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The situation in Abyei

Report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to paragraph 34 of Security Council resolution [2469 \(2019\)](#), in which the Council requested to be informed of progress in implementing the mandate of the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA), including a transition strategy that would allow for an eventual exit for the mission. It covers the period since the issuance of my previous report ([S/2019/319](#)), from 16 April to 15 October 2019. The report provides updates on, inter alia, political developments, the security situation, the operating environment, intercommunal dynamics and progress made on the reconfiguration of the mission, as well as recommendations for further revisions. The report also follows up on my letter of 20 September 2019 ([S/2019/768](#)) on progress in the implementation of the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism.

II. Abyei

Political developments

2. Political developments in the Sudan and South Sudan during the reporting period have had an impact on the context in which UNISFA operates in the Abyei Area. In Khartoum, the assumption of power by the Transitional Military Council in April 2019 resulted in the decision of the Peace and Security Council of the African Union on 6 June 2019 to suspend the Sudan from all activities of the African Union, until the formation of a civilian-led Government. Subsequent negotiations with the Forces for Freedom and Change, facilitated by the African Union and Ethiopia, concluded in August 2019. On 5 September, a transitional Government was announced, and the Peace and Security Council decided to lift the suspension of the Sudan from all African Union activities the next day, before the transitional Government was sworn in on 8 September. Meanwhile, in Juba, further delays hindered the implementation of the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan.

3. While both countries undergo their respective transitions, their partnership has remained strong. The President of South Sudan, Salva Kiir, attended the signing ceremony for the political and constitutional declarations in Khartoum on 17 August 2019, marking the beginning of the transitional rule in the Sudan. In addition, and in



support of the peace process in the Sudan, Mr. Kiir hosted talks in Juba in September between the transitional Government in Khartoum and a number of Sudanese armed groups. Meanwhile, the Sudanese authorities, as guarantors of the peace process for South Sudan, facilitated the visit to Juba of Riek Machar on 9 September 2019. The Prime Minister of the Sudan, Abdalla Hamdok, also conducted a visit of significant importance to Juba on 12 September 2019, during which he discussed with Mr. Kiir ways to enhance bilateral relations, including on borders and trade. Mr. Hamdok stated that he wanted to restore relations between people on the border as the first step towards the resolution of the border zone disputes. While the continued rapprochement between the two countries is encouraging, it is too soon to witness its effects on the situation in the Abyei Area.

4. In that regard, little progress was made by the parties on the issues of border demarcation and on the process leading to a final status of Abyei. In particular, the establishment of joint institutions in the Abyei Area, as foreseen in the Agreement of 20 June 2011, remained a challenge, notwithstanding continued advocacy by UNISFA with the parties to convene meetings of the Abyei Joint Oversight Committee. UNISFA also called for the timely resumption of meetings of the Joint Political and Security Mechanism. Owing to the temporary suspension of the Sudan by the Peace and Security Council of the African Union, the African Union High-level Implementation Panel was unable to operate. However, the Joint Political and Security Mechanism met in Juba on 2 October 2019.

5. UNISFA leadership met regularly with officials in Khartoum and Juba and with members of the diplomatic community on security and peace process-related matters, as well as on issues related to the full implementation of the Status of Forces Agreement, including in relation to freedom of movement of UNISFA and the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism, in both Abyei and the Safe Demilitarized Border Zone. In meetings held in Khartoum with government officials, including representatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Defence, and the Sudanese Co-Chair of the Abyei Joint Oversight Committee, on 23 and 24 April, on 15 and 16 July and on 1 September 2019, UNISFA reiterated the need to issue visas for United Nations individual police officers and formed police units to facilitate the deployment of police personnel, in accordance with the provisions of Security Council resolution [2469 \(2019\)](#). Officials in Khartoum maintain that recommendations regarding a proposed increase in the number of police officers and the deployment of three formed police units are not consistent with the original intentions of the parties, as set out in the Agreement of 20 June 2011. The authorities continue to insist upon the need for progress towards the establishment of joint institutions in Abyei, including the Abyei Police Service, as provided for in the Agreement. Similarly, officials in Khartoum have maintained throughout their meetings with UNISFA that the appointment of a civilian Deputy Head of Mission and the enhancement of the civilian component of the mission, mandated in Council resolutions [2445 \(2018\)](#) and [2469 \(2019\)](#), would amount to a departure from the terms of the Agreement of 20 June 2011, in which the establishment of a mission with an interim security-related focus was foreseen. In addition, the request by UNISFA that the Government of the Sudan reconsider its position on its use of the Athony airstrip remained inconclusive. Unfortunately, this continues to undermine the mission's logistical capabilities, including for medical evacuation and troop rotations.

6. In Juba, UNISFA leadership met with officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, including the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs, the South Sudanese Co-Chair of the Abyei Joint Oversight Committee, the head of the Abyei file and representatives of the Ministry of Defence, including the Chief of Defence Staff, on 2 and 3 May, on 17 and 18 July and on 8 August 2019. UNISFA underscored the need to implement all aspects of the Agreement of 20 June 2011 related to the establishment

of joint institutions in Abyei, including, as a first step, participation in the joint integrated planning exercise towards the establishment of the Abyei Police Service. Officials in Juba observed that arriving at a final resolution of the Abyei question was their first priority and that, while the establishment of joint institutions might have been a useful way forward in 2011, the time for such a decision had long since lapsed. In that respect, the Government of South Sudan maintains that, in Security Council resolutions 2445 (2018) and 2469 (2019), as well as in the recommendation of the Secretary-General to the Council on 22 April 2018, the administration in Abyei appointed by the Government and the Misseriya administration in Muglad have been recognized, thereby taking precedence over the Agreement of 20 June 2011.

7. In both Khartoum and Juba, UNISFA leadership underscored the need for both parties to engage at a higher level in achieving a political resolution to outstanding issues, as called for in paragraph 8 of Security Council resolution 2469 (2019), in which the Council requested, inter alia, an update by the African Union High-level Implementation Panel and my Special Envoy for the Horn of Africa on the proposal made by it in 2012 and on the implementation of all of the Abyei Joint Oversight Committee decisions by 15 October 2019. These matters were also discussed in Addis Ababa with my Special Envoy on 24 May 2019 and with the Chief of Staff of the African Union High-level Implementation Panel on 27 May 2019.

Conflict dynamics and security situation

8. The general security situation in Abyei during the reporting period remained fragile, with continued low-scale intercommunal tensions, an increase in criminality and the sporadic presence of armed elements in the Area, including the Safe Demilitarized Border Zone, as reported in my letter of 20 September 2019 (S/2019/768). Widespread poverty, unemployment, insecurity in areas neighbouring the Abyei Area and the absence of functioning governance and rule of law institutions have contributed to a potentially volatile situation. A total of 18 incidents of armed violence were reported, resulting in 10 fatalities, all men, including a UNISFA peacekeeper, with 3 deaths linked to animal rustling and 7 as a result of armed attacks. During this period, 11 cases of shooting, 3 cases of homicide, 468 cases of theft, 210 cases of aggravated assault, 2 murders, 2 cases of rape and 13 cases of animal rustling were reported, resulting in the loss of 1,537 livestock. A total of 18 weapons and 258 rounds of ammunition were also confiscated by UNISFA. However, the security measures put in place by the mission resulted in the largely peaceful reverse migration of the Misseriya through Abyei from May to September 2019.

9. While UNISFA strives to maintain Abyei as a weapon-free area, it is surrounded by armed groups from the Sudan and South Sudan, which are drawn to Abyei by the dearth of administrative structures and local law enforcement mechanisms, as well as by the economic activity in the area, in particular at the Amiet common market. The groups enter Abyei, including through corridors located on the eastern and western edges of Abyei, where UNISFA is not deployed.

10. As a result of the insecurity, some 21 persons, all Dinka, were kidnapped by unknown armed men during the reporting period, including 4 women on 28 May in Sector Centre, and 9 children and 8 men. Two men were found dead. The perpetrators are believed to be Misseriya and Nuer. Meanwhile, 38 cattle belonging to the Misseriya rustled from the Amiet common market on 16 July 2019 were recovered in Chak Chak, South Sudan, on 20 July, and handed back to their owners. On 17 August 2019, Misseriya and Nuer cattle traders on their way to Sector South to buy cattle reported that they were attacked by unknown men, resulting in the killing of 12 cattle traders, with another dying on 19 August 2019 as a result of gunshot injuries. The survivors stated that the attackers were members of the Sudan People's Liberation

Army from South Sudan. However, investigations by UNISFA revealed that the killing occurred outside the Abyei Area, in Mayom, South Sudan.

11. No act of intercommunal violence was recorded during the reporting period. However, one intracommunal fight occurred within the Nuer community at the Amiet common market on 21 June, resulting in three injuries. On 8 September 2019, the Nuer community requested UNISFA to recognize the community as one of those living at the market, and for the mission to include the community in and consult it on vital events and issues affecting the market. While it is difficult to measure with precision the number of Nuer in the market area, it is steadily growing.

12. On 28 June 2019, unknown armed men fired on a UNISFA patrol at Gung Garang, Sector Centre, but no casualties were sustained. In a subsequent attack on 16 July 2019 at the Amiet common market, an armed group, suspected to have come from South Sudan to rustle cattle in the Abyei Area, killed six civilians, including a baby, in an attack. While retreating, the assailants opened fire at a UNISFA observation post, killing one peacekeeper and injuring another. On 19 August 2019, UNISFA troops patrolling at the Dari market, Sector North, were attacked by local youths, who forcefully tried to hijack their vehicle, communication equipment and guns as they were attempting to apprehend a suspect, who managed to escape from the scene. One peacekeeper was injured and a Misseriya man was killed during the ensuing exchange of fire.

13. Despite the incidents mentioned above, insecurity in Abyei has remained generally contained, owing mainly to swift response mechanisms put in place by UNISFA forces. Regular patrols continued to ensure security and protection of civilians in the Area. To avoid future attacks such as the one on 16 July 2019, UNISFA has developed a plan to establish checkpoints on the main road from Agok in the south to Farouk in the north and, where feasible, on lateral routes, with a view to conducting search-and-seize operations to further enforce the weapon-free status of the area and to providing an additional layer of protection for civilians against armed elements. However, owing to troop reduction and delays in increasing the deployment of police personnel, the Force has been unable to deploy to the eastern and western parts of the Abyei Area, while continuing to engage its available resources in securing the areas along the Agok-Diffra corridor. In line with the Agreement of 20 June 2011, UNISFA has also sought to reactivate the Joint Military Observation Committee and joint military observer team concept, which had become defunct after the killing of the Ngok Dinka chief in 2013. The objective is to enable the mission to undertake some joint monitoring and verification missions with national monitors of both the Sudan and South Sudan.

Mine Action Service operations

14. During the reporting period, 12 items of explosive remnants of war were recovered by Mine Action Service teams in the Abyei Area and subsequently destroyed in controlled demolitions. The Service also destroyed 17 AK-47 assault rifles, one rocket-propelled grenade launcher and 432 rounds of small arms ammunition. It assessed 22,609 m² of land in the Abyei Area as safe from explosive hazards. In addition, it delivered 129 mine risk education sessions, which reached 3,820 men, women, boys and girls living in the Area. A total of 17 awareness sessions on explosive remnants of war were also delivered as part of UNISFA induction training, enhancing the awareness of 350 UNISFA personnel (325 men and 25 women).

15. The Mine Action Service remained essential for the operations of the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism. Teams assessed 1.36 km of patrol routes as safe from explosive hazards. During operations, one explosive remnant of war was found. The Service handed the item to the South Sudanese police for

subsequent disposal. In addition, the Service deployed patrol support teams in support of 84 ground monitoring missions.

Rule of law issues

16. In the absence of the Abyei Police Service, UNISFA remains the only entity that is mentoring and training the community protection committees on law and order matters in Abyei. Despite their informal nature and the fact that they are not recognized by the Sudan, the committees have contributed to the provision of timely information on criminal incidents and activities. However, they continue to suffer from a lack of logistical, administrative and financial resources.

17. The continued decrease in the strength of the United Nations police component during the reporting period, as a result of the non-issuance of visas by the authorities in Khartoum, has limited the mission's capacity to respond to the rise in criminal activity, in particular in and around the Amiet common market. Incidents of public disorder were also recorded, with two demonstrations in the market involving Misseriya youths, who insisted, in the first case, that loyalists of the Government of Omer Al-Bashir leave the market and, in the second, that Misseriya elders involve them more in market-related decision-making processes. Two demonstrations were also staged in Diffra by Misseriya youths, who, in one case, voiced concern at insufficient protection and, in the other case, expressed discontent following the killing of a member of the Misseriya community at the Dari market. Disruptions of public order were also caused by 12 incidents of fire at the Amiet common market, Mul Mul market in Abyei town, Agok market, and Dari market in Diffra. There was also one case of arson, which claimed the life of an Eritrean trader at the Amiet common market. UNISFA police continued to conduct training on fire safety and prevention as a mitigating measure.

18. The implementation of the UNISFA mandate remained complicated by the reluctance of South Sudan to take part in the joint integrated planning exercise to develop a road map strategy document aimed at establishing the Abyei Police Service. UNISFA has thus far sent four invitations, to which only the Sudan responded positively. Another concern remains the lack of a binding legal agreement with both parties on the handling of criminals arrested in the Abyei Area. The memorandum of understanding on procedures for handing over such criminals still needs to be signed by both parties, despite several reminders issued since November 2016.

19. While UNISFA does not have a dedicated human rights capacity, the mission's Community Liaison Office and the police have continued to engage with communities on human rights, including international standards, with particular emphasis on the rights of detainees and the treatment of other vulnerable persons, such as women and children. In this context, UNISFA organized a workshop on 1 and 2 August 2019 with representatives of traditional courts and the two communities to discuss challenges related to detention, including prolonged or arbitrary detention, and the poor quality of detention facilities. The workshop was also focused on ensuring women's rights in the administration of justice, as well as cooperation between community-based traditional justice mechanisms, the administration appointed by the Government of South Sudan and the Misseriya administration. The discussions at and conclusions of the event reconfirmed that, to address law and order issues, engagement cannot be limited to community policing, but should also include comparable support for traditional justice mechanisms and other relevant bodies.

Justice and corrections challenges

20. In the absence of functioning local judiciary authorities (police, prosecutors, courts and prisons) in the Abyei Area, justice is administered through traditional

mechanisms, such as customary courts, where traditional leaders act as de facto prosecutors, judges and arbitrators. In accordance with its mandate, UNISFA has been supporting these traditional mechanisms, notably the joint peace committee, comprising representatives of Ngok Dinka and Misseriya communities, which constitutes a forum for community dialogue that performs both legislative and judicial functions aimed at ensuring the peaceful coexistence of the two communities. The committee settles grievances regarding land disputes, cattle rustling, migration and other conflict drivers. UNISFA is equipping traditional courts, which apply local customary laws and are composed of local community leaders, who have basic knowledge of international judicial standards, such as independence and rights of the accused.

21. In terms of corrections, there are three community-operated detention facilities in Abyei town, the Amiet common market and Agok town. The facilities are consistently overcrowded and offer no separation between individuals in pretrial detention and those sentenced by traditional justice authorities, although separate cells are offered for men and women. The overall detention conditions are inappropriate and fall short of minimum international standards. Within its limited resources, UNISFA periodically monitors the facilities and provides guidance on how detention conditions and practices can be improved, but additional improvements and resources for the detention facilities are needed. With a view to improving human rights standards in detention facilities, UNISFA has initiated, through the quick-impact projects mechanism, the construction of a hard-walled detention centre at the Amiet common market and the renovation of the Abyei community protection committee station.

Local peace efforts

22. Intercommunal dialogue continued during the reporting period, thanks to facilitation by UNISFA of regular joint community protection committee meetings between Ngok Dinka and Misseriya representatives. Some 100 regular and ad hoc meetings were held to deliberate on cases of murder, livestock rustling and the payment of blood money. These meetings resulted in the handing over of compensation money and the recovery of rustled livestock. To avert the possibility of intercommunal conflict linked to acts of violence committed elsewhere in Abyei, the joint community protection committee temporarily closed down the Amiet common market twice, following incidents that occurred on 23 April, during which Misseriya youths expressed discontent over their lack of involvement in the market management, and in the aftermath of the armed attack on 16 July 2019.

23. UNISFA continued to promote dialogue by enhancing awareness and understanding of the mission's mandate to protect civilians and by familiarizing traditional judges with the concept of a fair trial in line with relevant international legal instruments and national laws. To this end, UNISFA held a workshop on the protection of civilians on 27 and 28 May 2019 in Diffra, attended by representatives of both communities, including members of the joint community protection committee, women's and youth representatives and the traditional judges, to discuss the protection of civilians, including women and children, human rights, the rule of law and traditional justice.

24. During the past financial year, UNISFA launched 11 quick-impact projects in the Abyei Area and two projects in support of the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism at Kiir Adem (Gok Machar). The projects are focused on basic livelihoods, small-scale infrastructure and enhancement of the rule of law and generate short-term employment for the communities. Completion of some of these projects was delayed owing to late approval by the Government of the Sudan for the transportation of construction materials.

Women and peace and security

25. Women have remained underrepresented at all levels of decision-making in Abyei, including in community-level conflict resolution and administration mechanisms. To address these gaps, UNISFA continued to engage traditional leaders, including local community leaders, on the importance of the participation of women in all areas and levels of decision-making in Abyei. Advocacy efforts have specifically targeted members of the joint peace committee, in which women are completely absent, the administration in Abyei appointed by the Government in Juba, and traditional leaders in the northern part of Abyei. While no significant progress has been made in this regard, local leaders have expressed willingness to support initiatives that empower women and promote their participation.

26. Gender mainstreaming activities continued to be focused mainly on strengthening the capacity of women's civil society groups, raising awareness among local communities of women's rights, including the prevention of sexual and gender-based violence, and advocacy efforts targeting traditional and administrative leaders aimed at promoting and protecting women's rights, including their participation in decision-making. Efforts by UNISFA resulted not only in the recruitment of more women in both the joint peace committee and community protection committees but also in the establishment of a traditional leaders gender champion network comprising male traditional leaders from the Misseriya community to advocate the promotion and protection of women's rights. A similar mechanism has been initiated by young people in Diffra.

27. Other gender activities targeting women and traditional leaders of both the Misseriya and Ngok Dinka communities were focused on creating awareness of Security Council resolution [1325 \(2000\)](#) and subsequent resolutions on women and peace and security. This was done through various thematic discussions with women leaders and workshops held on 13 May at Todach and 14 May 2019 at Diffra, in which awareness of the subject of women and peace and security was raised, including the role of women in conflict prevention. UNISFA also developed two tools to facilitate the implementation of the women and peace and security mandate: a mission-wide action plan for monitoring and reporting on the women and peace and security indicators, as well as a monitoring and data-collection tool for sexual and gender-based violence. In the reporting period, UNISFA recorded five cases of sexual and gender-based violence involving six victims, of whom three were minors. Four cases involved rape, one involved abduction and another involved domestic violence.

Humanitarian situation and recovery activities

28. United Nations agencies, funds and programmes, as well as non-governmental organizations, continued to provide humanitarian and recovery assistance to some 202,000 vulnerable people in need within the Abyei Area. They included 107,000 people from the Ngok Dinka community, 9,000 people displaced from neighbouring states in South Sudan, 37,000 people from the Misseriya community, 6,000 other South Sudanese (mainly Nuer), 38,000 seasonal Misseriya migrants and 5,000 Fallata nomads who returned in June and July 2019.

29. Between late July and September 2019, heavy rainfall caused flooding, displacing some 30,000 people from their homes in the southern part of Abyei, in particular in Agok town and surrounding areas. Roads, bridges and public facilities were destroyed by the downpours and agricultural farms were damaged. Most of the people displaced by floods erected temporary shelters with wooden poles on the roads, and many others occupied primary schools. United Nations agencies, funds and programmes, through non-governmental organization partners, distributed non-food items, including plastic sheets, cooking utensils, blankets, mosquito nets and blue

bags to 2,800 verified households comprising 15,000 individuals, to meet priority needs in four of the eight affected communities. The humanitarian community has faced challenges in reaching victims in remote areas owing to poor road conditions, including some roads cut off by water. Plans are under way to reach the remaining affected communities by foot from Agok and Abyei during the first week of October to assess the situation.

30. Despite the logistical challenges in South Sudan, 97 per cent of the food requirements for the rainy season were pre-positioned in seven warehouses in southern and central parts of Abyei. More than 111,000 vulnerable people benefited from various food assistance-related activities, including general food distribution for displaced people and school meals for children in the central and southern parts of Abyei. Efforts to support community livelihood activities continued, with over 109,000 livestock vaccinated against various diseases and more than 19,000 livestock treated, benefiting over 5,800 households. Training in basic animal health, handling and processing of fish, beekeeping and honey production, poultry production, post-harvest handling, the establishment of fruit tree nurseries, vegetable production and business skills was provided. Other key activities included the provision of business start-up materials, milk equipment, assorted vegetable seeds and fishing kits.

31. A total of 17 primary and 2 secondary health-care facilities throughout the Abyei Area remained operational. In addition, humanitarian organizations provided routine immunizations and health support, including consultations and essential drugs, benefiting some 110,000 people during the reporting period. The highest level of morbidity was from malaria, with a monthly average of 3,500 diagnosed patients. Owing to access constraints caused mainly by flooding, limited mobile health services were provided to the communities in the remote areas of northern Abyei. Nutrition screening and support for patients with moderate and acute malnutrition in the Abyei Area covered a monthly average of 10,500 children under 5 years of age, as well as pregnant and lactating women. The health and nutrition services in all facilities have been supported by awareness-raising and capacity-building activities, on-the-job training for clinical staff, training for elementary health-service personnel at the village level and health awareness sessions, including training on Ebola for 24 health workers. Three blocks of brick wall latrines were constructed at the Rumamer, Malual Aleu and Mading Achueng health facilities.

32. Six new handpumps and boreholes were drilled, eight handpumps were rehabilitated, a new water yard was constructed in Marial Achak, a borehole was upgraded to mini solar-powered water yards in Amiet Market and seven water yards were repaired, benefiting 21,000 people. Small-scale water, sanitation and hygiene projects supported 900 households and 4,000 schoolchildren throughout the Abyei Area. In order to mitigate the challenges of lack of ownership and proper management of water points in the area, humanitarian organizations, in consultation with communities, identified water management committees for all water yards and provided training on water systems, the roles and responsibilities of committee members, leadership and conflict management. Plans are under way to conduct technical training on the basic maintenance of water taps and generators once the rehabilitation work for all water yards is completed.

33. The food-for-education programme supported the provision of meals for over 23,000 schoolchildren in 34 primary and secondary schools in southern and central Abyei. Psychosocial support for schoolchildren through child-friendly schools and the upgrading of schools in the north of Abyei continued. The rehabilitation work at the Malual Aleu, Maibong, Mabyor, Nyiel and Rumbek primary schools is in progress. The five schools are at different stages, but physical monitoring and follow-up were not possible owing to the impassable roads. In some places, the rehabilitation work was postponed as a result of heavy rain and floods. Other major activities

included the provision of school recreational activities and individual psychosocial support and home visits.

III. Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism

34. As stated in my letter of 20 September 2019 (S/2019/768), modest progress has been made regarding implementation of the benchmarks set out in Security Council resolution 2465 (2019). This is largely because both parties are undergoing transitions that have, for the past few months, diverted their attention away from border-related matters. However, the current rapprochement between the two Governments, as described above, opens prospects for a breakthrough in resolving all pending border issues, provided that both transitional processes stay on track.

35. This lack of progress should not overshadow the importance of the stabilizing role that UNISFA and the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism in particular continue to play along the borders between the two countries. Monitoring activities and regular outreach to key stakeholders on the ground, as well as engagement by the two Governments, have constituted a deterrent to potential spoilers. They have also served as a confidence-building measure between the two parties. In that regard, the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism remains an indispensable tool for the implementation of any border-related decisions by the Joint Political and Security Mechanism in the future.

36. It is worth noting that, since my most recent letter on progress in the implementation of the mechanism's mandate, the two parties organized a meeting of the Joint Political and Security Mechanism in Juba on 2 October 2019, at which they committed themselves again to withdrawing all their forces from the Safe Demilitarized Border Zone and to fostering the establishment of border crossing corridors, requesting UNISFA support in monitoring the implementation of those decisions and reporting on their implementation during the next meeting of the Joint Political and Security Mechanism scheduled for 13 October 2019.

IV. Administrative aspects and mission support

37. UNISFA is among the most remote peacekeeping mission headquarters, located in an incredibly challenging and inhospitable environment and facing serious support challenges. There is no municipality to provide basic services and no local market or vendors that can provide goods, services or other capabilities required by the mission. In addition, the terrain and weather conditions during the rainy season pose real challenges and hinder the mobility of the Force to carry out its mandate. Consequently, infrastructure, Force mobility and real-life support are all major focuses of the mission to improve its ability to implement the mandate.

38. As part of the implementation of the mission's gender parity strategy, a mechanism was established to monitor gender representation in all mission components on an ongoing basis. As at 30 September 2019, women represented 10.6 per cent of UNISFA staff, accounting for 18.4 per cent of the civilian component, 10.1 per cent of the military component and 28 per cent of the police component. UNISFA routinely conducts outreach to potential women candidates for all vacancies to encourage applications, and all qualified women applicants are shortlisted and interviewed. Living conditions, opportunities for promotion, training and welfare concerns are rigorously addressed in order to retain women staff.

39. As at 25 September 2019, the UNISFA military component stood at 4,150 personnel (3,871 troops, 140 military observers and 130 staff officers). During the

reporting period, the mission completed the repatriation of 655 personnel, in line with Security Council resolution 2445 (2018), and a rotation of 611 personnel. The mission has made plans to reduce the number of troops by 295 by November 2019, in accordance with Council resolution 2469 (2019). With regard to the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism, the UNISFA military component stood at 582 personnel, comprising 515 men and 73 women (557 troops, 14 military observers and 11 staff officers). The strength of the police component stood at 34 officers (23 men and 11 women) against an authorized total of 640 police personnel (148 individual police officers and 492 formed police unit personnel). This low rate of deployment is attributed to the non-issuance of visas to police personnel. As at 15 September 2019, the number of civilian staff stood at 139 international staff, 33 United Nations Volunteers and 76 national staff, against authorized totals of 161 international staff, 33 United Nations Volunteers and 86 national staff. The vacancy rate was 7.27 per cent for international staff and 10.8 per cent for national staff.

40. The Government of the Sudan issued 108 visas for UNISFA personnel during the reporting period, while 191 visas remained pending (8 for international staff members, 8 for military personnel, 130 for police personnel, 5 for Mine Action Service contractors, 12 for official visitors and 28 for other contractors).

41. Company operating bases remained deployed at Farouk, Diffra, Goli and Todach in Sector North, Dokura/Rumajak, Noong and Abyei in Sector Centre and Marial Achak, Athony, Banton, Tajalei and Agok in Sector South. UNISFA also supports Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism team sites 11 (Safaha) and 12 (As Sumayah) in Sector 1 (Gok Machar), as well as team sites 21 (Tishwin) and 22 (El Amira) in Sector 2 (Kadugli).

42. Infrastructure and environmental installations are being upgraded at all UNISFA camps. A new mission headquarters is complete, and plans are being made to move into the new facility. To address the road conditions, UNISFA is in the process of contracting engineering services to operate its equipment and augment the military engineering unit capabilities to increase the mission's capacity to improve accessibility and Force mobility.

43. The mission continues to face shortages for laterite and fuel deliveries from the Sudan, leading to the suspension of additional infrastructure works. No progress has been made on the two major road renovation projects, as clearance by the Government of the Sudan has yet to be granted. This will continue to jeopardize the movement of troops and supplies to many camps.

44. The implementation of the recommendation to reduce the mission fleet by one fixed-wing aircraft to lower the aviation budget and increase cost-efficiency has had a negative impact on the mission's operations. Sharing an aircraft with the United Nations Mission in South Sudan resulted in a 20 per cent no-fly rate, which seriously hindered medical evacuations, official travel and air cargo, as well as the mission's obligations to personnel for rest and recuperation and leave. The mission has resumed its fixed-wing aircraft operations to Entebbe by repositioning an aircraft from Khartoum, since demand has decreased considerably on the route owing to the recent disturbances in the Sudan.

45. Following the two military helicopter accidents in February and May 2019 and the subsequent suspension of their operations by United Nations Headquarters, the mission has received two helicopters under commercial contracts, which have filled the gap left by the military helicopters. However, the Force still lacks the capability to mount military air operations using military-pattern helicopters should the need arise.

Culture of performance

46. UNISFA tracks and reports mission performance through metrics and targets that it has developed as part of a performance management system. The intention is to measure and improve outcomes related to force mobility, the environment, infrastructure development and mandate implementation. Results are regularly reported to mission leadership, managers, relevant end users and United Nations Headquarters. The metrics used are specifically designed to better inform decision-making on, inter alia, infrastructure, environmental issues and Force deployment.

47. UNISFA continued to conduct the quarterly performance evaluation of units in addition to other scheduled inspections. A total of 12 performance evaluations have been conducted over the past 12 months.

48. A major impediment is the inability of formed units to conduct test firing of weapons to ascertain the continuous serviceability of weapons, owing to the refusal of traditional and community leaders to release land in the mission area for this purpose. UNISFA continued to engage with the community on this matter. One recurrent issue concerning the welfare of the troops was the lack of Internet connectivity. This has now been resolved, with UNISFA providing Internet capability for all formed units, which has boosted the morale of troops in the mission.

49. All units performed their duties diligently and adhered to rules and regulations, as well as the provisions of existing standard operating procedures and United Nations policies. There were no issues related to sexual exploitation and abuse and other forms of misconduct during the reporting period.

Mission reconfiguration

50. As described above, the situation on the ground remained marked by a high crime rate, with the reported increased involvement of armed groups, often fuelling persistent intercommunal tensions. However, while the UNISFA troop ceiling has decreased in accordance with Security Council resolution [2445 \(2018\)](#), the mandated increase in the strength of the police forces from 50 to 640 has not materialized, creating a vacuum in the mission's capacity to deliver on all fronts. This decrease in the strength of the uniformed components will particularly reduce the mission's ability to simultaneously maintain its focus on the main hotspots along the Agok-Diffra road and deploy enough forces along the migration corridors in the western and eastern parts of the Abyei Area during the upcoming dry season.

51. In line with Security Council resolution [2469 \(2019\)](#), an assessment mission and a military and police capability study were conducted in August and September 2019. The overall objectives were to assess the progress in the implementation of the mandate, as well as the mission's capacity to fulfil its tasks on the basis of the current and projected security situation, with a view to updating the recommendations for the reconfiguration of the mission, including a transition strategy that would allow for an eventual exit. On the basis of the findings of the military and police study, it is recommended that UNISFA update its operational concept, improve its peacekeeping intelligence capabilities and protection of civilians capabilities and reconfigure its enablers, including by upgrading its mobility with night-flying assets and its engineering capability, as well enhance its existing medical capacity. There will also be a need to deploy troops with the range of skills and training standards adequate for the new operational concept and to carry out the police deployment in order to address law and public order issues.

52. Two approaches are proposed for consideration by the Security Council. The first option is derived from the provisions of Council resolutions [2445 \(2018\)](#) and [2469 \(2019\)](#), regardless of the recent security and political developments on the ground.

First, it involves the repatriation of 295 troops to complete the Force reduction set out in resolution [2445 \(2018\)](#), which did not take place as planned by May 2019. The Force will be further reduced by 295 troops in accordance with Council resolution [2469 \(2019\)](#), bringing the authorized ceiling to 3,550, while the police strength will be augmented to 640 personnel through the deployment of three formed police units and 148 police personnel. The mandate of the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism would be extended by at least six months to support potential progress on border issues that could result from the current political momentum between the Sudan and South Sudan. The repatriation of the first 295 troops commenced in October, while the second phase will be achieved by 15 November.

53. The second option follows the conflict and criminal trends over the past six months and the positive political developments between the Sudan and South Sudan described above. It provides UNISFA with sufficient force to fulfil its mandate and intervene with appropriate resources throughout its area of responsibility, given the difficulties encountered to date in implementing the mandated increase in police force strength. Requested by UNISFA leadership and the two main parties, it also gives the mission enough time to assess the impact on its overall operational capacity of reducing the 655 troops set out in resolution [2445 \(2018\)](#), and to adapt its posture and capabilities to the new operational concept recommended in the military and police component study. Should this flexible approach receive the approval of the Council, it would involve the postponement of the reduction of the 295 additional troops decided by the Council in its resolution [2469 \(2019\)](#) until the end of the dry season, by May 2020. While maintaining the Force within the authorized uniformed personnel ceiling, all efforts will be made to impress upon the two parties the need to expeditiously facilitate the deployment of the authorized police increase provided for in Council resolution [2469 \(2019\)](#), in a phased approach starting with the deployment of at least one formed police unit and 140 police officers by January 2020, while the remaining two units could be deployed by May 2020. As in the first option, the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism would be extended by at least six months to support any potential progress on border issues.

54. For UNISFA to efficiently fulfil all aspects of its mandate, the reconfiguration of the uniformed component described above should be accompanied by the strengthening of the mission's civilian capacities, as recommended in my letter of 20 August 2018 ([S/2018/778](#)). The recent review mission assessed an urgent need to deploy political affairs officers at mission headquarters and the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism headquarters, as well as in the liaison offices in Khartoum, Juba and Addis Ababa. It also recommended an increase in civil affairs officers in the mission, sectors and Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism headquarters to improve outreach to local administrations and communities and to increase the communication and awareness-raising capabilities of UNISFA. Finally, with regard to the rule of law, it recommended the establishment of a small team to address all the corrections and justice aspects for support and implementation purposes under the community liaison office.

V. Financial aspects

55. The General Assembly, by its resolution [73/311](#) and decision 73/555, appropriated the amount of \$260.2 million for the maintenance of the Force for the period from 1 July 2019 to 30 June 2020. As at 1 October 2019, unpaid assessed contributions to the special account for UNISFA amounted to \$91.9 million. Total outstanding assessed contributions for all peacekeeping operations as at that date amounted to \$3,798.9 million. Troop costs have been reimbursed for the period up to

30 April, while the costs of contingent-owned equipment have been reimbursed for the period up to 31 March, in accordance with the quarterly payment schedule.

VI. Observations and recommendations

56. In the past few weeks, encouraging steps have been taken by the new authorities in Khartoum and their counterparts in Juba to improve their relationship and pave the way for new momentum between the Sudan and South Sudan. I wish to commend the efforts made by the leadership of the two countries, including Mr. Kiir's visit to Khartoum on 17 August 2019 to attend the historic signing ceremony of the political and constitutional declarations marking the beginning of the transitional rule in the Sudan, and the subsequent visit of the new Prime Minister of the Sudan, Abdalla Hamdok, to Juba on 12 September 2019. I was particularly encouraged by their resolve to enhance bilateral relations, including on borders and trade, and by the commitment made by Mr. Hamdok to restore relations between people on the border as the first step towards the resolution of the disputed border zones between the Sudan and South Sudan. I call upon the Security Council to seize this opportunity and extend its support to both countries as they strive to overcome years of conflicts and division.

57. Time is of the essence to consolidate the gains made in recent weeks. I therefore urge the two Governments, with the support of the African Union High-level Implementation Panel and my Special Envoy for the Horn of Africa, to spare no efforts to make some progress on these sensitive issues in the coming months. In that regard, I welcome the recent convening of a meeting of the Joint Political and Security Mechanism in Juba on 2 October, during which the Sudan and South Sudan committed themselves again to withdrawing all their forces from the Safe Demilitarized Border Zone and to fostering the establishment of border crossing corridors, with the support of UNISFA, before the next meeting of the Mechanism scheduled for 13 October. I urge the two parties to pursue the talks to overcome their disagreements regarding the disputed and claimed areas along the border, in accordance with Security Council resolution [2416 \(2018\)](#), including by considering the concept of a "soft border" agreed upon in 2012, in order to reach an agreement on the final demarcation of their common border. UNISFA remains committed to supporting the implementation of any future agreement on demarcation in collaboration with the African Union Border Programme Technical Team, and to fostering community reconciliation and awareness-raising and supporting integrated border management at the border crossings.

58. Despite protracted delays on border demarcation, the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism has remained a vital part of the framework that regulates the relationship between the two countries. Since the Security Council decided to include support for the Mechanism as part of the mandate of UNISFA in 2012, there have been no incidents or confrontations between the two armies. In that context, I encourage the Council to continue to support the Mechanism as part of the mandated activities of UNISFA, while at the same time applying pressure on the two parties to make progress. However, as emphasized in my letter of 20 September 2019 containing an assessment of the progress made in the benchmarks set for the Mechanism ([S/2019/768](#)), the important role that it plays as a monitoring and confidence-building mechanism should in no circumstances supplant the obligation of the parties to resolve border demarcation issues and agree on a final status for Abyei through continued dialogue.

59. In the current context, with the effects of the rapprochement between the Sudan and South Sudan yet to materialize in, and with regard to, the Abyei Area, the continued presence of UNISFA will remain crucial to sustaining the stability achieved since its deployment in 2011. Indeed, recent incidents, including the one that claimed

the life of an Ethiopian peacekeeper in July 2019 in the Amiet common market area, are a clear indication that, pending progress between the two Governments on the sensitive issues of border demarcation and a final status, the Abyei Area will continue to be a volatile environment characterized by the presence of armed elements from both countries, combined with random criminal activities. In that regard, I emphasize the urgent need for the Sudan and South Sudan to overcome their differences on the presence of mutually agreed administrative and rule of law institutions in the Abyei Area. The continued absence of governance institutions in the Area affects the life, security and well-being of all communities.

60. In the future, I intend to continue to adapt the mission's configuration and posture to the new political realities and security dynamics on the ground, in accordance with the recommendations presented in my letter of 20 August 2018, and the adjustments decided upon by the Security Council in its resolutions [2445 \(2018\)](#) and [2469 \(2019\)](#). Considering the recent steps taken by the parties to accelerate their discussions on outstanding issues, I would like to recommend that the Council positively consider the second of the two options presented in paragraphs 52 and 53 above. That option, if endorsed, would allow the mission to maintain the minimum required strength to achieve its security-related mandated tasks while the reconfiguration of its posture and concept of operations proceeds, and would provide space and time for the sequenced deployment of the required police personnel, as mandated in relevant Council resolutions. I would recommend the extension of the mandate of UNISFA for a further six months, until 15 May 2020, along with the implementation of the proposals contained in paragraphs 53 and 54 of the present report.

61. Furthermore, as I mentioned in my letter of 20 August 2018, while the division of labour between UNISFA and the African Union since 2011 has resulted in the mission focusing most exclusively on security issues while political support was provided by the African Union, in recent years UNISFA has become increasingly exposed to the political shortcomings of the process and the insufficient political will and interest of the parties, in particular with regard to the most needed administrative arrangements in the Abyei Area, as well as discussions on the border demarcation. I will therefore continue to impress upon the parties the need to support enhancement of the civilian capacities of the mission, notably on local conflict resolution, the rule of law and protection. A particular focus should also be placed on intensifying day-to-day engagement in political mediation and dialogue between the two parties. In that context, I will continue to engage with the two parties, and in particular the new authorities in Khartoum, with a view to securing their agreement for the nomination of a civilian Deputy Head of Mission and for the deployment of adequate civilian capacities to support the mission leadership, in accordance with Security Council resolutions [2445 \(2018\)](#) and [2469 \(2019\)](#).

62. In 2018, I emphasized the important nexus between peace and development, and more specifically the mutually reinforcing effect that security and political facilitation, on the one hand, and recovery and development programmes, on the other, could have for the stabilization of the Abyei Area. I therefore suggested that a dedicated programme be developed for both communities by the respective country teams in the Sudan and South Sudan. I welcome in that context the United Nations joint programme initiative for Abyei by the country teams in the Sudan and South Sudan, which is aimed at addressing five key objectives in the Abyei Area, namely: strengthening local institutional capacities and support for the rule of law; fostering community peacebuilding and capacity-building; improving access to basic social services; promoting and supporting the local economy; and promoting gender equality and combating sexual and gender-based violence. I urge donors to support this laudable initiative.

63. Lastly, I wish to extend my gratitude and appreciation to the acting Head of Mission and Force Commander, Major General Mehari Zewde Gebremariam, and to 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, Parfait 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.

