



Security Council

Distr.: General
15 October 2020

Original: English

Situation in Abyei

Report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to paragraph 33 of Security Council resolution [2497 \(2019\)](#), in which the Council requested to be informed of progress in implementing the mandate of the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA). It covers the period since the issuance of my previous report ([S/2020/308](#)), from 16 April to 15 October 2020. The report provides updates on, inter alia, political developments, the security situation, the operating environment and intercommunal dynamics. The report also provides updates on progress in the implementation of the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism.

II. Abyei

Political developments

2. The reporting period was marked by a continued improvement in bilateral relations between the Sudan and South Sudan. On 24 September 2020, the two countries agreed to form a joint technical committee to resume oil production in Unity State and at other key oil fields. The South Sudanese authorities also facilitated the negotiation process that led to the initialling, on 31 August, of a peace agreement between the transitional Government of the Sudan, the Sudanese Revolutionary Front and the Sudan Liberation Army led by Minni Minawi. The peace agreement was signed in Juba on 3 October.

3. In parallel, in Juba, on 27 August 2020, senior officials of the Sudan and South Sudan expressed their willingness to relaunch the political process on the final status of Abyei. At the request of the President of South Sudan, Salva Kiir, the Presidential Adviser for National Security, Tut Gatluak, the Minister for East African Affairs, Deng Alor, and the Co-Chair for South Sudan of the Abyei Joint Oversight Committee, Deng Arop, travelled to Khartoum during the third week of September and met with the Sudanese authorities to discuss the final status of Abyei and other border areas.

4. Notwithstanding the continued rapprochement between the Sudan and South Sudan, the peace process has made little progress in Abyei. The main developments at the local level were the appointment by the authorities in Juba and Khartoum of the countries' respective chief administrators. On 29 June 2020, the President of South



Sudan appointed Lieutenant General Kuol Diem Kuol as Chief Administrator for the Abyei Special Administrative Area. On 20 August, the Chair of the Sovereign Council of the Sudan, Lieutenant General Abdel Fattah Abdelrahman al-Burhan, signed a decree appointing Gumaa Dawood Musa Hamdan as Chief Administrator for the Abyei Administrative Area. This is the first time that Abyei has two chief administrators.

5. As part of his familiarization tour, the acting Head of Mission/Force Commander visited Khartoum from 6 to 10 September 2020. In addition to introducing himself and the incoming Chief of the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism to relevant counterparts, he discussed issues raised during the expanded Joint Political and Security Mechanism meeting held in Juba on 19 February. These included the operationalization of the Athony airstrip, measures to enhance security in Abyei and the resumption of the meetings of the Abyei Joint Oversight Committee.

6. On 8 September 2020, the acting Head of Mission/Force Commander met with the Chair of the Sovereign Council of the Sudan. The Chair welcomed the role played by UNISFA in ensuring security and stability in the Abyei Area and gave assurances that UNISFA had the support of the Chief Administrator appointed by the Sudan for its efforts on the ground. He also noted that the appointment of a civilian Deputy Head of Mission would go against the spirit of the 2011 Agreement, as would the operationalization of the Athony airstrip, and announced that a team would be established to study the matter.

7. On 8 and 9 September 2020, the acting Head of Mission/Force Commander met with the new Co-Chair for the Sudan of the Abyei Joint Oversight Committee, retired Major General Ezedin Osman. The Co-Chair gave the assurance that he fully supported the rapid resumption of Committee meetings and of the peace conferences that UNISFA had proposed to organize at the local level with representatives of the Ngok Dinka and Misseriya communities.

8. The acting Head of Mission/Force Commander visited Juba from 21 to 25 September 2020, where he interacted with the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Beatrice Wani Noah, the Minister of Defence, Angelina Teny, and the Chief of Staff of the South Sudan People's Defence Forces and the South Sudanese Deputy Co-Chair of the Abyei Joint Oversight Committee. UNISFA welcomed the discussions being held in Khartoum between the parties on the future of Abyei and noted its continued availability to facilitate similar discussions at the local level. The interlocutors expressed confidence that the visit by the Presidential Adviser for National Security and the Minister for East African Affairs to Khartoum would pave the way for a timely agreement on the final status of Abyei and other border areas, including the 14 Mile Area. In their view, with the signing of the peace agreement in Juba on 3 October, the conditions were in place for fruitful discussions on Abyei to be held.

9. UNISFA reminded its interlocutors of the decisions arising from the meeting of the Joint Political and Security Mechanism held on 19 February 2020, some of which were pending, including the call for the Abyei Joint Oversight Committee to resume regular meetings. UNISFA noted that some of those pending decisions could usefully be addressed within the Committee, as could more recent matters, in particular the appointment of two chief administrators for Abyei and the need to agree on how they would work together in the interest of the local communities. UNISFA also reiterated its invitation to South Sudan to take part, alongside Sudanese counterparts, in the development of a road map for the establishment of the Abyei police service in early October. Lastly, UNISFA announced its intention to convene a peace meeting before the end of the year between community representatives in Abyei, in part to ensure a

peaceful upcoming migration cycle, and called upon the parties to support those efforts.

10. On 29 September 2020, the acting Head of Mission/Force Commander engaged virtually with the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Horn of Africa, Parfait Onanga-Anyanga, to debrief him on the security and political situation in Abyei and on his meetings in Khartoum and Juba. The peace process was also discussed, as was the need for enhanced engagement with the African Union High-level Implementation Panel.

Conflict dynamics and the security situation

11. The general security situation in Abyei over the reporting period remained tense. Of the 40 recorded incidents, 8 are of particular concern and subject to subsequent investigations: 4 attacks against UNISFA personnel and 4 instances of intercommunal violence, including armed attacks on villages. There were seven incidents of particular concern during the previous reporting period.

12. The first two assaults on UNISFA occurred on 24 April 2020, when armed Misseriya attacked UNISFA troops in Sector Centre. The first attack occurred in the general area of Nainai and the second at the Alal temporary operating base. Two Misseriya were killed in the attacks when UNISFA troops returned fire in self-defence. The third attack occurred on 12 May, when two soldiers from the Force Protection Unit assigned to the headquarters of the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism in Kadugli were fired upon while driving from the Kadugli base to the Murta water point. While their vehicle was damaged, the soldiers were unharmed and returned safely to the Mechanism's headquarters. Lastly, on 24 June, an unknown armed group opened fire on a UNISFA convoy between Goli and Todach in Sector North, injuring three peacekeepers, one of them critically. He was airlifted for treatment to Addis Ababa, where he is in stable condition.

13. An incident of intercommunal violence that had a significant impact during the reporting period occurred on 13 April 2020. A group of armed men, suspected to be Misseriya, attacked the village of Mabok, Sector South, killing four Ngok Dinka, including the village chief, kidnapping two minors, burning some 50 tukuls and rustling more than 100 goats. On 8 August, some 70 armed men, suspected to be Ngok Dinka, attacked fellow Ngok Dinka employed as domestic workers for the Misseriya residents of Ibrahim village, located between Goli and Todach in Sector North. Three people died in the incident: a 4-year-old boy whose parents were Ngok Dinka domestic workers and two of the armed attackers. Four of the domestic workers, including two women, suffered gunshot wounds. A clash occurred at Meiram, just outside the Safe Demilitarized Border Zone in the general area of the Sumayah/War Abar team site of the Mechanism, between the Misseriya and the Ngok Dinka on 30 April. Three Ngok Dinka and two Misseriya were killed, while a number of residents fled to nearby villages for safety. Lastly, on 12 May, violent ethnic clashes in Kadugli left 26 people dead and 19 injured, while five World Food Programme staff were evacuated from Kadugli town to the UNISFA/Mechanism headquarters for safety. No instances of intercommunal violence linked to the reverse migration of the Misseriya through Abyei were reported.

14. Criminal acts and the presence of armed elements remained a source of concern during the reporting period. Acts of violence included cattle rustling, kidnapping and armed attacks on civilians along the main supply route in Abyei. On 5 July 2020, a 45-year-old Ngok Dinka man was shot dead in an armed attack suspected to have been carried out by Misseriya at Kolbul, in Sector Centre. On 28 July, about 20 head of cattle belonging to the Ngok Dinka community were rustled by an armed group, suspected to be Misseriya, in the Banton area in Sector South. On 13 July, a local

employee of Imdad Total Site Services, contracted by UNISFA, was shot dead on the Kadugli-Dilling-El Obeid road, some 3 km from the headquarters of the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism.

15. Despite the restrictions imposed because of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, UNISFA strove to contain the security situation and to maintain Abyei as a weapon-free zone, using its rapid response mechanism and presence in the most sensitive areas. These efforts were supported by the continued engagement of the United Nations police and the Community Liaison Office with Abyei residents and the mentorship of members of the community protection committees. To enhance its security coverage and ensure the protection of civilians, UNISFA interacted with the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) on matters of mutual concern within the inter-mission working group. In that context, the acting Head of Mission/Force Commander met in Juba with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for South Sudan, David Shearer, and the Deputy Force Commander of UNMISS on 23 September 2020.

16. Further to the agreement reached between the parties during the expanded meeting of the Joint Political and Security Mechanism held on 19 February 2020, UNISFA operationalized the Joint Military Observer Committee and the joint military observer team mechanisms. As a result, two joint ground monitoring missions comprising both South Sudanese and Sudanese national monitors were deployed in Athony (Sector South) and Diffra (Sector North), respectively. The latter deployment drew protests from young Misseriya in Diffra who opposed the deployment of South Sudanese monitors in the northern part of the Abyei Area. The full activation of the Joint Military Observer Committee/joint military observer team is yet to be completed. In addition, further to the agreement, four permanent checkpoints were established, at Agok (Sector South), Dokura (Sector Centre), Todach (Sector North) and Farouk (Sector North), to search for weapons and ammunition.

17. The planned reduction of troops in line with Security Council resolution [2469 \(2019\)](#) is ongoing and expected to be completed by the end of the troop rotation under way. Once it is completed, UNISFA will maintain the authorized troop ceiling of 3,550, including individual uniformed personnel for both UNISFA and the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism.

Intercommunity dialogue

18. During the period under review, UNISFA continued to engage with the Ngok Dinka and Misseriya authorities and community leaders to further the local-level peace process. As indicated in my previous report of 16 April 2020 ([S/2020/308](#)) and in my letter to the President of the Security Council dated 29 July 2020 ([S/2020/767](#)), the incidents in Nainai and Kolom on 19 and 22 January, respectively, as well as the incident in Mabok on 13 April, compounded intercommunal tensions and negatively affected peace efforts at the local level. The Ngok Dinka were reluctant to engage with the Misseriya, demanding that the Misseriya recommit to the agreements arrived at between the two communities in the dry season of 2016, including a return to traditional practices of collaboration and dispute settlement. UNISFA efforts to have community representatives engage within the joint community peace committee were unsuccessful. Owing largely to the COVID-19 outbreak, attempts by UNISFA to reactivate dialogue at the level of traditional leaders following two inconclusive meetings in Diffra in March and April did not bear fruit.

19. On 22 April 2020, UNISFA met with the Misseriya members of the joint community peace committee in Goli and on 25 April with the head of the Abyei file appointed by South Sudan, the Co-Chair for South Sudan of the Abyei Joint Oversight Committee and the Chief Administrator appointed by South Sudan to push for the

resumption of the peace dialogue. Similar calls were made on 22 June and 21 July during meetings with, respectively, the outgoing and incoming chief administrators appointed by South Sudan and again on 22 July during a meeting in Diffra with the Co-Chair for the Sudan of the Committee. Lastly, shortly after his arrival, the incoming acting Head of Mission/Force Commander of UNISFA also pressed for a resumption of the dialogue during his introductory meeting with the Ngok Dinka on 19 August and, again, during his meeting in Diffra on 15 September with Misseriya traditional leaders.

20. The overtures made by the Misseriya Paramount Chief, Nazar Mukhtar Babo Nimr, to resume engagement at the level of joint community peace committees were unsuccessful, as the Ngok Dinka requested that agreement be reached at the level of traditional leaders beforehand. Furthermore, in addition to the COVID-19 mitigation measures, two other issues hindered the resumption of dialogue. The first was a disagreement over the way in which to refer to the Misseriya in written agreements. The Ngok Dinka insisted to use the term Misseriya “Ajaira” to denote those Misseriya clans whose transhumance falls within the Abyei Area, whereas the Misseriya were against that use. The second issue was the alleged rift within the Misseriya, which affected the credibility of their leaders. The Ngok Dinka outreach was affected by the replacement of the Chief Administrator appointed by South Sudan on 29 June 2020, as the new Chief Administrator needed time to settle in.

21. Despite these disagreements, UNISFA managed to bring both sides together during three ad hoc joint community peace committee meetings, the principal purpose of which was to manage efforts led by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to prevent the spread of COVID-19 at the Amiet common market. While UNISFA participated in the COVID-19 working group of the Abyei administration appointed by South Sudan, there was no equivalent forum in the north of Abyei. This prompted UNISFA to bring together Misseriya stakeholders in Diffra on 14 July 2020 to forge a joint front against COVID-19.

22. UNISFA efforts notwithstanding, the absence of joint forums at the local level was particularly problematic following the Ngok Dinka attack on Ibrahim village on 8 August 2020, after which the Misseriya refused to allow the remains of two Ngok Dinka perpetrators to be removed. The increased hostility between the two communities was also evident when the Ngok Dinka blocked the transfer to Diffra of a vehicle gifted by UNISFA to the Misseriya to conduct activities to prevent the spread of COVID-19. The matter was resolved when the mission leadership interceded with the Chief Administrator appointed by South Sudan, who was of the view that any UNISFA interaction with the Misseriya administration should be conducted only in Muglad, outside the Abyei Area.

23. On 31 August 2020, to resume the peace process, UNISFA and United Nations system agencies, funds and programmes drafted a peace agenda that included intra-community consultations, meetings at the level of traditional leaders and pre-migration conferences along the three migration corridors when the dry season starts.

24. Despite the pandemic, UNISFA continued to implement quick-impact projects to support the local population impartially and bolster the implementation of the mission’s mandate. Funds allotted for those projects were distributed equally across the Abyei Area. With the exception of the Kolom water yard project, where a slight delay has been incurred because of the attack of 22 January 2020, all 15 quick-impact projects implemented in 2019–2020 have been completed. The focus of the projects remained on water, health, traditional justice and the rule of law, community and social development, and women’s empowerment and education. The projects comprised the construction of or improvements to solar water yards (deep boreholes),

primary schools, a hospital, a meeting hall, a community hall and one facility at the Amiet common market run by the community protection committee. A quarter of the projects was focused on facilities used jointly by the Ngok Dinka and Misseriya at the Amiet common market and in Todach.

Rule of law issues

25. UNISFA continued to promote the rule of law, human rights and the administration of justice in line with international standards and best practices. UNISFA visited the customary courts to observe their proceedings and provide guidance pertaining to international fair trial and due process standards. United Nations police conducted 35 visits to detention centres to advise and mentor members of the community protection committees and the joint protection committee on international standards for the treatment of detainees. With the outbreak of COVID-19, UNISFA encouraged customary judges to rapidly review the cases of some of the detainees to decongest the detention centres. In addition, 63 detainees suspected of minor or bailable offences, including nine female prisoners and seven juveniles, were released.

26. United Nations police, in collaboration with the International Organization for Migration (IOM), strengthened the capacity of community protection committees for dispute resolution through two separate training events on mediation and dispute resolution for 10 committee members, including six women in Agok and 10 male members in Abathok, conducted from 1 to 3 June 2020, and through an advanced training event for the same participants conducted from 5 to 9 June. The training was focused on conflict mediation and resolution in community policing and on the analysis and handling of emerging disputes during the pandemic, including those involving sexual and gender-based violence.

27. Owing to COVID-19 mitigation measures and impassable roads, the public and community outreach activities conducted by United Nations police were limited. Some planned activities, including co-location activities, patrols and visits to detention centres, were reduced. Nevertheless, United Nations police conducted 159 joint patrols, 23 independent security observation patrols, 117 co-location activities, 40 visits to sites for internally displaced persons and seven air reconnaissance patrols in collaboration with military observers and national monitors from both the Sudan and South Sudan. United Nations police also conducted 25 crime awareness campaigns, 16 COVID-19 awareness campaigns and 10 outreach workshops. UNISFA troops and United Nations police continued to collect information from community members through the community protection committees to improve the timeliness of interventions. A total of 837 criminal acts were recorded during the reporting period, compared with 759 during the previous period. However, those statistics may not adequately reflect actual crime levels, as access restrictions posed by COVID-19 and impassable roads did not allow for optimal coverage. Nonetheless, United Nations police coverage expanded to three additional team sites in Noong and Tejalei, increasing to seven the number of team sites covered.

28. The current strength of the United Nations police stands at 35 officers – 11 women and 24 men – against an authorized strength of 640 police personnel, comprising 148 individual police officers and 492 formed police unit personnel. Hence, as at 26 August 2020, women accounted for 31.43 per cent of the police component. Three seconded police officers are holding the senior positions of Deputy Police Commissioner, Chief of Operations and Sexual and Gender-based Violence Crime Adviser. The police component submitted to the Sudan 108 visa applications for individual police officers, comprising 30 officers in the prioritized group (10 women, 33.33 per cent) and 78 in the general group (22 women, 28.21 per cent). The

selection of the UNISFA Police Commissioner has been finalized and onboarding is under way.

29. The process for generating and deploying the three authorized and identified formed police units has been hampered by the travel restrictions related to COVID-19 and the non-issuance of entry visas to the Sudan for the officials from those identified police-contributing countries intending to visit the mission for mandatory force generation activities. Nonetheless, the Secretariat completed the predeployment inspection and assessment of one of those units and is currently waiting for the Sudanese authorities to issue entry visas for their personnel and customs clearance for their equipment. Reconnaissance teams for the deployment of the two other formed police units are expected in Abyei in November 2020.

30. UNISFA has completed the draft reform documents for the establishment of the Abyei police service. The mission has sent three invitations and a reminder to both parties to attend the joint integrated planning exercise with a view to developing a road map for the establishment of the service. In the absence of a response from South Sudan, the meetings were not held. UNISFA has sent another invitation to both Governments proposing to hold the joint meeting in Abyei, or online, from 5 to 8 October 2020. Neither party has responded.

Humanitarian situation and recovery activities

31. Humanitarian and recovery needs in the Abyei Area remained significant. Since April 2020, the Area has been facing increased small-scale clashes coupled with an increase in the number of armed people, which has affected planned and ongoing humanitarian and recovery activities in the Area. In addition, the lockdowns imposed in the neighbouring areas of South Sudan and the Sudan and in other countries because of the COVID-19 pandemic affected humanitarian and recovery activities such as the pre-positioning of food for the rainy season, the vaccination and treatment of Misseriya cattle, and basic social services including health-care, nutrition, education and water, sanitation and hygiene activities.

32. Despite the pandemic, pockets of insecurity and poor road conditions, the agencies, funds and programmes, in coordination with NGOs, continued to provide humanitarian and recovery assistance to 210,000 vulnerable people within the Area, comprising 92,000 people from the Ngok Dinka community, 19,000 internally displaced persons from the Ngok Dinka community in southern Abyei and Abyei town, 9,000 people displaced from the neighbouring states in South Sudan, 39,000 people from the Misseriya community, 6,500 other South Sudanese (mainly Nuer), 39,000 seasonal Misseriya pastoralists and 5,500 Fallata nomads who left Abyei in early June 2020 and are expected to return late in October.

33. Agencies, funds and programmes, as well as partners, were engaged mostly in COVID-19 preparedness and response during the reporting period. In accordance with the Abyei joint COVID-19 response framework, the humanitarian partners supported point of entry and screening activities by establishing screening points for passengers and truck drivers at the Amiet common market and by conducting screening at health-care facilities. Likewise, awareness-raising activities were carried out by airing messages about COVID-19 on Abyei FM radio. Home health promoters, supported by international NGOs, reached out to the communities in southern Abyei with awareness-raising messages. Households were reached through the integrated community mobilization network and public address systems. Posters and pamphlets with awareness-raising messages in Arabic and Dinka were distributed and placed in key locations. The United Nations and NGOs supported three isolation centres, located in Agok, Abyei town and Goli, and a quarantine centre at the Amiet common market. Personal protective equipment and supplies were distributed to health-care

facilities. In addition, the aid community supported the collection, transport and testing of COVID-19 samples.

34. More than 115,000 vulnerable people benefited from food assistance-related activities, including general food distribution for internally displaced persons and school meals for children in central and southern parts of the Abyei Area. Efforts to support community livelihood activities continued, with over 100,000 livestock vaccinated against various diseases and over 15,000 livestock treated, benefiting more than 5,000 households. Vocational training events were held throughout the Area, targeting the Ngok Dinka and Misseriya communities.

35. As regards health and nutrition, 13 primary and two secondary health-care facilities throughout the Abyei Area remained operational. Of those, four in the north were reoperationalized. A plan is under way to operationalize two more clinics, one in Goli and one at the Amiet common market. Those two facilities are currently being used as COVID-19 isolation centres. In addition, humanitarian organizations provided routine immunization health support by holding consultations and providing essential drugs, which benefited some 130,000 people. Per month, nutrition screening and support for patients with moderate and acute malnutrition in the Area were provided to an average of 12,000 children under 5 years of age and to 1,200 pregnant and lactating women. At most facilities, the health-care and nutrition services continued to be supported by awareness-raising and capacity-building activities, on-the-job training for clinical staff, training of elementary health-service personnel at the village level and training sessions on health given to community members and health-care facility staff.

36. The installation of six new handpumps and the rehabilitation of five existing handpumps in the south of Abyei improved communities' access to clean water. Three broken water yards were repaired in Abyei town, and 11 handpumps were upgraded to mini-solar water yards in the north of Abyei and at public facilities in Abyei town. These efforts benefited 19,000 people, including newly internally displaced persons in Abyei town and at public and social facilities. In addition, sanitation and hygiene kits were made available in villages at high risk of experiencing a COVID-19 outbreak. The activities were supplemented with water management and technical training on the basic maintenance of water taps and generators.

37. Under the school meals programme, meals continued to be distributed to over 23,000 children in 34 primary and secondary schools in southern and central Abyei. Psychosocial support continued to be given to schoolchildren, and schools in the north of the Abyei Area continued to be upgraded. Two new classrooms were constructed in Makines to accommodate the increased number of children in the village. Given school closures as a result of COVID-19, arrangements were made for distance learning by radio. Once the lessons are recorded, they will be played on Abyei FM radio.

38. Protection, in particular of children and against gender-based violence, remained the key challenge because of the limited resources available to address the needs in the Area.

Women and peace and security

39. The implementation of the women and peace and security mandate continued, albeit with reduced activities owing to COVID-19. The pandemic fostered alternative and creative approaches and strengthened the mission's partnerships with women and other stakeholders on the continued implementation of the mandate.

40. The UNISFA leadership continued to engage with local authorities to promote decision-making by women. A positive outcome was the call made by the Co-Chair

appointed by South Sudan of the Abyei Joint Oversight Committee during a meeting with UNISFA on 28 April 2020 for the participation of women in peace processes. The new Chief Administrator appointed by South Sudan similarly highlighted the importance of women's empowerment during a public address that he delivered upon his arrival in Abyei on 20 July. UNISFA leveraged the demonstrated commitment of local leaders to engage with women leaders from the Ngok Dinka community to advocate the appointment of female personnel in the local administration. The efforts resulted in the identification and nomination of competent women for possible appointment.

41. To further strengthen the role of women and youth associations in conflict prevention and resolution, UNISFA is working with an NGO, Concordis International, on the involvement of women and young people in conflict analysis, as well as a capacity-gap assessment for women and youth associations in the Abyei Area. The findings will facilitate the development of a project to strengthen the capacity of the associations to contribute to conflict resolution and prevention. Their participation will contribute to shifting dynamics and broadening perspectives, which will in turn build buy-in among the communities in local peace processes.

42. On 23 March 2020, the Secretary-General launched an appeal for a global ceasefire in response to COVID-19, which presented an opportunity for women to play their role as an important constituency by calling for peace in Abyei. On 12 May, UNISFA engaged on the appeal with the Abyei Women's Association from the Ngok Dinka community, after which the Association issued a press statement in which it called upon all armed elements to observe a ceasefire. Women have, moreover, played a major role in their communities as conduits of information on COVID-19 and its gendered effects. With joint support from UNISFA and IOM, women's associations from the Ngok Dinka and Misseriya communities engaged in the local production and free distribution of 30,000 cloth facemasks to persons identified as vulnerable in Abyei, thus playing a crucial and visible role in local-level COVID-19 prevention.

43. UNISFA engaged with local communities, including community protection committees and women leaders, on sexual and gender-based violence, and continued to monitor and follow up on allegations of human rights abuses, particularly those committed against women and children, and advocate their prevention. UNISFA also engaged with local communities on sexual and gender-based violence by carrying out awareness-raising activities, with United Nations police conducting 89 sensitization events throughout Abyei and UNISFA advocating the prevention of such violence. The engagement resulted in the release of two underage girls who had been detained unlawfully by community protection committees for not consenting to arranged marriages.

44. During the reporting period, UNISFA recorded nine cases of alleged sexual and gender-based violence involving nine survivors, including four minors, an increase compared with the five cases reported during the same period in 2019. There were five cases of rape involving five victims, including one minor, and one case of attempted rape involving one minor, while two other cases involved underage and arranged marriages that could amount to statutory rape. There was one case of domestic violence involving one victim. To strengthen the response to and prevention of sexual and gender-based violence, UNISFA, on 1 September 2020, held a training event on that topic in collaboration with the Abyei Women's Association for nine women and four men from the Ngok Dinka community representing the local administration, the women's association and the community protection committee. Bringing the various stakeholders together was beneficial, as it created collaboration among them on response and prevention. A positive outcome was the establishment of a joint community protection committee, a women's association and an office and

service desk of the local administration for sexual and gender-based violence equipped with a victim hotline.

Operations of the Mine Action Service

45. Travel and face-to-face contact were limited owing to COVID-19. This affected mine action activities, some of which had to be cancelled. In March 2020, regular direct risk education on explosive remnants of war in the local communities was suspended and, on 4 May, the clearance and disposal of explosive ordnance was interrupted because it was uncertain that clearances for medical evacuations could be obtained in a timely fashion. Although the four team sites of the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism remained operational, planned ground monitoring missions were cancelled. Nonetheless, Mine Action Service clearance teams remained available to UNISFA for emergency response and ad hoc support so as to facilitate the unhindered movements, access and deployment of UNISFA, the Mechanism, humanitarian actors and civilians.

46. Mine Action Service teams recovered and destroyed, in controlled demolitions, six explosive remnants of war, five AK-47 assault rifles and 272 rounds of small arms ammunition confiscated by UNISFA troops. A total of 18,415 square metres of land in the Abyei Area was assessed as being safe from explosive hazards, including a helicopter landing site, an area previously contaminated with landmines and two secondary routes that supported UNISFA force mobility. On 8 June 2020, in support of a United Nations police community interaction initiative, 77 men, women, boys and girls living in the Abyei Area received explosive ordnance risk awareness training. In addition, five sessions on safety awareness regarding explosive remnants of war were delivered to 40 UNISFA personnel, including 6 women, as part of their induction training. The Mine Action Service provided support to the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism by fully deploying patrol support teams and having personnel present at all the Mechanism's sites to ensure effective and timely assistance when required. As a result, nine ground monitoring missions were supported with mine-protected vehicles at team site 11 (Kiir Adem) following the resumption of patrolling on 27 July.

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

47. On 13 January 2020, the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism established its fourth team site, in Abu Qussa. This completed the initial operating capacity phase of the Mechanism's deployment mandate. Currently, the Mechanism has four team sites: Safahah/Kiir Adem, Sumayah/War Abar, Tishwin and Abu Qussa.

48. During the reporting period, minimal progress was recorded in relation to the benchmarks of the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism and the decisions of the Joint Political and Security Mechanism owing to the pandemic. This in turn affected progress towards the opening of the crossing corridors that had been agreed upon in the resolution of the Joint Political and Security Mechanism of 18 March 2019 and in the border demarcation activities carried out by the Joint Border Commission and the Joint Demarcation Committee. The Joint Political and Security Mechanism was unable to hold meetings as scheduled, and planned operational activities and meetings of the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism were suspended. Aerial and ground monitoring missions were put on hold because of restrictions imposed by the host countries to curb the spread of COVID-19. While ground monitoring missions resumed on 27 July 2020, the onset of the rainy season rendered most areas inaccessible.

49. Team site 22 (Abu Qussa) remains non-operational owing to the absence from the location of South Sudanese national monitors, caused in turn by the presence of elements of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army in Opposition (SPLM/A-IO) in the general area of Abu Qussa/Wunkur. The deployment of national monitors to Abu Qussa had been authorized at meetings between the Chief of the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism and the senior national monitor for South Sudan, and during a subsequent meeting in Juba. A reconnaissance flight for the senior national monitor to Abu Qussa is expected to be conducted in the first week of November 2020, and it is hoped that South Sudanese national monitors will deploy soon thereafter. Furthermore, together with the acting Head of Mission/Force Commander, the Chief of the Mechanism engaged with officials in Khartoum and in Juba between 6 and 10 September, and between 21 and 25 September, respectively. During the visits, UNISFA urged its interlocutors to resume the meetings of the Joint Political and Security Mechanism so that further progress could soon be made on all seven measures listed in paragraph 3 of Security Council resolution [2497 \(2019\)](#). It is expected that meetings of the Joint Political and Security Mechanism and the activities of the Joint Border Commission and Joint Demarcation Committee will resume as soon as possible.

IV. Administrative aspects and mission support

50. UNISFA remains the most remote mission headquarters. It is located in an extremely non-permissive environment in which challenges posed by long and difficult supply chains must be overcome by perseverance, creativity and a flexible approach to problem-solving. Force mobility, the environmental footprint, living conditions, real-life support (water, rations and fuel) and improved connectivity remain the focus of the mission support component.

51. As at 15 September 2020, UNISFA had 155 international civilian staff against an authorized total of 177, 76 national civilian staff against an authorized total of 85 and 32 United Nations Volunteers against an authorized total of 36. The vacancy rate stood at 12.43 per cent for international staff and 10.59 per cent for national staff. Women comprised 18 per cent of civilian staff. As at 7 September, the visa approval rate was about 50 per cent: of the 350 visas requested for UNISFA personnel and visitors, the Government of the Sudan had granted 177, while 173 remained pending (8 for international staff members, 8 for military personnel, 109 for police personnel, 12 for official visitors, 10 for consultants and 26 for other contractors).

52. Company operating bases remained deployed at Farouk, Diffra, Goli and Todach (Sector North); Dokura/Rumajak, Noong, Highway and Abyei (Sector Centre); and Marial Achak, Athony, Banton, Tejalei and Agok (Sector South). Temporary operating bases for dry season deployment were established at Shegeg (Sector North); Alal (Sector Centre); Rumamer and Leu (Sector South); and Aganitok (quick reaction force). With the start of the rainy season, the temporary operating bases in Aganitok, Shegeg and Alal were closed. UNISFA also provided support for team sites 11 (Safahah/Kiir Adem) and 12 (Sumayah/War Abar) in sector 1 (Gok Machar), and to team sites 21 (Tishwin) and 22 (Abu Qussa/Wunkur) in sector 2 (Kadugli).

53. Infrastructure and environmental installations were upgraded at all UNISFA camps. The waste management yard in Abyei is operational in accordance with the recommendations contained in the environmental strategy of the Department of Operational Support. Phase 1 of the implementation of field remote infrastructure monitoring has been completed and will now be implemented in the sectors and at the team sites. Security-related installations such as guard posts have been constructed at all team sites in the Abyei Area. During the reporting period, the level II hospital was

being renovated and 50 hybrid solar air conditioning units were installed. The new mission headquarters was fully operationalized and the former headquarters reconfigured to accommodate the expanded police component. The impact of floods on accommodation camps in Abyei was minimized with the construction of concrete footpaths between accommodations and office areas. A temporary flood discharge sump is operational and earthen drainage channels have been excavated. Accommodations for civilian and uniformed personnel were expanded and improved as new prefabricated buildings were built and secondary roofing constructed.

54. The expansion of the Tejalei and Noong team sites to accommodate United Nations police was completed. To address the often-impassable road conditions, UNISFA contracted a third-party operator service for its heavy equipment in order to augment the military engineering unit capabilities to increase the mission's capacity to improve accessibility and force mobility. The effort was a significant success and the mission has further increased its capacity for force mobility by transferring heavy equipment from the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur. Negotiations to obtain a site for test-firing of weapons were put on hold owing to issues related to COVID-19.

55. As regards the installations of the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism, mission support is rehabilitating the accommodation facilities at all team sites, as well as access routes. The erection of permanent accommodation structures is in progress at team sites 12 and 22, while engineering works are taking place at team sites 11 and 21.

56. The mission continued to face shortages of laterite, gravel and other materials, and its contractors were subjected to delayed road clearances from the Sudan, leading to the suspension of additional infrastructure work.

57. Information and communications technology coverage continued to be expanded to assist troop mobilization. Tetra radio coverage was expanded at the team sites in Tejalei and Noong. Wi-Fi access points were doubled in number at all team sites, which significantly increased the availability of wireless Internet service. To mitigate the impact of the weather on the low-Earth orbit satellite-based primary Internet service during the rainy season, the UNISFA Field Technology Services team increased the capacity of its alternate Internet service provider to ensure communications at all sites even in inclement weather. To enhance information-sharing with the local community and act as an early warning system, the team worked with United Nations police to provide means of communication to local communities.

58. Starting in early April 2020, air operations were reduced owing to COVID-19 restrictions and the closure of international flights and air space. The number of flight hours projected for patrols, logistics and administration tasks was significantly reduced. The rotation of troops was postponed to ensure that incoming troops had time for the mandatory quarantine. Crew rotation was equally affected. The mission continued to operate without military helicopters, instead utilizing commercial helicopters until the military helicopters are replaced. The replacement of the third fixed-wing aircraft is also pending.

Culture of performance

59. UNISFA tracks and reports mission performance through metrics and targets that it has developed as part of a performance management system. The mission measures and improves outcomes related to force mobility, environment, infrastructure development and mandate implementation. Results are regularly reported to the mission leadership, managers, relevant end users and Headquarters. The metrics used are specifically designed to better inform decision-making on such matters as infrastructure, environmental issues and force deployment. Indicators of

performance include mobilizing road repairs in four major patrol and resupply routes simultaneously within one week of rains subsiding, reducing risk from waterborne disease from moderate to minimal in the dry season and high to minimal in the wet season, reducing water consumption by 50 per cent across all locations, reducing latency by improving force mobility through enhanced horizontal engineering capacity (improvement of 25 per cent) and reducing the downtime of major plant infrastructure in remote locations through telemetry, automation and predictive analysis (improvement of 73 per cent).

COVID-19 measures

60. In compliance with the instructions of the Secretary-General, UNISFA established a COVID-19 task force on 11 March 2020 whose aim is to assist with the development of the mission's emergency preparedness and contingency planning. Using situation-based planning, a risk matrix and trigger points, the task force has charted a contingency plan and a medical plan, enabling the mission to enhance its resilience and agility, and be better prepared for the pandemic. As at 30 September, there had been 52 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in the local community, with two confirmed deaths from COVID-19. UNISFA had 12 positive cases, based on the polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test, and one death suspected to be from COVID-19. Of the 12 PCR-positive cases, 6 were international staff, 2 were international contractors, 2 were uniformed personnel and 2 were troop-contributing country personnel. The rotation of troop-contributing country personnel resumed on 16 July. A quarantine facility with 220 beds where incoming personnel from troop-contributing countries are quarantined before being dispatched to their locations has been established in Kadugli. To monitor compliance with COVID-19 measures and guidelines, the task force has a subcommittee on compliance that conducts checks at all mission camps, company operating bases and team sites. The findings are presented to the task force and subsequently submitted to the mission leadership for decision-making. The mission has circulated compliance measures using posters, news briefs and broadcasts to enhance the awareness of personnel and inform them of possible disciplinary action and other consequences in cases of non-compliance. To support the local community, UNISFA has gifted two ambulances and personal protective equipment kits. UNISFA will sign a memorandum of understanding to support local hospitals once they are operational.

61. UNISFA acquired ventilators and adequate personal protective equipment through the global systems contract of the Global Service Centre. As an interim measure, whenever the mission encountered supply chain challenges, it procured personal protective equipment on local markets in Khartoum and Entebbe, Uganda. The task force has a subcommittee on supply that holds weekly meetings to discuss stock levels, reorder and plan the distribution of the equipment to UNISFA personnel. Given the mission's limited medical capabilities, supportive medical care can be provided to patients with mild and moderate cases of COVID-19 only. There is no level III intensive care facility within the mission or in the local community and therefore there is no capability to handle severe and critical cases. All such cases, especially those with underlying comorbidities, are to be evacuated to specialized designated centres in Addis Ababa or Nairobi. In the absence of PCR testing capability, UNISFA has utilized antibody testing in an effort to project the hot-spot groups and categories and prioritize personnel who required more intensive infection control and preventive measures. From the beginning of the pandemic, the mission counselling unit has provided input for the contingency plan on ways to address the psychosocial aspects of the pandemic. UNISFA personnel who were outside the mission and not able to return are now able to do so, as Khartoum airport is partially operational. Prior to the reopening of Khartoum airport, the mission had made a stop-gap arrangement through Addis Ababa.

62. Owing to the remoteness of the mission and the non-permissive operational environment, UNISFA faces many challenges that affect the timely provision of effective medical care to both COVID-19 and non-COVID-19 patients. There is no airport in Abyei for fixed-wing aircraft that could be used for urgent medical and casualty evacuation. The lack of night flying capability can add several hours of delay in life-threatening emergencies. No higher-level medical facilities with level III intensive care capability are available nearby to handle emergencies. The nearest such facilities are in Khartoum, Nairobi, Addis Ababa and Kampala, which require more than five hours to reach during daylight. Flight clearances must be secured from the relevant Governments and, over the past six months, the mission has experienced several delays in obtaining clearance for medical evacuation flights as well as normal passenger and cargo flights with medical supplies. Furthermore, the World Health Organization is not represented in the mission area. Logistics and customs clearance procedures are difficult and lengthy. The mission is dependent on the Sudan, South Sudan or Uganda for clearance of goods and supplies. The restriction on air and surface transport is affecting the mission's supply chain and operation, as well as the movement of personnel within the areas of operations. The lack of diagnostic testing capability for both the community and the mission, in particular the lack of PCR and diagnostic testing equipment, makes it difficult to realistically assess the impact of the pandemic in Abyei.

63. UNISFA recorded no allegations of sexual misconduct during the reporting period. As part of the conduct and discipline strategy, as well as of its COVID-19 contingency plan, UNISFA continued to conduct community outreach activities and provide reminders to staff members of the heightened need to maintain the highest standards of integrity, professionalism and respect for diversity.

V. Financial aspects

64. By its resolution [2519 \(2020\)](#) of 14 May 2020, the Security Council extended the mandate of UNISFA until 15 November. The General Assembly, by its resolution [74/283](#) of 30 June, appropriated the amount of \$263.8 million for the maintenance of the Force for the period from 1 July 2020 to 30 June 2021. As at 28 September 2020, unpaid assessed contributions to the special account for UNISFA amounted to \$70.2 million. Should the Council decide to extend the mandate of UNISFA beyond 15 November, the cost of maintaining the mission would be limited to the amounts approved by the Assembly. The total outstanding assessed contributions for all peacekeeping operations as at that date amounted to \$3,606.5 million. Reimbursements of troop costs has been made for the period up to 30 June, while reimbursement of the costs of contingent-owned equipment and self-sustainment has been made for the period up to 31 March in accordance with the quarterly payment schedule.

VI. Observations and recommendations

65. I am encouraged by the continued improvement in relations between Juba and Khartoum, as demonstrated by the key role played by South Sudan in facilitating the talks between the Sudan, the Sudanese Revolutionary Front and the Sudan Liberation Movement/Minni Minnawi, which led to the signing on 3 October 2020 in Juba of a peace agreement. It is my hope that the Sudan and South Sudan can build on this collaboration and give new impetus to a political process that would lead to an agreement on the final status of Abyei and the demarcation of the border. In that connection, I am further encouraged by discussions on Abyei and other border areas conducted by the parties in Khartoum in the second half of September and hope, in

the interest of the people of Abyei and of the two parties, that those will soon bear fruit.

66. While I am also encouraged by the continued rapprochement between the two countries and by the recent discussions on Abyei held between the parties in Khartoum, I urge the parties to also resume discussions within the Abyei Joint Oversight Committee, as provided for in the decisions taken at the meeting of the Joint Political and Security Mechanism of 19 February 2020. I believe that the Committee could be an appropriate forum to discuss and come to an agreement on the modalities for cooperation between the chief administrators recently appointed by South Sudan and the Sudan. In the same vein, I urge the timely resumption of the Mechanism's meetings to follow up on some of the decisions made at those meetings, including those referred to by the presidencies. Those include not only the issue of protection of the Diffra oil fields, but also the formation of a joint investigative team formed by both countries to investigate the attacks that occurred in Nainai and Kolom on 19 and 22 January. In the light of the COVID-19 restrictions, such meetings could be held online, if necessary.

67. I am concerned that no progress has been made towards the operationalization of the Athony airstrip or the issuance of outstanding visas for three formed police units and 108 individual police officers. I note that, if no visas are issued by 15 October 2020, the United Nations police strength will remain at 35 police officers, 16 of whom will be in the process of checking out of the mission, thus opening the prospect of a serious gap in police staffing and leaving most team sites with no personnel. I also regret that no progress has been made on the deployment of a civilian Deputy Head of Mission.

68. I call upon both parties to accept the offer made by UNISFA to convene meetings to jointly draft a road map for the establishment of the Abyei police service. I also encourage engagement with the Sudanese and South Sudanese authorities regarding the deployment of human rights expertise to UNISFA in accordance with the relevant Security Council resolutions, which would give the mission additional expertise and would let local authorities and communities benefit from technical assistance that would help them to prevent and better address human rights violations and abuses.

69. I note with concern that, despite my appeal for a global ceasefire, Abyei continues to suffer numerous episodes of violence against residents. Moreover, Abyei communities remain bereft of basic social services. The status quo cannot continue. I also condemn the recent trend of targeting United Nations troops and contractors. I call upon the parties to actively work to defuse tensions at the local level and to raise community awareness of the need to facilitate the implementation of decisions made at the meeting of the Joint Political and Security Mechanism of 19 February 2020, including the establishment of checkpoints and the reactivation of the Joint Military Observer Committee and the joint military observer team.

70. As the Security Council considers the renewal of the mandate of UNISFA, I recommend an extension of six months in order to address issues affecting the Abyei Area, provide the opportunity to my new acting Head of Mission/Force Commander to further engage with the parties, and, together with my Special Envoy for the Horn of Africa, engage with the African Union on the political situation. In that regard, I remain fully committed to supporting the African Union High-level Implementation Panel and its efforts to facilitate an agreement between the parties on the future of Abyei. I count on the political mediation of the African Union, including through possible support to the parties in resuming the meetings of the Abyei Joint Oversight Committee by the end of 2020. In addition, I stress the need for the publication of the report on the killing of the Ngok Dinka Paramount Chief in 2013.

71. I commend UNISFA for its handling of the pandemic and the support that it has provided in that regard to the communities in Abyei. UNISFA will continue to work closely with humanitarian and other actors to facilitate assistance to the most vulnerable.

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

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OCTOBER 2020

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