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Situation in Abyei

Report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to paragraph 33 of Security Council resolution [2550 \(2020\)](#), in which the Council requested to be informed of progress in implementing the mandate of the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA). It covers the period since the issuance of my previous report ([S/2020/1019](#)), from 16 October 2020 to 15 April 2021. The report provides updates on, inter alia, political developments and intercommunal dynamics, the security context, the humanitarian situation and UNISFA assistance to the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism and on interactions with the Governments of the Sudan and South Sudan in relation to the implementation of the mission's mandate.

II. Abyei

Political developments

2. The reporting period was marked by a continued rapprochement between the Sudan and South Sudan. On 23 November 2020, the Minister for East African Affairs of South Sudan, Deng Alor, met in Khartoum with Hassan Sheikh Idris Qadi, a member of the Transitional Sovereign Council, to discuss the implementation of the Juba Peace Agreement of 3 October 2020, as well as the question of Abyei. On 25 February 2021, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Sudan, Mariam al-Sadiq al-Mahdi, chose to go to Juba as her first visit upon assuming her duties in the new cabinet of the Government of the Sudan. However, the détente has yet to positively impact the situation in Abyei.

3. Despite logistical constraints linked to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, UNISFA has remained fully engaged with the Governments of both the Sudan and South Sudan. The acting Head of Mission/Force Commander visited Khartoum to take part in the Joint Political and Security Mechanism meeting hosted by the Government of the Sudan on 28 and 29 October 2020. The meeting was the first since the meeting hosted by the Government of South Sudan in February 2020, during which a number of important matters were agreed upon, including the establishment of checkpoints in Abyei, the introduction of search and seize operations, the deployment of joint military observer teams throughout the Abyei



Area, the need for regular meetings of the Joint Political and Security Mechanism and of the Abyei Joint Oversight Committee and the need for progress on Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism and border-related benchmarks (see Security Council resolution 2550 (2020), para. 3). During the meeting, the parties recommended that “the Abyei Joint Oversight Committee resumes regular meetings within two weeks ... and urge it to hold at least one session before the next Joint Political and Security Mechanism meeting slated for 15 January 2021”. The African Union Peace and Security Council welcomed the outcomes of the meeting and called for the Facilitator of the Committee to initiate consultations with the Governments of the Sudan and South Sudan with a view to agreeing on modalities for the reconvening of the Committee, as soon as possible. The African Union Peace and Security Council held a meeting on the situation in Abyei on 24 November 2020, and subsequently issued a communiqué calling for community reconciliation following the tensions after the killing of Chief Kuol Deng Kuol of the Ngok Dinka.

4. The acting Head of Mission returned to Khartoum again in late 2020 and early 2021, when he had the opportunity to discuss with senior officials ways to move the Abyei peace process forward, including through support for inter-community peace talks. The appointment of a civilian Deputy Head of Mission was also discussed, but little progress was made in that regard, or regarding the operationalization of the Athony airstrip and the issuance of visas for the three formed police units and the full complement of individual police officers.

5. On 23 November 2020, the acting Head of Mission, together with the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Horn of Africa, Parfait Onanga-Anyanga, briefed the African Union Peace and Security Council on the situation in Abyei. The former highlighted the need for enhanced engagement at the political level on the question of Abyei as a way to mitigate rising inter-community tensions in the area.

6. On 28 March 2021, the Khartoum-appointed Chief Administrator arrived in Diffra. The mission interacted with him on 31 March and encouraged his own interaction and coordination with the Juba-appointed Chief Administrator based in Abyei town.

Conflict dynamics and the security situation

7. The general security situation in the Abyei Area has been relatively calm, yet tense and unpredictable. The most prevalent threats to security were shooting incidents, the increased presence of unidentified armed groups, armed attacks on civilians and violent confrontations between the Misseriya and Ngok Dinka communities at the Amiet common market. The denial of access to a World Food Programme (WFP) convoy and UNISFA contractor vehicles in Goli and Todach, in Sector North, as well as general criminality, were also among the security challenges that the mission had to face. Of a total of 47 incidents recorded, 23 were attacks on civilians resulting in fatalities and serious injuries. The main supply route between Abyei town and Goli, the Amiet common market and its surrounding villages have been identified as the most volatile areas within the UNISFA area of responsibility, despite regular patrols and constant presence along the route by UNISFA troops. During the reporting period, a total of five civilians were killed in gunfire or stabbing incidents by unidentified armed elements, while 11 persons were severely injured in attacks, also by unidentified armed elements, along the main supply route, in the vicinity of the Amiet common market and the surrounding areas.

8. On 2 December 2020, a UNISFA patrol was the target of an armed attack near Doungab in Sector South. The troops returned fire and pursued the attackers, who managed to escape. No casualties were reported. On 8 December, young Misseriya in Todach demonstrated against UNISFA and the UNISFA contractor by blocking the

entrance to the Todach company operating base in Sector North. The protesters were demanding “fair opportunities” for the recruitment of local workers. After several hours of negotiations, the commander of the base was able to convince the young people to vacate the area. Similarly, on 31 December, the UNISFA Sector South Battalion commander and some of his officers were confronted by hostile young people in Athony village, accusing UNISFA of failing to protect their community at the Amiet common market. The commander held a meeting with the elders of the community and with youth leaders, reassuring them of the commitment of UNISFA to protect the entire population in the Abyei Area, without discrimination, and urging them to remain calm.

9. In another development, from 18 to 21 December 2020, 49 WFP trucks with humanitarian supplies en route from the north towards Abyei town were denied access by a Misseriya crowd at Dari village. The group demanded 50 per cent of the load as a precondition for granting passage to the south. After two days of negotiations, it was decided that the humanitarian convoy would return to Khartoum. In the process, some 15 trucks were looted. The Governments of the Sudan and South Sudan had been informed and had authorized the convoy’s movement.

10. There was a violent clash between the Misseriya and Ngok Dinka communities on 30 December 2020 at the Amiet common market, stemming from heightened tensions in the aftermath of an inconclusive traditional leaders’ meeting in mid-December. During the clash, several shops and properties were destroyed, with five Dinka and seven Misseriya sustaining injuries. On 15 February 2021, three armed men, suspected to be Dinka, opened fire on a civilian vehicle about 4 km outside of Abyei town along the Abyei-Banton road. Six civilians were severely injured in the attack and taken to the UNISFA level II hospital for treatment. The motive and identity of the assailants were uncertain, and investigations by the local authorities are ongoing. On 26 November 2020, UNISFA troops apprehended a suspected armed robber at Leu area, Sector South, and handed him over to the community protection committee. On 1 January 2021, seven Misseriya men were apprehended at a snap checkpoint near the Amiet common market and handed over to relevant authorities. Their arrest was preceded by a violent clash between the Misseriya and Ngok Dinka communities at the Amiet common market two days earlier. On 20 January, a South Sudan People’s Defence Forces team of eight armed members of the Special Forces entered the Abyei Area and proceeded north towards Athony village, before turning back south and leaving the Area. The Juba-appointed Chief Administrator of Abyei explained to UNISFA that the incident was a mistake and promised that such acts would not be repeated. On 2 February, two armed Dinka men were apprehended by a UNISFA patrol team in Mijak area, Sector South. On 9 February, UNISFA foiled an armed robbery incident along the main supply route near Goli and apprehended an armed Misseriya man. During the reporting period, a total of 1 hand grenade, 4 knives, 4 AK-47 assault rifles, 1 RPG-7 launcher, 1 rocket and 97 rounds of small arms ammunition were confiscated by the Force.

11. On 2 February 2021, during pre-flight inspection, a stone was discovered wedged in the left wing aileron of the United Nations B-1900 aircraft. In the ensuing investigation, it was concluded that it was an act of sabotage. To date, no suspect has been apprehended. On 9 February, a multirole logistics unit convoy consisting of 11 Ural trucks travelling from Ethiopia to Abyei was denied passage by a Sudanese Armed Forces unit affiliated with 22nd Division at a checkpoint in Kar’ama. They were authorized to resume their movements the following day.

Inter-community dialogue

12. UNISFA engaged extensively with both the Misseriya and Ngok Dinka communities to facilitate a resumption of the intercommunity grassroots peace process, which had been stalled since the violent incidents at Nainai and Kolom in January 2020. During the preceding dry season, UNISFA had facilitated two meetings of the traditional leaders at Diffra, Sector North, in March and April 2020, respectively. These were inconclusive and the mission in subsequent months continued to call for intercommunity dialogue, to ensure a peaceful migration cycle.

13. After considerable engagement by UNISFA with both communities in the last quarter of 2020, a third traditional leaders' meeting was held at Todach, Sector North, on 16 and 17 December 2020. However, the delegations, each led by their paramount chiefs, failed to reach an agreement. One of the main disagreements revolved around the use of the term "Ajaira". The Misseriya object to the term in the Abyei dialogue context, while the Ngok Dinka insist on calling the Misseriya "Ajaira", considering it more relevant, as only the "Ajaira" clan of the Misseriya uses Abyei for its transhumance. Despite the efforts of UNISFA and the peacebuilding working group, pre-migration conferences have not yet been held.

14. UNISFA continued to advocate for the two communities to recommit to the peace process. As part of this, UNISFA, with the support of the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) and the non-governmental organization (NGO) Concordis International, facilitated the attendance of 11 Misseriya and 11 Ngok Dinka observers at a peace conference between the Dinka Malual and Misseriya of Western Kordofan, held in Aweil, Northern Bahr el-Ghazal State, South Sudan, from 1 to 4 February 2021. On 5 February, the Ngok Dinka and Misseriya requested the peace coordinator of Northern Bahr el-Ghazal State to act as a facilitator for a week-long peace conference on Abyei to be conducted in Aweil from 22 February. At the conference, the sides again failed to sign an agreement because of their opposing views on the term "Ajaira". They did however agree to reconvene a restructured Joint Community Peace Committee and to engage in localized pre-migration meetings in the three transhumance corridors.

Law and order

15. Despite the absence of the Abyei Police Service and constraints stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic, UNISFA continued to support the joint protection committee and the community protection committees through daily co-locations, patrols and mentorship. Efforts were made to enhance the capacity of local traditional institutions and conflict-resolution mechanisms.

16. A total of 1,681 general crimes were recorded during the reporting period, compared with 759 during the previous reporting period. United Nations police conducted a total of 143 crime awareness-related activities, including meetings with community protection committees and campaigns against drug abuse, on environmental awareness and fire outbreak prevention, against sexual and gender-based violence and on gender awareness, in schools, villages and marketplaces. In the light of the increase in criminality in Abyei and the absence of an Abyei police service, United Nations police conducted 76 crime prevention and reduction awareness campaigns and road safety campaigns and 68 sexual and gender-based violence awareness campaigns to minimize abuse of the rights of women and children. The campaigns sensitized community members on issues of sexual and gender-based violence, sexual exploitation and abuse, domestic violence, child marriage, forced marriage and child abuse, and 14 sexual and gender-based violence cases were reported. United Nations police also conducted conflict resolution training for female community protection committee members, enhancing their ability to

prevent sexual and gender-based violence in their communities. Corrections experts serving with United Nations police conducted 68 visits to the three detention facilities in Abyei, Agok and the Amiet common market with members of the community protection committees and the joint protection committee, advising and mentoring on best practices in the management of detention centres.

17. United Nations police conducted 1,448 community interactive patrols to mobilize members of the public to actively participate in peacebuilding initiatives. United Nations police also conducted 559 joint patrols, 623 community activities, including confidence-building mechanisms, 409 independent security observation patrols and 8 air reconnaissance patrols in collaboration with the military observers and national monitors from both the Sudan and South Sudan.

18. United Nations police trained 190 members of community protection committees (124 male and 66 female) through a basic policing refresher course to strengthen their capacities and assist in maintaining law and order and respect for human rights. United Nations police continued to mentor the community protection committees and the joint protection committee members on how to handle detainees. With the COVID-19 outbreak, traditional leaders were encouraged to decongest detention centres as a preventive measure. United Nations police conducted 21 sensitization events on COVID-19 each week.

19. United Nations police strength stands at 47 officers – 31 male (66 per cent) and 16 female (34 per cent). Entry visas to the Sudan were granted to 31 officers in December 2020 and January 2021, increasing the number from 16 to 47 officers. Visas for 77 individual police officers, requested in a note verbale to Khartoum, are awaiting approval. The ceiling for individual police officers, as authorized by the Security Council in resolution [2550 \(2020\)](#), is 148.

20. The deployment of the Police Commissioner is still pending visa approval from the Government of the Sudan. A note verbale was sent to the relevant authorities in Khartoum on 20 October 2020 to request the necessary entry visa and work permit for her deployment.

21. Concerning the three authorized formed police units, the process of deployment of the units from China and the United Republic of Tanzania was interrupted, mainly owing to the non-issuance of entry visas for the delegation from the United Republic of Tanzania and of travel permits to visit Abyei for the delegation from China. The deployment of the advance party of the Ethiopian formed police unit is subject to visa approval and the clearances for contingent-owned equipment.

Humanitarian situation and recovery activities

22. The Abyei Area continues to face significant humanitarian and recovery challenges, coupled with high rates of inflation in the Sudan and South Sudan. People's living conditions are also impacted by very limited government-led services and inadequate access to basic public health, water sanitation and hygiene (WASH), education and protection services, including protection against sexual and gender-based violence and child protection. In 2019, the area was severely impacted by floods and in 2020 and 2021 by drought, highlighting the high reliance on climate-sensitive natural resources, in particular on a rain-fed subsistence agriculture. The COVID-19 pandemic added a further burden, significantly impacting the existing humanitarian operations, as well as peace and stability, and resilience-building activities. On 8 February 2021, the Amiet common market, comprising more than 1,000 shops and stalls and 360 living shelters, was partially destroyed by a fire, resulting in a significant economic loss. This led to a temporary displacement of market traders and residents south to Abyei town and north to Goli village. The humanitarian and development agencies worked closely with the local population concerned, to address

the immediate and long-term needs of the affected population. A fire that broke out at the Amiet market on 1 April 2021 destroyed an additional number of shops and structures. The beginning of the dry season, however, enabled road rehabilitation work to commence throughout the area, and the main roads and most of the feeder roads are now operational.

23. The Abyei town internally displaced persons sites that hosted approximately 4,000 people who had been displaced from Kolom, Noong, Amiet and Dokura villages in the aftermath of the Nainai-Kolom incidents of January 2020 were closed by early February 2021, following the return of most internally displaced persons to their places of origin. A small group of internally displaced persons was integrated in the host community.

24. Despite all these challenges, including COVID-19, the United Nations agencies, funds and programmes, in coordination with NGOs and the local authorities and communities, continued to provide humanitarian and recovery assistance to 220,000 vulnerable people within the area, including 100,000 people from the Ngok Dinka community, 15,000 internally displaced persons from the Ngok Dinka community in southern Abyei and Abyei town, 9,000 people displaced from the neighbouring states in South Sudan, 42,000 people from the Misseriya community, 7,000 other South Sudanese (mainly Nuer), 41,000 seasonal Misseriya pastoralists and 6,000 Fallata nomads who entered the area in early October 2020 and are expected to leave in June 2021.

25. More than 115,000 vulnerable people benefited from various food assistance-related interventions, including the supplementary feeding programme in the central and southern sectors of Abyei. Efforts to support community livelihood activities continued during the reporting period, and more than 100,000 livestock were vaccinated and 20,000 livestock treated, benefiting more than 11,000 households. In coordination with the local authorities and communities, training, infrastructures and equipment in basic animal health provision services, the handling and processing of fish, post-harvest handling, the establishment of local fruit tree nurseries, vegetable production and small business skills for businesswomen were provided. Virtual meetings on the impact of climate change and early warning for floods in Abyei were held. Other key market-oriented livelihood initiatives included the provision of assorted vegetable seeds, beekeeping equipment, start-up kits for bakeries and restaurants, vocational training tools, fishing kits and cash-for-work activities.

26. A total of 18 primary and two secondary health-care facilities throughout the Abyei Area remained operational. Humanitarian organizations provided routine immunizations and essential medicines, benefiting more than 200,000 people during the reporting period. Mobile health clinics provided primary health services to the communities in remote areas, including through the provision of two ambulances supporting the northern areas. The Ameth-Bek referral hospital in Abyei town was rehabilitated, provided with equipment and inaugurated on 29 October 2020. The facility has since largely been used for COVID-19 related activities. Humanitarian actors also rehabilitated two clinics in the central and northern parts of the Abyei Area. The Abyei community, humanitarian organizations and UNISFA coordinated their COVID-19 activities in the Abyei Area. The key activities included COVID-19 hygiene awareness campaigns, temperature checks at entry points and sensitization, the production and distribution of 10,000 face masks, the maintenance of three isolation centres and polymerase chain reaction testing. Nutrition screening and support for patients with moderate and acute malnutrition reached a monthly average of 10,000 children under five years of age, as well as pregnant and lactating women in the Abyei Area. Awareness-raising on COVID-19 hygiene measures and capacity-building activities were conducted, including on-the-job training for clinical staff and health awareness sessions.

27. A total of 7 new hand pumps and boreholes were drilled, 10 hand pumps were rehabilitated and a new water yard in the Amiet common market was made operational, benefiting 10,000 people throughout the Area. Other activities included the construction of toilet blocks in Abyei town and Goli and the construction of the Todach community meeting hall. Two cash-for-work cleaning campaigns in Abyei town were organized. Some targeted communities were also provided with hygiene kits.

28. Owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, schools operated with limited activities during the reporting period. The food-for-education programme supported meals for 22,000 schoolchildren in 30 primary and secondary schools in southern and central Abyei. In response to the pandemic, a key education activity was the broadcast on Abyei FM Radio of recorded lessons. The learners received an additional 344 handset radios to access their lessons. Other major activities included the construction and establishment of child-friendly spaces in Diffra and central Abyei and the rehabilitation of the Luise school kitchen in Abyei town. The rollout of the functional adult literacy programme continued. It is run in eight facilities with a total of 500 beneficiaries enrolled, of whom 460 are female.

29. Protection, in particular of children, and against gender-based violence, remained the key challenge because of limited resources. In February 2021, the humanitarian community reactivated the Global Protection Cluster and its sexual and gender-based violence, child protection and mine action subclusters to address the protection needs in a more coordinated manner jointly with the community and UNISFA.

30. In consultation with local authorities, traditional leaders, United Nations agencies, funds and programmes and NGOs, UNISFA completed the selection of 17 quick-impact projects for the 2020/21 period. Projects in northern Abyei all address water issues, while projects in southern Abyei are related to health, livelihood, rule of law and social development. Procurement and transportation of construction material to Abyei is under way, and construction will start soon.

Women and peace and security

31. UNISFA continued its efforts to promote women's participation in community decision-making and protect women and girls from sexual and gender-based violence. The efforts translated into the participation of women in local peace processes and broadened civic space for women to share their views. In positive developments, local leaders in Abyei demonstrated their commitment to promote women's participation and protect their rights. During the reporting period, the local administration in Southern Abyei appointed a Gender Adviser. On 19 November 2020, during a meeting with UNISFA, the Sudan Abyei Joint Oversight Committee representatives in Diffra noted their intention to appoint a gender focal point to follow up on gender issues in the Misseriya community. Traditional leaders and local administrators also continued to publicly commit to the protection of women's rights and the promotion of their participation at different levels of community decision-making.

32. A positive outcome was the participation of two women from the Misseriya community and three from the Ngok Dinka community in the Aweil peace dialogue held from 22 to 26 February 2021, as compared with a single female (Misseriya) participant at the preceding Aweil conference of 1–4 February 2021, at which she called on the Abyei traditional leaders to promote women's participation in local peace dialogues. At the second Aweil forum, the five women took a united stand despite community divides to denounce conflict and call for peace, pledging their readiness to support their male counterparts to find a peaceful solution to the conflict between the two communities.

33. Ngok Dinka local authorities demonstrated their support for women's needs and priorities, as well as protection for their rights, when they relocated the Mul Mul market of Abyei town to a non-residential part of the Nyinkuac area on 31 January 2021. The move was preceded by women's advocacy to relocate the market owing to cases of sexual violence in the vicinity of the market. It is noteworthy that previous attempts at relocation had not materialized.

34. To strengthen women's agency in the Misseriya community, UNISFA conducted seven consultations with traditional leaders and women on the primacy of women's participation in community decision-making in Al Radaya, Diffra, Goli and Makines on 23 March and in al-Askar, Farouk and Um Khaer on 24 March. In a follow-up workshop held on 28 March with traditional leaders drawn from the seven localities, the male traditional leaders committed to promote women's participation and expressed their appreciation to UNISFA for efforts to strengthen women's agency in the Misseriya community.

35. UNISFA continued to support community members and their leaders in preventing and responding to sexual and gender-based violence through advocacy, engagement with local leaders, awareness-raising activities, capacity development and training on prevention. Fifty-two awareness campaigns on sexual and gender-based violence, women's and children's rights and HIV and COVID-19 were conducted across Abyei. As part of the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence, UNISFA undertook four training workshops on sexual and gender-based violence and human rights and on the Sudan and South Sudan legal frameworks relevant to the protection of women and children's rights. The training targeted community members working on prevention and response to sexual and gender-based violence. Two training courses were conducted on 16 and 17 November and on 8 December 2020, respectively, for the Ngok Dinka community, and two others were conducted on 2 and 3 December and on 6 and 7 December for the Misseriya community.

36. UNISFA also supported the Abyei Women Association in the Ngok Dinka community in launching the 16 Days of Activism through an event that highlighted the impact of early and forced marriages on children by means of drama and poems by schoolchildren. A radio awareness campaign which included broadcasting of pre-recorded messages by prominent community members, children's debates on sexual and gender-based violence and a radio quiz in which UNISFA awarded prizes were conducted by UNISFA in collaboration with the International Organization for Migration (IOM). One thousand solar-powered radios were distributed to rural women and select traditional leaders from both communities to promote their access to information and news. UNISFA facilitated the appointment of community sexual and gender-based violence focal points in four locations (Agok, Amiet, Banton and Noong).

37. UNISFA, in collaboration with IOM and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), conducted community outreach to commemorate International Women's Day. Activities were conducted in seven locations across Abyei for both communities. The activities included a radio talk show on 7 March by local women on their roles and challenges that they face in fighting COVID-19. Commemoration events were conducted in Abyei town, Agok, Amiet, Banton, Diffra, Noong and Tejalei from 8 to 10 March.

Operations of the Mine Action Service

38. The Mine Action Service remained fully deployed to the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism headquarters, sector headquarters and all

active team sites, addressing all requests for support from the mission and enabling 52 ground monitoring Mechanism missions.

39. Twelve items of explosive remnants of war and three anti-tank mines were recovered and subsequently destroyed in controlled demolitions. The Mine Action Service also destroyed 28 weapons and 1,347 rounds of small arms ammunition confiscated by UNISFA troops. In addition, the Service handed over to the Sudan Police Force one item of explosive remnants of war discovered during operations in support of the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism.

40. The Mine Action Service assessed 331,783 m² of land and 674 km of routes in the Abyei Area as safe for movements by UNISFA, the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism, humanitarian actors and the local population. Areas assessed included UNISFA temporary operating bases and patrol routes, in accordance with the dry season deployment plan, two suspected landmine contaminated areas, an old military trench and the establishment of new routes for enhanced Force mobility.

41. The Mine Action Service delivered 227 explosive ordnance risk education sessions that reached 2,402 men, women, boys and girls living in the Abyei Area. Twenty-two sessions on explosive remnants of war awareness were also delivered as part of UNISFA induction training through online and video sessions, enhancing the awareness of 1,061 UNISFA personnel (958 men and 103 women). The majority (88.9 per cent) of explosive ordnance risk education beneficiaries demonstrated an increase in knowledge between safe and unsafe practices.

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

42. The situation in the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism area of responsibility was relatively calm but remained unpredictable during the reporting period. On 16 February 2021, a group from El Leri village, the Sudan, protested against the positioning of team site 22 at Abu Qussa/Wunkur, some 55 km to the south. Two days later, they demanded the removal of the Ethiopian flag from team site 22. On 15 February 2021, a contractor's convoy of 11 trucks conveying construction material to team site 22 was blocked by residents of El Leri village and subsequently taken into the custody of a unit of Sudanese Armed Forces 22nd Division for safekeeping. The convoy was composed of eight trucks carrying quarry stones and gravel, two trucks loaded with cement and another truck carrying fuel. The national monitor from the Sudan gave the assurance that his office was working to resolve the issue, but that it remains pending. On 10 February, the Force Protection Unit from team site 21 (Tishwin) escorting military observers and national monitors to Kadugli camp was denied passage by a Sudanese Armed Forces unit of 22nd Division, some 90 km from Tishwin. The Force Protection Unit was allowed through later in the day.

43. With regard to team site 21 in Tishwin, during the meeting of the Joint Political and Security Mechanism in Khartoum on 28 and 29 October, the parties requested UNISFA to relocate its team site from its current temporary location to a permanent site. Accordingly, the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism requested the national monitors of the Sudanese Armed Forces and the South Sudan People's Defence Forces to carry out reconnaissance of a new location for the team site alongside military observers from the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism. However, the South Sudan People's Defence Forces did not participate in the reconnaissance mission. The Chief of the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism wrote to the Co-chairs of the Joint Political and Security Mechanism urging them to commit to a permanent team site. The situation impacts

greatly on the health and morale of United Nations personnel. The temporary team site will have to be closed during the upcoming rainy season, at a significant budgetary expense.

44. The above notwithstanding, most of the planned ground and aerial monitoring missions were conducted at the various team sites as planned. There were two border demarcation activities by both the Joint Border Commission and the Joint Demarcation Committee within the reporting period. A 14 Mile Area ad hoc Committee meeting was conducted from 16 to 19 November 2020 at Sector 1 headquarters (Gok Machar), in line with the conclusions of the October 2020 meeting of the Joint Political and Security Mechanism.

45. All requested aerial monitoring missions and ground monitoring missions were approved by the Governments of the Sudan and South Sudan in October 2020. Freedom of movement within the Safe Demilitarized Buffer Zone was guaranteed for the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism. The general area of team site 22, Abu Qussa/Wunkur was still under the control of elements of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army-in-Opposition (SPLA-IO), despite the Joint Political and Security Mechanism calling again for the immediate withdrawal of SPLA-IO during its meeting in Khartoum in late October. As a result, South Sudan People's Defence Forces national monitors did not deploy to Abu Qussa/Wunkur within the reporting period.

46. With regard to the seven benchmarks set out in Security Council resolution [2550 \(2020\)](#), progress has been modest. Standing clearance for all air and ground patrols was granted, and occasional challenges were addressed with the support of the national monitors. Regarding the operationalization of team site 22 in Abu Qussa/Wunkur, while the team site is established, it has not yet been operationalized, as South Sudan refuses to deploy national monitors owing to the presence of SPLA-IO in the area.

47. Benchmark 3 required the holding of two Joint Political and Security Mechanism meetings during the reporting period. A Joint Political and Security Mechanism meeting was held in Khartoum on 28 and 29 October 2020, and its decisions were widely disseminated. Regarding the withdrawal of residual troops from the Safe Demilitarized Buffer Zone, UNISFA has not been notified of any such withdrawal by the parties. A 14 Mile Area ad hoc Committee meeting was conducted from 16 to 19 November in Gok Machar. In its report, the Committee recommended that the Chief of Defence Force of the South Sudan People's Defence Forces issue the necessary orders for withdrawal of their Units from within the 14 Mile Area. Since then, there has not been any confirmation from South Sudan of the withdrawal of its elements and equipment.

48. The reopening of border crossing corridors (benchmark 5) has been achieved, including the reopening of the Meiram-Aweil crossing, which was temporarily closed owing to the COVID-19 pandemic. Four of the ten corridors are currently open and functioning: Buram-El Murra, Higlig-Bentiu, Kostu-Renk and Meiram-Aweil. Only the Meiram-Aweil crossing is manned. With regard to the border demarcation (benchmark 6), two meetings of the Joint Demarcation Committee were held, one in Juba from 3 to 9 November 2020 and the other in Khartoum from 12 to 19 November 2020.

49. In accordance with benchmark 7, with the exception of team site 22 (Abu Qussa/Wunkur), the parties have deployed national monitors to participate in Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism operational activities.

IV. Administrative aspects and mission support

50. UNISFA remains one of the most remote mission headquarters in an extremely non-permissive environment with long and difficult supply chains. Force mobility, improving operational resilience, responsibly managing the environmental footprint, sustainable living conditions, real-life support and improved connectivity continue to be the focus of mission support.

51. As at 1 March 2021, the overall female representation in UNISFA stood at 12.7 per cent, with women accounting for 20 per cent in the civilian component, 11.7 per cent in the military component and 34 per cent in the police component. UNISFA routinely reaches out to female candidates for all vacancies to encourage applications. Living conditions, opportunities for promotion, training and welfare concerns are rigorously addressed in order to attract and retain female staff.

52. During the reporting period, the mission completed the repatriation of 295 personnel to maintain the troop ceiling at 3,550, in accordance with Security Council resolution 2469 (2019). As at 1 March 2021, the UNISFA military component, including the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism, stood at 3,419 personnel, comprising 3,016 men and 403 women (3,164 troops, 131 military observers and 124 staff officers). The current troop deployment is below the authorized ceiling of 3,550 by 131 (43 staff officers and military observers, 86 personnel of the Aviation Unit and 2 personnel from contingent units yet to be deployed).

53. The police component strength stood at 47 officers – 31 male and 16 female – against an authorized total of 640 police personnel (148 individual police officers and 492 formed police unit personnel). The low rate of deployment is attributed to the non-issuance of visas to the police personnel by the Government of the Sudan.

54. As at 1 March 2021, the number of civilian staff stood at 156 international staff, 33 United Nations Volunteers and 80 national staff, against an authorized total of 174 international staff, 36 United Nations Volunteers and 88 national staff. The vacancy rate stood at 10.34 per cent for international staff and 6.10 per cent for national staff.

55. The Government of the Sudan issued 237 visas for UNISFA personnel during the reporting period, while 163 visas remained pending (15 for international staff members, 13 for military personnel, 77 for police personnel, 2 for consultants and 56 for other contractors).

56. Company operating bases remained deployed at Farouk, Diffra, Goli and Todach (Sector North); Dokura/Rumajak, Noong and Abyei (Sector Centre); and Marial Achak, Athony, Banton, Tejalei and Agok (Sector South). Temporary operating bases for dry season deployment were established at Dokura 2 (Sector Central); Rumamier and Leu (Sector South); and Um Khariet (North Sector).

57. UNISFA also supports four Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism team sites, namely team site 11 (Kiir Adem/Safahah) and team site 12 (Sumayah/War Abar) in Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism Sector 1 (Gok Machar). In Sector 2 (Kadugli), UNISFA supports team site 21 (Tishwin) and team site 22 in Abu Qussa/Wunkur. However, the mission has suffered from localized opposition at both these latest sites, resulting in contractor trucks and drivers being blocked from accessing team sites 21 and 22.

58. Infrastructure and environmental installations continue to be upgraded at all UNISFA camps. Priority is given to improving old troop accommodation that is no longer fit for purpose, putting in place flood mitigation measures and constructing a

new heliport. The new level II hospital has been completed and preparations are under way to move the medical operation to the hospital.

59. The mission continues to face shortages in laterite, gravel and other materials, and its contractors are often subjected to delayed road clearances from the Sudan, leading to the suspension of essential infrastructure works, including those in support of Force mobility.

60. A third fixed-wing long-term air charter is being sourced by United Nations Headquarters in support of medical evacuations, passenger operations and cargo on the northern route to Khartoum (see [S/2020/308](#), para. 46). Following the two military helicopter accidents in February and May 2019 and the subsequent suspension of their operations by Headquarters and repatriation of the personnel, the mission continues to operate with civilian helicopters only. However, the redeployment from the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID) to Abyei of two Chinese helicopters and associated personnel under letter of assist is at an advanced stage, awaiting final clearance from the Government of the Sudan.

Culture of performance

61. UNISFA is the pilot mission for the smart camp initiative, having been piloting its enabling Internet of things platform and the field remote infrastructure monitoring system. UNISFA has already piloted the installation of smart meters for the consumption of power and water as well as alert systems for critical infrastructure, such as wastewater treatment and power generation plant. The success of the original pilot has led to a significant uptake in field remote infrastructure monitoring system among field operations globally. The current pilot builds on this experience to develop truly smart camps. To that end, UNISFA is finalizing six proofs of concept in the following areas: (a) automation of reporting – real time verification of assets for management and financial reporting; (b) automation of reporting – environment parameters for power and water usage, as well as solid waste management, into the mission-wide environmental action plan; (c) predictive analysis – automated alerts predicting failure of critical infrastructure such as generators and wastewater treatment plant; (d) automation of function – refuelling of generators and refilling of main feeder tanks; (e) automation of function – irrigation using recycled wastewater, which improves the survival rate of saplings for carbon offset and ensures that the oxidation pond is depleted before the wet season; and (f) monitoring and metering of well-water abstraction.

62. All the smart camp functions will be fully rolled out at one military camp near the Abyei headquarters in the coming months. The collection, collation and curation of the data, as well as the installation methodology, will be optimized and documented as a model for all camps.

63. Performance of contractors is closely monitored for productivity and quality using data from the UNISFA call centre and quality management application. This is in turn used to manage the performance of the staff in these supervisory roles. Managers are increasing their use of productivity data from various systems, including Umoja, to devise workplans and improve performance.

COVID-19 response

64. The UNISFA COVID-19 task force has charted a contingency plan and a medical plan to respond to the pandemic. There had been 198 cases of COVID-19 reported in the local community, as at March 2021, based on the polymerase chain reaction test, with 10 confirmed deaths. From the beginning of 2021 to 9 April, UNISFA had 79 positive cases, which were mostly mild and asymptomatic. The outbreak was confined to UNISFA headquarters in Abyei. Of the 79 cases that tested

positive, 16 were still active, of which 5 were uniformed personnel and 11 civilian personnel (international staff, international contractors and national staff). Since the beginning of 2021, there have been two cases of contingent personnel testing positive for COVID-19. All necessary infection prevention and control measures were in place, and maximum efforts have been exerted to ensure that all staff comply with the use of the personal infection preventive measures. All United Nations Headquarters guidelines regarding the COVID-19 outbreak measures in the field missions are fully adhered to, and the mission is obtaining all available support and guidance in controlling this moderate outbreak. The rotation of troop-contributing country personnel proceeded seamlessly. The quarantine facility, with 220 beds, where incoming troops are quarantined before being dispatched to their locations, is contributing towards infection prevention, control and monitoring. To monitor compliance with COVID-19 measures and guidelines, the task force has entrusted its subcommittee on compliance to conduct checks at all mission camps, company operating bases and team sites. The findings are presented to the task force and subsequently submitted to the mission leadership for decision-making. The mission has circulated compliance measures using posters, news briefs and broadcasts to enhance the awareness of personnel and inform them of possible disciplinary actions and other consequences that they may face in case of non-compliance. Inter-office memorandums have been used to emphasize the significance of compliance with the infection prevention and control measures against the spread of COVID-19 and to point out the consequences of non-compliance. In late 2020, UNISFA signed a memorandum of understanding to support local hospitals in managing the pandemic.

65. UNISFA acquired ventilators and personal protective equipment through the global systems contract of the Global Service Centre. As an interim measure, whenever the mission encountered supply chain challenges, it procured personal protective equipment on local markets in Khartoum and Entebbe, Uganda. Currently, the mission has an adequate stockpile of all components of personal protective equipment. The task force has a subcommittee on supply that holds weekly stock monitoring meetings to discuss stock levels and reorder and plan the distribution of the equipment to UNISFA personnel. Given the mission's limited medical capabilities, supportive medical care can be provided to patients with mild and moderate cases of COVID-19 only. As at the beginning of 2021, the mission had established a 16-bed capacity isolation unit which is equipped to monitor and manage all mild and moderate infection cases. There is no level III intensive care facility within the mission or in the local community, and there is therefore no capability to handle severe and critical cases. All such cases, especially those with underlying comorbidities, are evacuated to specialized designated centres in Addis Ababa or Nairobi. The mission established COVID-19 polymerase chain reaction testing capability in October 2020. The laboratory has since been accredited by the Government of the Sudan, and the test certificates are valid and acceptable for travel to the countries within the region. From the beginning of the pandemic, the mission counselling unit has provided input for the contingency plan on ways to address the psychosocial aspects of the pandemic. UNISFA personnel who were outside the mission and not able to return are now able to do so, as commercial airports in the region are now fully operational.

66. Owing to the remoteness of the mission and the non-permissive operational environment, UNISFA faces many challenges that affect the timely provision of effective medical care to both COVID-19 and non-COVID-19 patients. There is no airport in Abyei for fixed-wing aircraft that could be used for urgent medical and casualty evacuation. The lack of night flying capability can add several hours of delay in life-threatening emergencies. No higher-level medical facilities with level III intensive care capability are available nearby to handle emergencies. The nearest such facilities are in Khartoum, Nairobi, Addis Ababa and Kampala, with a flight time of

more than five hours during daylight. Flight clearances must be secured from the relevant Governments, and the mission has experienced several delays in obtaining clearance for medical evacuation flights, as well as normal passenger and cargo flights with medical supplies. Furthermore, the World Health Organization is not represented in the mission area. Logistics and customs clearance procedures are difficult and lengthy. The mission is dependent on the Sudan, South Sudan or Uganda for clearance of goods and supplies. The restriction on air and surface transport is affecting the mission's supply chain and operations, as well as the movement of personnel within the area of operations. The lack of diagnostic testing capability for the community, in particular the lack of polymerase chain reaction and diagnostic testing equipment, makes it difficult to realistically assess the impact of the pandemic in the Abyei community.

67. The mission's Conduct and Discipline Unit continued to highlight the importance of zero tolerance for sexual misconduct. The mission has recorded one allegation of sexual exploitation during the reporting period. UNISFA continues to remind all staff members of the critical need to maintain the highest standards of integrity, professionalism and respect for diversity in the face of the current challenges.

68. The Strategic Communication and Public Information Office focused on sensitizing staff and members of the Abyei communities with regard to observing hygiene and other mitigating measures.

V. Financial aspects

69. By its resolution [2550 \(2020\)](#) of 12 November 2020, the Security Council extended the mandate of UNISFA until 15 May 2021. The General Assembly, by its resolution [74/283](#) of 30 June 2020, appropriated the amount of \$263.8 million for the maintenance of the Force for the period from 1 July 2020 to 30 June 2021. Should the Council decide to extend the mandate of UNISFA beyond 15 March 2021, the cost of maintaining the mission would be limited to the amounts approved by the General Assembly. As at 30 March 2021, unpaid assessed contributions to the special account for UNISFA amounted to \$61.7 million. The total outstanding assessed contributions for all peacekeeping operations as at that date amounted to \$2,723.9 million. Reimbursement of troop costs were made for the period up to 31 December 2020, while reimbursement of the costs of contingent-owned equipment and self-sustainment has been made for the period up to 31 December 2020 in accordance with the quarterly payment schedule.

VI. Observations and recommendations

70. I welcome the continued strengthening of relations between the Sudan and South Sudan, as exemplified by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Sudan, Mariam al-Sadiq al-Mahdi selecting Juba as her first visit upon assuming her duties in the new cabinet of the Government of the Sudan, as well as the engagement between the parties on the final status of Abyei and the demarcation of the border.

71. I am encouraged by steps taken by the two parties to convene and participate in joint bodies related to the management of the border. In particular, I welcome the holding of a meeting of the Joint Political and Security Mechanism in Khartoum on 28 and 29 October 2020. I urge the parties to effectively follow up on the agreed written conclusions of the previous and earlier Mechanism meetings, including the decisions deferred to the respective presidencies. Those include not only the issue of protection of the Diffra oil fields, but also the formation of a joint team to investigate

the attacks that occurred in Nainai and Kolom on 19 and 22 January 2020. I am concerned that, in spite of the clear direction expressed by the Mechanism, the parties did not organize a meeting of the Abyei Joint Oversight Committee during the reporting period. The Committee has not convened since November 2017.

72. I am also concerned that no progress has been made regarding the operationalization of the Athony airstrip, the deployment of a civilian Deputy Head of Mission and the issuance of outstanding visas for the three formed police units and 148 (the authorized ceiling) individual police officers. I would also urge the Sudanese and South Sudanese authorities to permit the deployment of human rights expertise and to strengthen local capacities to assist with management of law and order, ensure the humane and dignified treatment of suspects and other detainees and facilitate accountability for serious violations.

73. The rapprochement between the parties has yet to be felt in Abyei, where the relations between the Misseriya and Ngok Dinka communities remain tense. In this connection, I am encouraged that both communities took part in a peace conference in February 2021, in Aweil, South Sudan, a location they both agreed on. Although the communities did not sign an agreement as the outcome of the conference, they did express commitment to further engage with each other to ensure a peaceful transhumance. To further inter-community dialogue, I call for enhanced engagement between the parties in the local peace process, including on the issue of the grazing entitlements of the pastoralists and other issues of mutual concern. I also encourage the continuation of progress in the inclusion of women in local peace dialogues.

74. I welcome the communiqué adopted by the Peace and Security Council of the African Union at its 966th meeting, held on 24 November 2020, on the situation in Abyei. In this connection, I count on the commitment of the African Union to enhance its efforts to promote a political mediation, including through possible support to the parties in resuming the meetings of the Abyei Joint Oversight Committee, and wish to reiterate that the United Nations stands ready to support the organization of such meetings. I further echo the request of the African Union Peace and Security Council, in paragraph 11 of the communiqué, that “the African Union Commission and the African Union High-level Implementation Panel ... develop modalities for releasing the report on the killing of Chief Kuol Deng Kuol of the Ngok Dinka, and ... ensure that the report is used as a basis for community reconciliation, sensitization and peace process in Abyei”.

75. I thank my Special Envoy for the Horn of Africa, Parfait Onanga-Anyanga, for facilitating consultations with the Governments of the Sudan, South Sudan and Ethiopia and relevant stakeholders, including the African Union High-level Implementation Panel, to discuss the exit strategy of UNISFA, which should prioritize the safety and security of civilians living in Abyei and take into account the stability of the region. As noted in my letter of 1 April (S/2021/322), the consultations have to date been inconclusive on the future of UNISFA, and no options that would be minimally acceptable to the parties have yet been formulated.

76. UNISFA will continue to support, alongside the humanitarian and other actors, the communities in Abyei handling the COVID-19 pandemic.

77. In conclusion, I wish to extend my gratitude and appreciation to the acting Head of Mission/Force Commander of UNISFA, Major General Kefyalew Amde Tessema, and all UNISFA personnel for their tireless efforts to maintain peace and security, often under very difficult conditions. I also commend my Special Envoy for the Horn of Africa, Mr. Onanga-Anyanga, the African Union, including the African Union High-level Implementation Panel, and the Government of Ethiopia for their active engagement in support of the stabilization of the Abyei Area.

