corrections wardens and developed community protection committee/joint protection committee framework policies that provide for, inter alia, training of community protection committee wardens on the Nelson Mandela Rules, enhanced coordination with agencies, funds and programmes and the use of quick-impact projects to improve the living conditions of inmates. Two rule of law experts supported the Mission by drafting a joint rule of law strategy to strengthen the rule of law in the Abyei Area.

30. In accordance with Security Council resolution 1990 (2011), United Nations police currently comprise 50 individual police officers, of which 36 per cent are women (18). Currently, three visa requests are pending for new individual police officers, who will replace those departing in September and October. United Nations police strive to maintain the ceiling of 50 individual police officers, which was accepted by the Sudan. The deployment of an additional 98 individual police officers for a total of 148, as authorized by the Council in its resolution 2469 (2019), has not been permitted by the Government of the Sudan. Furthermore, as mentioned above, no progress has been made regarding the deployment of the three formed police units.

### **Human rights situation**

31. The human rights situation continued to be fragile and characterized mainly by repeated cycles of violence between the Ngok and Twic Dinka communities, as well as between the Misseriya and Ngok Dinka communities. Recurring intercommunal violence over land disputes and reprisal attacks remained the main threat to civilian lives. In the absence of rule of law institutions, investigations and accountability for crimes committed remained rare. Access to education, water and health care continued to be limited. The Mission faced challenges in documenting human rights violations and abuses in the absence of human rights expertise. However, on 15 June, for the first time since the establishment of UNISFA, United Nations police inaugurated a pilot gender desk referral pathway for survivors of sexual and gender-based violence in Abyei, operating 24/7 in a bid to protect survivors, in particular women and girls who are at the highest risk.

32. A milestone was reached with the construction and renovation of corrections facilities at Agok and Abyei that promote the right of inmates to be detained in humane conditions. United Nations police, corrections officers and designated detention focal point persons at the Abyei, Agok and Amiet detention facilities monitored the detention facilities daily for possible violations of the rights of inmates. In addition, the UNISFA Gender Advisory Team conducted campaigns to bring attention to violations of human rights, protection of civilians and sexual and gender-based violence to the benefit of community protection committees/joint protection committees and the people of the Abyei Area.

33. United Nations police handled six cases of physical violence against women, of which two were cases of domestic violence. Perpetrators were arrested by community protection committee members under United Nations police guidance. United Nations police continued to engage with traditional leaders and community members on the issue of child marriage, which has an impact on young girls in particular, as such a practice is a violation of the rights of children and hinders their right to education. The absence of a human rights office in the Mission area continued to pose a challenge.

### **Humanitarian situation**

34. Given Abyei's disputed status and continued insecurity in several parts of the Area, humanitarian access challenges persisted. The reporting period witnessed

notable population movement, including returns, relocations and flood-related displacements. Frequent and unpredictable outbreaks of violence and the presence of armed elements further added to the existing humanitarian crisis.

35. The economic difficulties and high rate of inflation in the Sudan and South Sudan have had an impact on the living conditions in the Abyei Area, with the price of basic commodities, including food, rising sharply. Access to basic services continued to be affected by limited or non-existent government services, including public health, water, sanitation and hygiene, education and protection, as well as farming and livestock technical assistance, especially in northern Abyei. The lack of a humanitarian presence in northern Abyei, along with logistical hurdles, insecurity and political sensitivities, remained challenges. However, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in Abyei is working with stakeholders in Diffra and the Office of the Humanitarian Coordinator in Khartoum to re-establish an operational presence in northern Abyei.

36. The humanitarian community continued to assist the 250,000 vulnerable people in central and southern Abyei, including host communities, internally displaced persons, including from Kolom and Unity State, and displaced persons who had fled their homes in Twic owing to violent intercommunal clashes driven largely by territorial disputes. The humanitarian response in the Abyei Area includes health, water, sanitation and hygiene, and education activities, ensuring a balanced and strong community-based approach and reintegration. Humanitarian actors also continue activities to strengthen food security, nutrition and early warning information systems, agropastoral livelihood diversification, as well as livelihoods and market access, transboundary animal diseases and natural resources management. However, access constraints, including roads rendered impassable as a result of flooding and insecurity in hard-to-reach areas in northern and southern Abyei, continued to limit the humanitarian response.

37. Floods in late August had an impact on large parts of the Abyei Area, including 73,000 people living in southern Abyei and another 18,000 in northern Abyei (government figures as at 16 September). The floods washed away farmlands and fuelled food insecurity. UNISFA and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs jointly conducted assessments in areas affected by the floods in northern Abyei. In addition, UNISFA supported the Office, agencies, funds and programmes, and international NGOs in delivering humanitarian assistance by air to 2,500 flood-affected families in villages around Agok that remained cut off from roads. They included 800 internally displaced families that had fled from Mayom, in Unity State, South Sudan, to the east of the Abyei box.

38. Food production was not adequate to cover the food needs of the people in the Area, and the entire population in northern Abyei lacked access to primary health-care services, with a critical gap in medicines, trained health-care workers and laboratories, and a limited referral system. The local communities, nomads and displaced people faced severe water shortages, and almost all communities lacked basic sanitation facilities. A lack of non-food items and substandard levels of housing further exposed families to additional health and protection risks.

39. Owing to displacement earlier in the year, school enrolment decreased, from 21,000 in 2021 to 17,000 this year. However, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs is working with the education cluster and the Minister of Education of the Juba-appointed administration to complete a survey of school-aged children in Abyei to devise strategies to bring children back to schools. Displaced children who work in the local markets to support their families' food needs are exposed to sexual abuse, exploitation and trafficking. Some 38 unaccompanied

minors from Aweil and Twic have been assisted by the administration, in collaboration with humanitarian workers, to find sustainable, non-institutionalized care.

40. Jointly with UNISFA and NGOs, United Nations agencies, funds and programmes continued to promote dialogue and peaceful coexistence between the two communities, including by supporting programmes that benefit both communities, in particular along migration routes. In addition, the partners continued to vaccinate and treat both Ngok Dinka and Misseriya livestock.

41. Approximately 100 Eritreans, of whom the majority were men, arrived in the Amiet market area in Abyei in August. Some were registered as refugees in the Tigray region of Ethiopia. All have expressed interest in going to Kenya, South Sudan or Uganda from Abyei. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees have engaged the Chief Administrator in Abyei to take the lead in first registering them in their respective databases and then processing their paperwork and transportation to their final destination. UNISFA is working closely with United Nations agencies, funds and programmes to support the logistical and security aspects of the response. To address the underlying drivers of humanitarian need, UNISFA is also working with the United Nations agencies, funds and programmes to enhance peacebuilding through the Abyei joint programme of the United Nations country teams of South Sudan and the Sudan, as detailed below.

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

42. The meaningful participation of women in decision-making processes in Abyei remained a serious challenge. The Mission continued to engage with key stakeholders and partners to enhance the meaningful participation of women in decision-making processes in their communities, including intercommunal dialogues and early warning mechanisms. As part of the effort, in May, UNISFA facilitated the participation of women in the Joint Traditional Leaders' Peace Conference in Entebbe. Three women, representing 10 per cent of the participants, attended the conference, in which representatives from the two communities affirmed their readiness to promote peaceful coexistence with women as transformative agents in peacebuilding and ongoing intercommunal dialogues. The Mission also engaged local leaders and communities to establish community protection committees in the Misseriya community and advocated the participation of women in the mechanisms, which resulted in the selection of 64 women in the newly established community protection committees, representing some 15 per cent of members. The women on the committees are expected to contribute to community early warning.

43. During the period under review, seven cases of sexual and gender-based violence were registered in Abyei. Victims included internally displaced persons and children. Cases comprised one attempted rape, one gang rape by a group of eight alleged perpetrators, four cases of physical assault on women (two domestic violence and two non-domestic) and one case of sexual harassment. The alleged perpetrators in all cases except the gang rape were arrested by the community protection committee under the guidance of United Nations police and found guilty by the Traditional Court of Abyei. Thanks to a restructuring of the traditional court system, supported by the International Organization for Migration and UNISFA in October 2021, there are currently women judges in 11 of the 13 Ngok Dinka traditional courts.

44. UNISFA continued to support local communities in the Abyei Area to strengthen their capacities to prevent and respond to sexual and gender-based violence, including through mitigation of its impacts and promotion of access to services for survivors of such violence, through training sessions and awareness-raising. Fifty-nine community

awareness-raising sessions were conducted to promote accountability for such violence and the protection of the rights of women and children.

45. The Mission supported the construction of an office space located at the Abyei community protection committee office to serve as a gender-based-violence desk office.

### **Youth, peace and security**

46. Ensuring youth participation in the peace process continued to pose challenges. Deliberate steps to promote the meaningful engagement of young people in peace initiatives in Abyei were conceived. For example, UNISFA advocated and ensured the inclusion of youth in the Joint Traditional Leaders' Peace Conference, in which four young men participated. No young women were present.

47. The Mission worked together with the University of Juba to engage the Abyei Youth Union to develop a strategic peace plan for the next five years. The process involved workshops among Abyei young people, as well as a joint dialogue between Misseriya and Ngok Dinka young people in Todach, held on 6 June, aimed at fostering collaboration between young people of both communities. The Mission's support to the Abyei Youth Union led to the adoption of a five-year strategic peace plan with a built-in framework for governance and administrative structures.

48. In northern Abyei, UNISFA cooperated with the international NGO Search for Common Ground to promote intergenerational dialogue between district committee leaders, young people and women. The effort led to the formation of six joint local youth community networks and the training of 20 young people on conflict transformation and mediation skills. A total of 13 young women and 8 young men were provided with entrepreneurship grants to empower them as engines for peacebuilding.

### **Operations of the Mine Action Service**

49. The Mine Action Service remained fully deployed at the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism headquarters in Kadugli and the two active team sites in Sector 2, enabling 29 ground monitoring Mechanism missions.

50. The Mine Action Service assessed 5,129 square metres of land in the Abyei Area as safe for use by UNISFA, humanitarian actors and the local population. They included UNISFA temporary operating bases and patrol routes to enhance Force mobility in accordance with the dry season deployment plan, as well as two suspected landmine-contaminated areas (Koladit and Makir). As a result of these activities, two anti-tank mines and 42 explosive remnants of war were recovered and subsequently destroyed in controlled demolitions. As part of weapons and ammunition management, the Service destroyed 48 weapons and 8,377 rounds of small arms ammunition confiscated by UNISFA troops. In addition to allowing UNISFA to safely operate in the relevant area, the mine-clearing activities contributed to the safe movement of the people of Abyei through the impacted area, thereby improving their livelihoods to the extent possible, given the heavy rains.

51. The Mine Action Service continued with explosive ordnance risk education. A total of 246 sessions were delivered, reaching 6,985 community members (945 men, 973 women, 2,735 boys and 2,332 girls) living in the Abyei Area. Community members, including children and pastoralists, were provided with comic books to create awareness of explosive remnants of war, as well as masks to support coronavirus disease (COVID-19) mitigation measures. Thirty-two awareness-raising sessions on explosive remnants of war were delivered as part of UNISFA induction

training sessions, raising the awareness of 642 UNISFA military and civilian personnel, including 98 women.

52. The Mine Action Service was tasked by the Mission to destroy the ammunition of the departing Ethiopian troop contingent, which resulted in a total of 110 tons of ammunition destroyed, predominantly tank and artillery ammunition. The Service was also tasked by UNISFA to organize and destroy ammunition received from El Fasher after the closure of the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur, which resulted in some 30 weapons and 73,543 units of ammunition being destroyed.

### **Abyei joint programme of the United Nations country teams in the Sudan and South Sudan**

53. From 31 May to 2 June, the resident and humanitarian coordinators of the Sudan and South Sudan conducted a joint visit to Abyei, facilitated by UNISFA. The aim of the visit was to engage with the population, the local leadership and humanitarian responders to understand gaps and engage with UNISFA leadership on opportunities for the implementation of the Abyei joint programme.

54. In this connection, the Mission, with the United Nations country teams in the Sudan and South Sudan, continued the development of the Abyei joint programme proposed in the letter dated 17 September 2021 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2021/805). The work has resulted in the near completion by UNISFA and the resident coordinators in South Sudan and the Sudan, respectively, of the programme document, developed with the support of the Development Coordination Office and the Department of Peace Operations. The programme document reflects inputs from a wide range of interlocutors. It is expected that implementation of its first activities will begin during the next reporting cycle. The programme has brought United Nations entities together to provide much-needed services in the areas of water management, health, livelihoods and conflict resolution skills, thereby promoting an enabling environment for peacebuilding. The joint programme team will continue its close consultations and coordination with relevant stakeholders, including communities in Abyei, their leaders and the Governments of the Sudan and South Sudan.

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

55. The situation in the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism area of responsibility was generally calm but unpredictable around Abu Qussa/Wunkur owing to incidents involving fighting between factions of the Sudan People's Liberation Army in Opposition (SPLA-IO), which controls the Abu Qussa/Wunkur and Tonga general area. The Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism successfully conducted regular aerial and ground monitoring missions in one of the two sectors of the Safe Demilitarized Border Zone. The Government of South Sudan informed the acting Head of Mission and Force Commander of UNISFA, during his visit to Juba from 12 to 16 July, that the awareness of the community was being raised to enable the reoperationalization of the Mechanism Sector 1. Mechanism leadership continued to engage with the Sudan and South Sudan authorities with the aim of convening a meeting with the combined Joint Border Commission and Joint Demarcation Committee and the Joint Political and Security Mechanism, originally scheduled for August. However, no such meeting was held.

56. SPLA-IO remained present in the Abu Qussa/Wunkur team site general area. As a result, South Sudan national monitors could not deploy because of security

concerns. Armed clashes between factions of SPLA-IO forces were reported between 4 and 5 July and 17 and 18 July, which led to an influx of internally displaced persons to the team site, where they remained for some weeks, with humanitarian assistance provided by UNISFA/Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism only, as the area was inaccessible to humanitarian actors.

57. From 31 May to 2 June, a Joint Security Committee, led by the Chief of Military Intelligence of the South Sudan People's Defence Forces and the Chief of the Military Intelligence Authority of the Sudan Armed Forces, visited several border crossing corridors to investigate the free movement of goods and persons across their common border. The Meiram-Aweil and Kosti-Renk River corridors were ready for official opening while the infrastructure and technical arrangements were being organized. There were no agreements on the Bentiu-Higlig and Kosti-Renk corridors, and the Joint Security Committee referred the matter to the two presidencies.

58. The Sudan and South Sudan both maintained a police presence at Tishwin within the Safe Demilitarized Border Zone.

59. There was no progress on facilitating a detailed workplan and discussions within the framework of the signed agreements for the border demarcation. On his visits to Juba from 12 to 16 July and to Khartoum from 31 July to 4 August, the acting Head of Mission and Force Commander discussed priorities for the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism, including reoperationalization of the Mechanism's Sector 1, deployment of South Sudanese national monitors at team site 22 in Abu Qussa/Wunkur and the status of team site 21 at Tishwin. Interlocutors in Juba assured the acting Head of Mission and Force Commander of their commitment to facilitating the reoperationalization of Sector 1, as well as the deployment of South Sudanese national monitors to Abu Qussa/Wunkur.

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

60. As at 2 September, the number of civilian staff stood at 158 international staff, including 25 United Nations Volunteers and 84 national staff, against an authorized total of 176 international staff and 93 national staff. Women accounted for 21 per cent of the civilian component.

61. In line with the directive of the Secretary-General and guided by the gender implementation plan and the workplan for 2021–2023 focused on increasing the recruitment and retention of female staff, UNISFA remained committed to its efforts to increase the number of women serving at the Mission.

62. As at 28 September, UNISFA had 2,567 military personnel, comprising 181 women and 2,386 men (2,354 troops, 101 staff officers and 112 military observers). Included in the figures, the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism accounted for 526 personnel, comprising 29 women and 497 men (491 troops, 12 staff officers and 23 military observers). Women represented 7 per cent of all military personnel.

63. The police component strength stood at 50 officers, including 18 women and 32 men, against a total of 640 police personnel, as authorized under Security Council resolution [2469 \(2019\)](#) (148 individual police officers and 492 formed police unit personnel).

64. The Government of the Sudan issued 923 visas for UNISFA personnel. Currently, 91 visas remain pending: 3 for civilian staff, 22 for military personnel, 62 for contractors, 3 for United Nations police and 1 for a consultant.

65. UNISFA initiated several technology-inspired initiatives that are in line with the United Nations data strategy. To accelerate this, the Mission invested in providing information and analytics in all its business units to enhance its ability to provide data-informed decision-making.

66. The Secretariat led a transition task force consisting of UNISFA and other relevant entities. The aim was to ensure coordinated planning towards implementation of the recommendations of the Secretary-General of September 2021 for a more agile and mobile UNISFA force and to oversee the reconfiguration of the UNISFA military component. This effort required many infrastructure activities, establishment of an airbridge at El Obeid, the Sudan, the establishment of transit arrangements in Entebbe, Uganda, for deployments and rotations, as well as focused coordination of internal and external movements. The task force has been wound up and the remaining coordination activities handed over to the Mission Support Centre.

67. UNISFA company operating bases remained deployed at Diffra, Goli and Todach (Sector North), Dokura/Rumajak, Noong and Abyei (Sector Centre), Highway (Sector Centre) and Marial Achak, Athony, Banton, Tejalei and Agok (Sector South). The dry season deployment plan is being finalized in order to increase Force mobility and establish temporary operating bases at Um Khariet (Sector North), Dungoup (Sector Centre) and Leu and Rumamier (Sector South). The Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism headquarters in Kadugli, the Sudan, currently has two team sites, in Tishwin and Abu Qussa/Wunkur.

68. Infrastructure works continued along the two tracks of raising existing infrastructure to acceptable standards to ensure that there is no slowdown in deployments and the roll-out of the camp improvement plan towards exclusively “smart camps”.

69. Shortages of laterite, sand, gravel and other materials have been exacerbated by heavy rains that occurred atypically late in the year. This, in turn, will delay infrastructure and Force mobility works while not affecting core operations, however.

### **Culture of performance**

70. The smart camp global pilot in the Dokura/Rumajak Sector Centre headquarters is largely completed, and a phased handover to the contingent is under way. The smart camp will provide for optimal use of Mission resources, as well as increasing resilience, improving safety, security and personnel well-being and reducing the Mission’s environmental footprint. The camp will be replicated to scale at all UNISFA locations. This will provide UNISFA with a data-rich environment permitting the Mission to have greater control over its fuel use, environmental footprint, critical infrastructure downtime, fire safety, physical security and real-time verification of assets.

71. UNISFA is developing a set of real-world metrics that will affect the agility of operations, as well as automation to collect, collate, curate and report on performance. Changes in performance will be tracked against the measures implemented to improve them. This will initially involve factors driving the performance of the smart camp implementation project and Force mobility and will increase its scope into all high-risk areas identified in the enterprise risk management framework.

### **Response to the coronavirus disease pandemic**

72. To respond to the pandemic, UNISFA has been implementing preventive measures as outlined in a contingency plan and a medical plan drawn up by a dedicated COVID-19 task force. Following two surges in cases in previous reporting

periods, since July, the Mission has been experiencing a third surge, consisting of a low wave of positive cases.

### **Conduct and discipline**

73. There were no allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse during the reporting period. Sensitization and awareness-raising activities were expanded through the training of 95 independent contractors, including 4 women, 7 national monitors and 389 military staff (including 26 women) from troop-contributing countries. They included 16 male and 7 female military officers who were trained as trainers to roll out training sessions on conduct and discipline and prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse. The Conduct and Discipline Team trained the military at its various locations. Induction and refresher training sessions were delivered monthly to 92 civilian, military and United Nations police personnel, including 9 women.

## **V. Financial aspects**

74. By its resolution [2630 \(2022\)](#), the Security Council extended the mandate of UNISFA until 15 November 2022. The General Assembly, through its resolution [76/281](#), appropriated the amount of nearly \$259.7 million for the maintenance of the Force for the period from 1 July 2022 to 30 June 2023. Should the Council decide to extend the mandate of UNISFA beyond 15 November 2022, the cost of maintaining the Mission would be limited to the amounts approved by the Assembly.

75. As at 22 September, unpaid assessed contributions to the special account for UNISFA amounted to \$135.4 million. The total outstanding assessed contributions for all peacekeeping operations as at that date amounted to \$4,765.2 million. Reimbursement of troop costs and of the costs of contingent-owned major equipment and self-sustainment are in the process of being paid for the period up to 30 June 2022, in accordance with the quarterly payment schedule.

## **VI. Observations and recommendations**

76. I am concerned by the ongoing suffering of the people of Abyei, who continue to live in fear of crime and violence, endure floods and face so much related hardship. I call upon the leadership of South Sudan and the Sudan to redouble their efforts towards finding a solution for the final status of Abyei.

77. While I am concerned that the parties were unable to organize a meeting of the Abyei Joint Oversight Committee, I am encouraged by recent interactions between the parties aimed at reconvening one “in the near future”. Abyei Joint Oversight Committee meetings, the last of which was held in late 2017, will provide the parties with a forum through which to address pending issues and agree on a process and timeline for a political settlement on the final status of Abyei that would reflect the improved relations between them.

78. I welcome the convening of a meeting of the Joint Political and Security Mechanism in May and progress made on the opening of border crossing corridors. I urge the parties to implement previous decisions of the Mechanism and encourage the two presidencies to consider matters referred to them during the meeting of the Mechanism on 19 February 2020 and reiterated in subsequent meetings.

79. I call upon the representatives of the Ngok Dinka and Misseriya communities to use the positive engagement demonstrated during the Entebbe peace conference towards improving the lives of their constituents, and to do so while ensuring the meaningful participation of women in the process. It is encouraging that they have

agreed on a set of priorities, which need to be implemented. I also call upon the leaders of the Twic Mayardit Dinka and Ngok Dinka communities to prioritize the implementation of the cessation of hostilities agreement of 4 April 2022. The United Nations, including UNISFA, the United Nations Mission in South Sudan and the Secretariat, stands ready to provide facilitation support, as requested.

80. I call upon the communities of Abyei to seize this opportunity to strengthen their bonds, and I urge them to take part in a seasonal peace conference in the near future to agree on modalities for the next transhumance period. The Abyei joint programme of the United Nations resident coordinators in the Sudan and South Sudan with UNISFA should provide instrumental peacebuilding support towards reconciliation and in the areas of water management, health and livelihoods. The United Nations is committed to addressing the underlying drivers of humanitarian need and fragility.

81. In the area of rule of law, despite my regret that the Abyei Police Service is not yet operational, I welcome the expansion of community protection committees to the entire Abyei Area and the significant increase in their members, including women. I reiterate the need for both parties to participate in a joint integrated planning meeting for the development of a road map strategy for the establishment of the Abyei Police Service. In the same way, I remain concerned that no progress has been made regarding the issuance of visas for the three formed police units and additional individual police officers, as well as regarding the operationalization of the Athony airstrip.

82. With regard to the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism, I am encouraged by the commitment expressed by interlocutors in mid-July to facilitating the reoperationalization of the Mechanism's Sector 1 headquarters in Gok Machar, South Sudan, and its team sites 11 (Safahah/Kiir Adem) and 12 (Sumayah/War Abar), and I reiterate my strong call to South Sudan to raise the awareness of the local populations so as to allow Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism activities there to resume rapidly.

83. I remain concerned by the continued attacks on UNISFA peacekeepers that occurred over the reporting period and remind all parties that violence against peacekeepers may constitute crimes under international law. I am also concerned by repeated restrictions on the freedom of movement of UNISFA. They affected the Mission's ability to fully implement its mandate. Some instances of denial of freedom of movement appear to have been the result of disinformation and misinformation.

84. I wish to thank Ethiopia, South Sudan, the Sudan and the troop-contributing countries for their collaboration on the reconfiguration of the UNISFA military component. I urge all stakeholders to redouble their efforts to enable the remaining movement of personnel and equipment. In this regard, I recommend an extension of the Mission's mandate by one year.

85. I thank the new acting Head of Mission and Force Commander of UNISFA, Major General Benjamin Olufemi Sawyerr, as well as my Special Envoy for the Horn of Africa, Hanna Tetteh, and the African Union, including the African Union High-level Implementation Panel, for their tireless efforts towards improving the lives of the people in the Abyei Area. I also take this opportunity to thank all UNISFA personnel, and that of the United Nations agencies, funds and programmes in Abyei, for their commitment to maintaining peace and security, often under very difficult conditions.

