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Report of the Secretary-General pursuant to paragraph 31 of Security Council resolution 2677 (2023)

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution 2677 (2023) of 15 March 2023, by which the Council inter alia extended the mandate of the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) until 15 March 2024 and requested the Secretary-General to provide a separate report that provides an assessment and a detailed analysis of the political, security and economic factors delaying the implementation of the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan and their causes; an assessment of certain conditions and/or indicators; an integrated United Nations transition strategy; and recommendations for how UNMISS might adapt in light of the findings.

II. Assessment and analysis of factors delaying the implementation of the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan

A. Political factors

1. Status of the implementation of the Revitalized Agreement

2. The implementation of the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan remains significantly behind schedule owing to delays in the completion of critical tasks, including the reconstitution of the National Constitutional Review Commission, the National Elections Commission and the Political Parties Council, as well as the transitional security arrangements. Recent independent perception surveys conducted by civil society organizations and UNMISS suggest that the majority of South Sudanese want elections to be held in December 2024 without further delays.

3. While the permanent constitution-making process remains pending, the reconstituted National Constitutional Review Commission will be the oversight body for the process and the reconstituted National Elections Commission will be responsible for the preparations and conduct of the elections. According to the Political Parties Act, 2012 (amendment) bill, 2023, the Political Parties Council will be the body responsible for registering, monitoring and regulating political parties. The National Elections Act, 2012 (amendment) bill, 2023, was signed into law on 26 September but the training and deployment of the Necessary Unified Forces, a key



component of the transitional security arrangements, are still incomplete. Moreover, the allocated funding for all the outstanding tasks mentioned above remains inadequate.

4. Some stakeholders have identified a trend of unilateral decisions made by the President, Salva Kiir Mayardit, as evidenced by the reshuffling of ministers, governors and military leadership, which have affected the implementation process for the Revitalized Agreement and led to an erosion of trust between key national actors. The lack of trust has contributed to the widening of the gap between the parties, in particular on issues relevant to elections. Opposition parties have insisted on the need to complete the permanent constitution-making process, census, security arrangements, repatriation of refugees and settlement of internally displaced persons as prerequisites for the conduct of peaceful and inclusive elections. Conversely, the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) has expressed the view that some of the provisions of the Revitalized Agreement, such as the census and relocation of internally displaced persons, may not be necessary for a successful transition. Bridging these disparate positions remains a challenge.

5. Regionally, the conflict in the Sudan has exacerbated the dire economic and humanitarian situation in South Sudan and has also diminished the bandwidth for regional engagement and international attention, as well as external encouragement for the parties in the South Sudanese peace process. Mr. Kiir has indicated his willingness to engage in efforts towards a mediated resolution of the conflict in the Sudan, both bilaterally and as part of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) framework.

2. Status of the constitution-making process

6. According to the Agreement on the road map to a peaceful and democratic end to the transitional period of the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan, the reconstitution of the National Constitutional Review Commission should have been completed by 30 August 2022 and the Constitution-Making Process Act 2022 promulgated by 5 February 2023. This should have been followed by the establishment of the Constitutional Drafting Committee, a 15-member technical expert body, by 30 October 2022; the recruitment of members to form the National Constitutional Conference by 30 December 2022; the conduct by the reconstituted National Constitutional Review Commission of an initial phase of civic education and collection of data on public views on the constitution-making process and the establishment of the Preparatory Subcommittee by 30 January 2023; and the preparation of the first report on the civic education and public consultation data for validation by the public by 30 March 2023.

7. Almost 10 months after the passing of the Constitution-Making Process Act 2022 into law on 21 December 2022, none of the tasks outlined in the road map have been completed. Of particular concern is the lack of clarity regarding the timeline of the constitution-making process in view of the protracted delay in the implementation of the road map. In the Revitalized Agreement and the road map a 24-month timeline is envisaged for the constitution-making process to be concluded in July 2024, six months ahead of elections in December 2024. However, there has yet to be an indication from the Government regarding a revised timeline or a streamlined procedure for the constitution-making process. Overall, the process is 12 months behind schedule.

8. On 1 June 2023, the Government established a joint task force, which includes the United Nations, the African Union and IGAD to coordinate planning and implementation of the constitution-making and electoral processes. To date, three meetings have been convened at the principal level, along with several secretariat-

level meetings. At the same meeting on 1 June, the National Constitutional Review Commission presented its draft action plans and an estimated budget of \$40 million, of which \$32 million was requested for the National Constitutional Conference. However, in the national budget for the fiscal year 2023/2024, which was passed into law in August only \$287,000 was allocated for the constitution-making process. The Government has yet to indicate how and when the remaining funding for the constitution-making process will be provided.

3. Status of electoral preparations

9. The benchmarks to ensure the conduct of elections in December 2024 have yet to be met. The National Elections Act, 2012 (amendment) bill, 2023, progressed from the National Constitutional Amendment Committee through the Council of Ministers to the reconstituted Transitional National Legislative Assembly. It was reviewed and deliberated from June to September 2023. The Assembly held public consultations on the bill from 22 to 23 June, when the current National Elections Commission, representatives of academia, civil society, women, youth, persons with disabilities and other relevant stakeholders presented their views, including on aspects related to the electoral system and quotas for women, youth and persons with disabilities. On 18 September, the bill was passed through expedited procedure combining the third and fourth readings in the Assembly, amid protests from some members of parliament from the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-in-Opposition (SPLM-IO) and the South Sudan Opposition Alliance (SSOA) primarily because it empowers the President-elect to appoint 5 per cent of the seats in the Parliament. The President assented to the bill on 25 September. The opposition argues that the required two thirds majority was not obtained.

10. In June, the National Elections Commission submitted to the Government's trilateral joint task force its staffing and funding requirements. These included a budget for its immediate needs ahead of the elections, amounting to \$6 million; a draft budget for the elections totalling \$250 million, and an indicative timeline for the implementation of electoral activities. However, without an electoral legal framework clearly stipulating the type and number of elections, voter registration modality, boundary delimitation and the inclusion of the displaced population, among other parameters, the budget of the Commission remains uncertain. The approved 2023/2024 national budget does not provide adequate funding for the proper functioning of the Commission and to support elections-related preparations and activities, such as conducting civic and voter education campaigns, public outreach, voter registration and logistics and operations. Only SSP 29,020,664 (equivalent to \$28,354) has been allocated, except for salary payments for the current staff of the Commission. Without clarity on the type and levels of elections, the budget of the Commission will have to be revised once legislation is passed and critical decisions are taken by the Government of South Sudan.

11. The Political Parties Act, 2012 (amendment) bill, 2022, passed in June 2022, has yet to be operationalized, including the reconstitution of the Political Parties Council, without which political parties are unable to register or hold party conventions. Both the National Elections Commission and the Political Parties Council are underresourced and lack adequate staff. Their current members do not have the authority to make critical decisions, as their mandates have expired. The Commission does not have permanent office space in Juba or in the states, and there are threats of eviction from its current premises in Juba owing to rental debts. In addition, neither institution has experience, respectively, in election management or in the registration and regulation of political party activities.

12. The Judicial Reform Committee, tasked with developing recommendations for judicial reforms as outlined in the Revitalized Agreement, is continuing internal

consultations, supported by UNMISS, in order to promote transparency and the participation of the people of South Sudan in the reform process. Recommendations of the Committee to the Government will address questions, including the hierarchy of the judiciary in South Sudan, the relationship between the formal and the informal justice systems, the establishment of an independent, impartial and credible constitutional court and the independence of the judiciary. These reforms are key to ensuring that election disputes are addressed in an impartial manner and that decisions – and therefore the outcome of the elections – are perceived as legitimate. Furthermore, it is crucial to determine the election dispute resolution process and the role of the judiciary early in the electoral process. On 16 June, IGAD announced that it would not be able to continue to fund the Committee beyond September 2023. Currently, there is no clarity on how the funding gap will be filled at a time when the Committee is required to finalize its recommendations.

13. The ministerial task force of the Ministry of Justice and Constitutional Affairs, in accordance with its mandate, has been encouraging all parties and stakeholders to expedite the selection and appointment of the 57 members of the reconstituted National Constitutional Review Commission, as well as for the Political Parties Council and the National Elections Commission. The ministerial task force has not to date announced any appointments of members of any of these institutions.

14. The Council of Ministers has yet to discuss the key priority issues presented, and the joint task force has not been convened by the Government since 27 July 2023. UNMISS has continued to urge the Government of South Sudan to reconvene the monthly meetings of the joint task force.

4. Status of a conducive environment for peaceful and inclusive elections

15. In his public statements on both the twelfth Independence Day and Martyrs Day, Mr. Kiir emphasized the need for the parties to work together to complete the transitional period through elections in 2024, on time and without further extensions. On 15 August, the Minister of Information and Government Spokesperson stated that the Government would hold the elections within the agreed timeline regardless of the full implementation of the remaining provisions of the Revitalized Agreement. While such statements set the tone, much remains to be done to forge a consensus among the parties on ways to meet the deadlines.

16. Meanwhile, some parties have begun campaigning for the general elections despite the legal framework stipulating that political campaigning should not start prior to the formal announcement by the National Elections Commission. On 4 July, Mr. Kiir was endorsed as the SPLM presidential flagbearer and launched the membership registration campaign at a political rally which was attended by SPLM representatives from Northern and Western Bahr el Ghazal, Warrap and Lakes States, as well as the Abyei Administrative Area. Similarly, delegates from a faction of the Other Political Parties alliance convened a three-day national convention from 22 to 25 August in Yambio, Western Equatoria State, and unanimously endorsed Peter Mayen Majongdit as their flagbearer, and opened an office to facilitate grass-roots mobilization. SPLM/IO has opened offices in all 10 states. While some political parties have freely conducted political engagements in some areas, there remain notable political tensions between SPLM and SPLM/IO in the ethnically split Western Bahr el Ghazal, Unity and Western Equatoria States, where the parties struggle to gain political dominance over each other. Some opposition members have alleged unlawful arrests of their members, intimidation and general sabotage during their party engagements in the counties, raising concerns over an uneven political playing field.

5. Status of security arrangements

17. Entrenched patterns of intercommunal and intracommunal violence involving community-based militias and/or civil defence groups have persisted. However, the overall number of civilian casualties attributed to conventional parties to the conflict has declined since the signing of the Revitalized Agreement in September 2018. The general absence of effective formal justice institutions and an unwillingness to hold uniformed personnel accountable for human rights violations continue to sustain a culture of impunity in South Sudan. The level of insecurity observed in some parts of the country could also undermine participation in the electoral processes, in particular of women and persons with disabilities.

18. The Government has indicated its willingness to conduct voluntary disarmament of civilians throughout South Sudan, and has introduced draft legislation to generate a secure environment and mitigate violence before and during the elections. If the disarmament effort is voluntary, well coordinated and primarily conducted through law enforcement entities, with security forces ensuring the security of communities throughout the country, such a campaign can enhance the security environment. However, many previous forcible disarmament operations led by the military have resulted in displacement, violence against the local populations and limited success in accomplishing intended goals.

19. The Government of South Sudan has begun election security planning. In this regard, the South Sudan National Police Service has established an Election Security Committee and appointed focal points for election security planning. The Committee held initial discussions with UNMISS and UNDP regarding technical support, including training on the role of security forces in elections. The Committee has drafted a national election security plan and training manual, which has been submitted to the Minister of Interior for review and approval. However, the viability of the plan cannot be assessed without full knowledge of the electoral framework. In addition, the South Sudan National Police Service, with assistance from the United Nations, is drafting its comprehensive election security management strategy and curriculum to build the capacity of the local police for the elections. Furthermore, training of trainers for public order management has been planned by the Mission to build the capacities of the South Sudanese National Police Service in acting with restraint, the rules of engagement and crowd management control. This training is in addition to that conducted by specialized police teams and formed police units for the South Sudanese National Police Service as part of the election security training.

20. Without sufficient and expeditious progress on the transitional security arrangements, the overall election security environment remains unpredictable and not conducive to the exercise of civil and political rights. Adequate financial and logistical resources from the Government are required for the South Sudanese National Police Service and other security institutions of the Necessary Unified Forces, in addition to training on the rule of law and human rights, to enable them to fulfil their constitutionally mandated security roles.

6. Status of civic and political space

21. UNMISS continued to receive reports of restrictions on fundamental freedoms, including censorship, harassment, arbitrary arrests and detention of journalists, activists, members of opposition political parties and other individuals expressing views critical of or divergent from those of the Government. From March to July 2023, UNMISS documented nine incidents that affected 37 individuals (36 arrested and detained and one case of intimidation). These actions, which severely constrict civic and political space, are reportedly perpetrated by national security agencies and civilian authorities, including governors, ministers and armed actors who threaten and

hinder the engagement of the South Sudanese people in the political sphere. Furthermore, these actions have led to alleged accusations of preferential treatment for SPLM-aligned parties and individuals, which could be mitigated by clear leadership direction to ensure equal rights for all.

22. Although electoral campaign activity at this stage is not in line with the current legal framework, the election campaign by SPLM at the subnational level has commenced and triggered varied political reactions. It also revealed existing tensions, mainly between SPLM and SPLM-IO. Reports from SPLM-IO claiming harassment, inability to open party offices and lack of enjoyment of the same freedoms as SPLM persist, and the mistrust could compound as elections draw closer.

23. Following sustained advocacy from political parties and civil society groups, in February 2023 the Presidency agreed to remove controversial sections in the National Security Service Act (2014), whereby the National Security Service had been granted powers to arrest without a warrant. The National Security Service Act 2014 (amendment) bill, 2023, was tabled in parliament and referred to the relevant committee in May. Once enacted, this amendment would be a step towards bringing the Act in line with the Transitional Constitution of South Sudan and further contribute to enhancing civic and political space.

24. Opposition political parties continue to raise concerns about the lack of civic and political space and have called for a level playing field in the lead-up to elections. They also suffer from insufficient capacity, exemplified by the fact that only four to five parties have physical addresses. Since the 2016 conflict, opposition political parties have not received capacity-building and logistic support from international organizations that offered such services before the conflict. Smaller parties have complained that they lack the resources to engage in a fair competition in 2024 compared with other well-positioned parties. In contrast, SPLM has been receiving the direct transfer of funds and support from Government functionaries.

25. UNMISS is adapting its response in the current context, including by providing nonpartisan technical assistance and support for greater public awareness of the status of the electoral processes and conditions conducive for holding inclusive and credible elections. The Mission forums remain one of few platforms where the political parties come together and discuss critical issues including constitution-making, electoral processes, and nation-building.

26. South Sudan has ratified the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol), relating to gender equality and women's empowerment. While incidents of sexual and gender-based violence are increasingly brought to the attention of the South Sudan National Police Service, there has been limited progress in effectively addressing conflict-related sexual or gender-based violence. Discriminatory sociocultural norms and practices continue to prevail and are reflected in institutional cultures and public attitudes, in particular in professional settings, where women tend to be relegated to performing support duties. Some women have been appointed to senior positions and executive posts in the mechanisms and institutions of the Revitalized Agreement, which is generally not the case for the decision-making posts, especially in the security sector.

27. On 22 and 23 June, the Standing Specialized Committee on Legislation and Justice of the reconstituted Transitional National Legislative Assembly conducted a public consultation workshop on the unresolved issues related to the electoral system and quotas for women, youth and persons with disabilities, as well as other aspects of the election bill. These consultations gave an opportunity to a broad spectrum of stakeholders to voice their concerns and inform lawmakers about outstanding issues, with the aim of enhancing the inclusivity of the legislation-making process.

B. Security factors

1. Status of the transitional security arrangements

28. The ceasefire in South Sudan is largely holding, and the country has observed a substantial reduction in political violence since 2018. However, there has been insufficient progress in the implementation of the transitional security arrangements, which are vital for overall stability in the country and the provision of election-related security. Since the graduation of approximately 53,000 Necessary Unified Forces personnel from August 2022 to January 2023, some graduates, especially from the Opposition, have remained in training centres and others have returned to their places of origin owing to the lack of food. Despite multiple assurances from the Government that the deployment process would commence imminently, reports from the Ceasefire and Transitional Security Arrangement Monitoring and Verification Mechanism indicate that neither the Sudan People's Liberation Army-in Opposition (SPLM/A-IO) nor the SSOA forces that graduated as part of the Necessary Unified Forces have received salaries or are part of any formal registration process, whereas the SPLM/South Sudan People's Defence Forces graduates have been receiving salaries and benefits. In addition to allowances, the SPLA-IO and SSOA forces remain in need of basic provisions, including food and medicine.

29. On 12 May, the Government announced the allocation of \$3.6 million for the deployment of the Necessary Unified Forces under phase I. However, it remains unclear whether this amount has been included in the budget only for the fiscal year 2023/2024 or whether it had been disbursed. Some estimates suggest that salary payment alone, in addition to the costs for firearms, uniforms and construction of barracks, will exceed this allocation. On 11 September, the Joint Defence Board ordered the ungraduated candidates for the Necessary Unified Forces to report to their training facilities with their weapons within seven days for batch II of the training. Batch I graduates were ordered to report for initial deployment. The Board also mentioned that the absence of weapons would prohibit soldiers from entering the training facilities.

30. While the deployment batch I of the Necessary Unified Forces was set to be completed by September 2022, and training and deployment of batch II completed by November 2022, neither has started. Phase II of the transitional security arrangements process is also yet to be initiated. This delay is due to a deadlock over the unification modalities of the middle and command echelons in the uniformed forces between SPLM/South Sudan People's Defence Forces, SPLA-IO and SSOA, as well as a lack of funding and a detailed implementation programme.

31. The Ceasefire and Transitional Security Arrangements Monitoring and Verification Mechanism lacks resources, inhibiting its operational effectiveness. The national monitors, who had been on strike since April 2022 owing to non-payment of salaries, resumed their work in June 2023 after the Mechanism received funding from Japan to facilitate payment. The national monitors of the National Constitution Amendment Committee and the Judicial Reform Committee were also affected by non-payment of salaries. In March 2023, the Reconstituted Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission noted that the National Transitional Committee had not been able to pay incentives and operating costs for members of security mechanisms for more than three years. In March, the Minister of Peacebuilding, Stephen Par Kuol, reported that the operations of the National Transitional Committee, the National Constitution Amendment Committee and the Judicial Reform Committee were affected by accrued rent as they had to close the offices.

32. The Community of Sant'Egidio-led Rome peace talks between the Government and non-signatory opposition groups have stagnated since March, in particular as the latter insisted that the forum be reset with a different membership and agenda. The risk of intensified fighting between the Government forces and non-signatories remains, unless they are integrated into the peace process. Continued clashes between Government forces and the non-signatories could threaten the eventual roll-out of the permanent constitution-making process and election preparations in areas where the non-signatory groups have an active presence. At the same time, defections to the Government from the non-signatories continue and undermine trust between the mediation blocks.

2. Prevailing security environment and the causes of subnational violence

33. The factors that contribute to subnational violence in South Sudan are primarily the result of competition for dwindling resources; political positioning; a lack of governance systems, especially the absence of effective law enforcement and internal security mechanisms; a non-transparent, non-accountable financial system; and a lack of investment and services.

34. The lack of effective law enforcement and security agencies while civilian populations are well armed has led communities to increasingly take charge of their own security. This has also led to the proliferation of community defence groups primarily composed of armed youth. The absence of justice sector institutions and personnel throughout the country, as well as conflict resolution mechanisms and transhumance coordination mechanisms, has further led to patterns of retribution and spirals of conflict as grievances are unaddressed.

35. Subnational violence in the form of intercommunal conflict, sometimes influenced by political actors in Juba, continues to manifest locally. Since the signing of the Revitalized Agreement, a pattern has emerged, reflected in the attempts by the Government to weaken SPLM/A-IO using defections and proxy forces, or by leveraging ethnic identities and perceived communal grievances for political ends in SPLM/A-IO controlled locations. This tactic disrupts governance in these areas.

36. Separately, the ongoing crisis in the Sudan has created security tensions in localities in South Sudan bordering the Sudan, including in Upper Nile, Unity, Warrap and Western Bahr el Ghazal States and Ruweng Administrative Area, and events in Gambella, Ethiopia, have led to refugee flows into Upper Nile and Jonglei.

37. In Central Equatoria, disagreements over the natural resources also triggered conflict in some areas. For example, the National Salvation Front contests the gold mining area around Lobonok, and after several cases of access denials, UNMISS patrols reached the area twice from 10 to 11 August and from 13 to 15 September 2023 to monitor the security situation and human rights environment. The local communities indicated challenges of access to medical facilities in Tambura and Yappa, as well as harassment by the South Sudan People's Defence Forces operating in the area.

38. Conflict-related sexual violence remains prevalent in South Sudan. Perpetrators, including conventional parties to the conflict and community-based militias, have continued to use sexual violence as a tactic to inflict revenge, displace and terrorize civilians from their communities, homes and settlements. National security actors that bear the primary responsibility for protecting the population, namely, the South Sudan People's Defence Forces and the South Sudan National Police Service remain listed in the 2022 annual report of the Secretary-General on conflict-related sexual violence ([S/2022/272](#)).

3. Impact of climate change on the security situation

39. Climate change and its political, economic and security implications have been intensifying in South Sudan. The disruption and displacement as a result of climate shocks continue to threaten the coexistence of communities whose livelihoods are anchored in climate-sensitive livelihood systems. The impact of climate change has escalated the humanitarian crises, increased competition for scarce grazing resources and exacerbated the risk of violence.

40. South Sudan has faced perennial flooding in the past four years in most parts of the country, in particular in Unity, Jonglei, Warrap, Lakes, Central Equatoria and Upper Nile states. There have also been persistent drought conditions in other parts of the country, especially in Eastern Equatoria State. These extreme climate hazards have continued to disrupt and destroy livelihoods with the increased risk of diseases, such as cholera outbreaks, food insecurity and fuelling conflict and migration due to major crop and pasture losses and widespread water shortages. Floods and drought inhibit the operational activities of the South Sudan National Police Service as access to various locations remains limited.

41. With the absence of early warning systems in South Sudan, protracted displacements stretch the resources of host communities. In addition, even with seasonal cattle migration governed by the memorandum of understanding from the pre-migration conferences, the changes in the climate pattern are also disrupting the timing of return migration of the herders, generating new forms of tension, sometimes resulting in conflict and putting pastoral practices in crisis.

42. The political, security and economic impact of climate change is significant. On 13 August, the Environment Ministry stated that South Sudan would require \$100 billion in the next 27 years to mitigate and adapt to the impact of climate. The Government intends to raise \$20 billion by 2050 and mobilize the rest from international donors.

C. Economic factors

1. Funding gaps: budgetary allocations for the implementation of the road map

43. Funding gaps still need to be addressed, while necessary budgetary allocations towards the implementation of the Revitalized Agreement have yet to be provided. The national budget for the fiscal year 2023/2024 was approved on 11 August by the parliament, and the President signed it into law on 14 August. The total budget amounted to SSP 2.11 trillion (\$2.06 billion), of which \$48.85 million was allocated for peace implementation by institutions and mechanisms related to the peace process; \$275,342 to the National Elections Commission; \$2.14 million to the Ministry of Peacebuilding; \$280,706 to the National Constitutional Review Commission; \$236,893 to the Peace Commission; \$131,923 to the Political Parties Council; \$190,045 to the Commission for Refugee Affairs; \$301,051 to the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Commission; inter alia. Notably, there is a budget deficit of approximately \$261 million, which is expected to be financed through borrowing.

44. As in previous budgets, funding for implementing the peace process accounts for only approximately 2 to 3 per cent of the total, compared with other sectors such as infrastructure (21 per cent), mandatory expenditures (15 per cent) and security (11 per cent). However, historical patterns suggest the actual spending on the implementation of the peace agreement is likely to be lower than the budgeted amount. Key stakeholders, especially from the opposition political parties and civil society groups, have expressed concern about inadequate funding to implement the

Revitalized Agreement and pay public servant salaries. Given the pressure to fill the budget deficit of \$261 million, the additional requirement related to the peace agreement may lead to budgetary allocation disparity by either reductions in the expenditure from other sectors or the deferral of salary payments, which has been the common practice in the past. While the possibility of a supplementary budget remains, there is currently no ongoing discussion in this regard.

45. Civil society organizations have called for an increased allocation for elections, noting that the implementation of the road map alone would require \$200 million. SPLM-IO claims that insufficient budget allocations for critical tasks will jeopardize both the implementation of the road map and the conduct of elections. The Government continues to assure the public that an adequate budget for elections will be allocated within the national budget for fiscal year 2024/2025. However, this would leave little time for the completion of the constitution-making process, security arrangements, electoral preparations, repatriation, and resettlement of refugees and internally displaced persons.

2. Economic reforms and public financial management, constraints and causes of concern

46. The Government of South Sudan is confronted with challenges in the implementation of the Revitalized Agreement, particularly in areas of economic reforms and public financial management. While some progress has been made on revenue management, a wide range of reform items are either progressing at a slow pace or remain stagnant. The report of the Reconstituted Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission in June 2023 on the status of implementation of the Agreement noted a lack of progress and slow implementation of the Public Financial Management Reform Strategy since the establishment of the Public Financial Management-Governance Structure in April 2020. This specifically relates to the reforms aimed at formulating effective monetary and fiscal policies, enhancing resource management, increasing transparency on revenues and expenditure, and strengthening oversight and accountability.

47. There is also a significant lack of progress in the establishment of the Economic and Financial Management Authority, which is mandated to provide effective oversight of economic and public financial management and ensure transparency and accountability in the petroleum sector. Additionally, the creation by the Government of competing structures, coupled with insufficient human and financial resources allocated to the Anti-Corruption Commission impedes its ability to implement the required reforms to lead the Government's anti-corruption efforts. The reconstitution of this Commission remains pending and overdue.

48. Multiple challenges may have contributed to the limited progress in the implementation of provisions related to the chapter on resource, economic and financial management of the Revitalized Agreement. Financial constraints, lack of initiative and weak technical capacity are the primary obstacles on the path to sustainable economic and financial reforms. The effects of the slow progress of reforms contribute to the weak public financial management, rife with widespread allegations of corruption, exacerbating conditions of poverty and underdevelopment and consequently serving as triggers for conflict and violence.

3. Economic factors affecting humanitarian assistance and the reconstruction process

49. An estimated 9.4 million people are projected to require humanitarian and protection assistance in 2023, constituting 76 per cent of South Sudan's population and an increase of 500,000 people as compared with the figures from 2022. The

escalation in needs is attributed to factors such as conflict, widespread flooding, deepening food insecurity, lack of access to basic services, inflation, and high food prices.

50. The 2023 Humanitarian Response Plan was launched in December 2022, reflecting the request from the humanitarian community for \$1.7 billion to target 6.8 million of the 9.4 million people in need with urgent life-saving assistance and protection services. As at the end of September, the plan was funded at 51.7 per cent.

51. The crisis in the Sudan, which has triggered a large influx of refugees, returnees and third-country nationals into South Sudan since its onset on 15 April, has affected the already fragile humanitarian situation in the country, thus straining the humanitarian response. The disruption in cross-border trade and humanitarian corridors and breaks in the food supply chains from the Sudan have led to a 35 per cent increase in the cost of the minimum expenditure basket throughout South Sudan. The International Monetary Fund has estimated consumer prices will increase by 28 per cent in 2023. In addition, the reduction in the purchasing power of households exacerbates the vulnerability, especially among internally displaced persons, returnees, refugees and host communities.

52. Humanitarian actors have been forced to stretch their limited resources to new emergencies, and this has increased the need for further funding. As at 31 August, 250,967 individuals (58,428 households) had been registered at border crossings into South Sudan. There are growing concerns about competition over limited resources owing to congestion and overcrowding in points of entry. The increasing number of arrivals may lead to a deteriorating humanitarian and security situation along the points of entry and within host communities where the arrivals integrate.

53. Meanwhile, the annual commitment of \$100 million for the Special Reconstruction Fund by the Government as provided for in the Revitalized Agreement over the transition period has not materialized.

III. Integrated United Nations transition strategy

54. Following a workshop on early transition planning held from 16 to 18 May 2023, the leadership of United Nations entities in South Sudan articulated a vision for the transitional planning process and agreed on the foundational priorities for joint actions. The vision is intended to strengthen the strategic and operational coherence of the peace and development efforts of the United Nations system, and to enhance the capacities of South Sudanese stakeholders and partners. Furthermore, it was agreed that early transition planning should be underpinned by support for institutional capacity-building, to enhance national ownership in support of the Government to achieve its national development plan and enable a path towards peace and development. In this regard, the integrated United Nations transition strategy will focus on addressing critical capacity gaps.

55. The leadership of the United Nations entities in South Sudan also agreed that early transition planning should be accompanied by extensive stakeholder engagements, including with the Government, and a robust communication strategy around a shared vision of key priorities. The aim is to enhance national ownership and support the Government in achieving its national development plan and enable a path towards peace and development.

1. Transition: enabling the self-reliance of South Sudan

56. To enable the self-reliance of South Sudan, key transition pillars were identified based on a risk analysis of potential areas of relapse in the conflict dynamics. The following were identified as priority areas for support:

(a) Transition pillar I – Security sector reform, demobilization disarmament and reintegration and community violence reduction require United Nations support to national actors. Ensuring progress in these areas, as well as designing a United Nations integrated strategy to sustain protection gains in the long term, are imperative for the stability of South Sudan;

(b) Transition pillar II – Strengthening the rule of law, the expansion of access to justice and accountability, policy and legal reforms and the prevention of conflict-related sexual violence and gender-based violence are essential for lasting peace and stability. The capacity-building of actors in the formal justice sector and traditional courts is necessary at all stages of the judicial process;

(c) Transition pillar III – Addressing human rights challenges, including violations of the right to life, the rights of women, children and youth, frequent arbitrary and/or prolonged detention and prevalent impunity for human rights violations, is essential;

(d) Transition pillar IV – Civic space and political participation remain constricted. Empowering government and non-governmental institutions to support the media, human rights defenders and civil society is needed to prevent self-censorship, intimidation and harassment before, during and after the elections;

(e) Transition pillar V – Cross-cutting priorities on good offices, positive legacy and sustainability underpin the efforts under the four substantive pillars. This pillar reflects the cross-cutting priorities that underpin the other four transition pillars and are therefore critical to the success of early transition planning efforts. The good offices role of UNMISS needs to be leveraged to provide the needed space for actors to work on identified transition priorities, which are sometimes sensitive in nature and require political will to be achieved. Another key workstream under the pillar will be ensuring a positive legacy for the Mission. Enabling a positive legacy after the exit of UNMISS entails ensuring that the investments made by the Mission will serve national actors and the United Nations country team in positive ways after Mission withdrawal.

2. Addressing critical gaps towards building durable peace at the local and national levels

57. To enable comprehensive and effective transition planning that addresses identified challenges and supports South Sudan on its path to durable peace, the United Nations system in South Sudan is developing joint programmatic actions for each of the pillars and pillar-specific transition concepts to accompany the overall strategy. The activities are expected to be anchored in existing efforts, building on the concept of integration, national ownership and strengthening the implementation of the peace, humanitarian and development nexus.

58. Early transition planning is aimed at building capacities that will allow the United Nations system, inclusive of the Mission, agencies, funds and programmes, as well as the Peacebuilding Fund and key partners, to address joint priority areas, according to their own mandates and comparative advantages. United Nations leadership will drive the process by communicating its joint vision and priorities for early transition planning.

59. The refocusing of the United Nations system will be implemented gradually, guided by the realities on the ground, especially progress in the political and security situation in South Sudan.

IV. Observations and recommendations

60. Five years since the signing of the Revitalized Agreement, the causes of the delay in its implementation are principally rooted in the lack of political will, especially among the conventional parties to the Revitalized Agreement. It is now time to muster that political will to bring the peace process back on track towards free, fair and credible elections.

61. Above everything else, the peace process in South Sudan now seriously needs to be underpinned by a commitment to a spirit of practical compromise and the recognition of national interests above partisan concerns. Accordingly, it is necessary to replace instances of unilateralism observed in the past with a renewed leadership so that key decisions which do not require additional financial resources are taken in a timely manner.

62. Bearing in mind the challenges in the pre-transition phase and the key role played by external stakeholders in delivering and guaranteeing the Revitalized Agreement, there is now a consistent need for such guarantors to monitor, facilitate and resolve impasses during the final stages of the transition phase. Beyond the region, engagement from the broader international community in the South Sudan peace process has been constrained by current crises throughout the world. It will be critical to leverage the strengths of the region and the international community to support the South Sudanese in the months ahead. This support has to include meaningful incentives to fuel a change towards a government coming from the will of the citizens. I encourage IGAD, in close consultation with the African Union, to identify fresh leverage points to steer the process towards its peaceful conclusion during its final and most critical phase.

63. With 14 months remaining to elections according to the timeline outlined in the road map, I am increasingly concerned that several critical benchmarks remain unmet. In addition to the allocation of adequate resources, the parties are now required to immediately implement the following steps to allow for free, fair and credible elections by December 2024:

- (a) Finalize the implementation of the transitional security arrangements;
- (b) Clarify the way forward on the constitution-making process;
- (c) Operationalize relevant bodies, in particular those critical for the elections, including the reconstitution of the National Elections Commission and Political Parties Council and their funding;
- (d) Upon the reconstitution of the National Elections Commission, clarify the legal framework and funding of elections, considering the implementation feasibility within the existing time frame;
- (e) Clarify issues related to electoral boundary delimitation;
- (f) Agree on voter registration modalities;
- (g) Establish an election dispute resolution mechanism;
- (h) Determine the participation of refugees and internally displaced persons in the upcoming elections;

(i) Create and promote the conditions for a civic and political space appropriate for free, fair and credible elections;

(j) Establish a code of conduct which will define the parameters of legitimate political activity.

64. I am deeply concerned regarding the ability of the Government to independently organize and conduct elections without external support. In view of the uncertainty as to whether the necessary conditions will be met for free, fair and credible elections, and in line with the recommendations of the needs assessment mission endorsed by the Security Council (see [S/PRST/2021/20](#)), the support of the United Nations to South Sudan will be implemented in phases. The initial phase will be focused on establishing an enabling environment for political competition.

65. For South Sudan to progress towards elections, it is also necessary to address subnational violence and general insecurity throughout the country. As part of its effort to resolve security sector challenges, the transitional security arrangements have to be put in place without any further delay, in order to address intercommunal conflict. Plans to train and deploy the Necessary Unified Forces as a means to address violence, especially before, during and after the elections, as well as the creation of an impartial and representative security force have to be treated as a national priority.

66. UNMISS will continuously adapt its posture in line with its obligation to protect civilians. In response to assessing the ability of UNMISS for rapid response to a new conflict, in a Headquarters military and police capability study an expansion of the military by a battalion and additional formed police units has been recommended, among other measures.

67. In the light of the findings contained in the present report, UNMISS, through the use of the Comprehensive Planning and Performance Assessment System (CPAS) to evaluate its activities, will expand its geographical reach and physical presence and additional temporary operating bases will be established. Long-distance patrols will continue to be routinely conducted, and all-terrain vehicles will be purchased to navigate adverse weather conditions. The Mission is also implementing the recommendations of an after-action review of its intervention at the Malakal protection of Civilian site in June 2023.

68. UNMISS will continue to emphasize its integrated approach to its protection of civilian responsibilities, especially sustainable local level peace processes between communities in conflict. The Mission is at an advanced stage of adapting its structures for rapid response to early warning, including reviewing such indicators on a weekly basis. Human rights monitoring capacity and assistance to rule of law institutions will also be used to combat impunity and promote accountability, as these are key elements to mitigate intercommunal violence, and especially conflict-related sexual violence.

69. The United Nations continues to consult with the guarantors and relevant South Sudanese stakeholders to determine the critical conditions for the conduct of elections and to evaluate the establishment of the necessary electoral institutions. This exercise will identify priority institutions and processes that must be established by March 2024, as well as those administrative arrangements that can be deferred until closer to the elections. However, the window of opportunity to effect change is closing.

70. I also call upon the international community to bring South Sudan back on its radar despite other pressing global priorities. It is important that the international community speaks with one voice, backed by a shared assessment of the challenges, and coordinate its engagement and support towards an enabling and inclusive political process with the full participation of civil society, women and youth.

71. UNMISS will strengthen its engagement with the Revitalized Transitional Government of National Unity, political parties and civil society on making the elections a nation-building moment and not a source of division and conflict. I call upon all stakeholders to work collaboratively to expand civic and political space, including the promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms and to actively engage the people of South Sudan in shaping the destiny of their country.
