

Briefing to the IGAD Extraordinary Summit on the Situation in
South Sudan

**by United Nations Special Representative of the Secretary-General
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Mr. Chairman, Prime Minister Hailemariam, Excellencies and distinguished delegates,

1. I thank you for the opportunity to address this Assembly of Heads of State and Government of IGAD. The United Nations commitment to partnership was reaffirmed in the IGAD, AU and UN joint statement on 29 January. I wish to express my own appreciation for the IGAD leaders' continued efforts to help end the conflict in South Sudan.

Mr. Chairman, Excellencies

2. With my limited time, I will make some brief comments about the situation in the country and what the United Nations is doing as part of its mandate to protect civilians and build a durable peace. I will conclude with some observations on the need for strong partnerships and collective action.

3. First and foremost, the people of South Sudan are desperate for peace. South Sudan has incredible potential for food production, but today more than half of its people need food aid. One-third of

the population is displaced and half of those are refugees. 50,000 have arrived in Uganda each month this year. Record numbers have fled to Sudan. Kenya and Ethiopia are also hosting thousands of South Sudanese. As neighbours, you know better than most the suffering of those who have arrived and the stress on host communities.

Excellencies,

4. This tragedy is man-made. It is the result of violence that has still not stopped. With the start of the rainy season this month major military operations have paused, but fighting over the past few months has been intense – and they persisted well after the ceasefire announcement made by His Excellency President Salva Kiir at your last sitting in Nairobi.

5. In the north, the SPLA has dislodged Opposition forces from strongholds on the west bank of the Nile River. In the east, it has taken towns in northern greater Jonglei. In the west, around Wau clashes between Government and Opposition forces have led to 22,000 people taking refuge with the UN. And fighting in the south has left towns in the Equatorias with as little as 20% of their previous populations.

Excellencies,

6. In response to the famine declaration, there has been a massive humanitarian scale-up in affected and at-risk areas. I welcome the Governments of Sudan and Kenya opening of routes for cross-border humanitarian assistance. WFP has been able to pre-position 90 per cent of their food aid ahead of the rainy season. Sadly, these efforts are not without risk. Despite your Excellencies' own calls for safe humanitarian access – 15 humanitarian workers have lost their lives in 2017 alone.

7. Despite obstacles, the United Nations – along with humanitarian actors - is saving tens of thousands of lives in South Sudan. Let me give just one example. Last month 20,000 people – in a desperate state – fled fighting to the tiny village of Aburoc, in Upper Nile. An epidemic of cholera was imminent. UNMISS deployed a light detachment of peacekeepers to secure the area. That presence prompted humanitarians to arrive, who provided clean water and other emergency assistance. Cholera did break out, but because of those actions was quickly contained. Hundreds of lives were saved.

8. We are being robust in our determination to protect civilians. Our peacekeepers are instructed to persist in getting through checkpoints to reach vulnerable populations – even when they are threatened – and at times shot at. Their robustness directly supports South Sudanese civilians – giving them confidence, enabling us to

investigate human rights abuses and ensure humanitarian assistance goes to those who need it most. Many of these peacekeepers who carry out this good work are from your countries and we are grateful for their presence. I ask for your support with the deployment of the Regional Protection Force that is facing constant delays.

Excellencies, I would like to make some observations...

9. The cornerstone of peace efforts remains the Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (ARCSS) brokered by the IGAD leaders. But, today, there is greater fragmentation. A multitude of players is now evident – and the causes of fighting are multi-layered. Going forward we need to recognise this reality.

10. We also need to recognize that the comprehensive reforms envisaged in the Agreement will take time and require real commitment. A rushed process and premature elections, when the conditions are not ready, may lead to more conflict. Therefore, a well-coordinated strategy that addresses the conflict at all levels; the local or sub-national, national level and across the region. Your effort, working together, is the key ingredient to lead us on the path to peace.

11. As I have travelled across South Sudan, I have observed valuable work by the UN and others, notably the churches, to broker local peace agreements between neighbouring communities, ethnic

groups and tribes. Those efforts to reconcile will continue. However, we must also acknowledge that the good will of local communities to build peace can easily be undone by decisions at the national level.

12. For that reason, I welcome the commitments made by President Salva Kiir at the swearing-in of the National Dialogue Executive Committee and his decision to step-aside as patron. He also announced at that time a unilateral ceasefire and the release of political prisoners. We urge other parties to join the ceasefire. To follow-up, CTSAMM should be granted full freedom of movement to monitor and verify the ceasefire. A further test of the President's commitment will be how many political prisoners are released. For example, one UN staff member was released recently, but two others have been held for two years still without charge.

13. Genuine dialogue amongst the people is needed and the conditions must be ripe for all South Sudanese to feel free to fully engage. Genuine dialogue means talking to ones enemies as well as ones friends. No constituency can be left out. For this, IGAD and the region could consider ways to help to ensure these constituencies are represented at the table. I commend the work of the churches in thinking creatively about how to bring people together.

Excellencies,

14. The United Nations fully supports IGAD and the African Union in their efforts to engage the parties to return to peace. I commend the work of the Chairperson of the Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission (JMEC), His Excellency Festus Mogae for his untiring efforts.

15. As President Mogae noted, unity of purpose is needed. The status quo is not delivering peace to the people of South Sudan. Renewed efforts, including by some of South Sudan's neighbors, to find a path to peace are welcomed and encouraging. But, we must walk the same path.

16. For our part, the United Nations is committed to supporting peace initiatives at all levels. At the local level, UNMISS will work with peace partners to mitigate conflicts and promote reconciliation. At the national level we are prepared to engage with a genuine and credible process to promote dialogue from both the bottom-up and top-down. At the regional level, the United Nations remains committed to partnering with the AU, IGAD and JMEC in South Sudan. The UN, the Secretary-General, his Special Envoy Nicholas Haysom, who is here today and I, personally, stand ready to support a joint initiative to chart a path to peace.

Thank you.