



Meeting of the Security Council on the situation in South Sudan

Statement of Under Secretary-General/Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide Mr. Adama Dieng

Your Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen.

Firstly, I would like to thank the President of the Security Council, Ambassador Oh Joon, and other Council Members for inviting me to brief this meeting.

Mr. President, the Secretary-General, Mr. Ban Ki-moon, asked the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navi Pillay, and I to travel to South Sudan this week to follow up on the recent brutal attacks against civilians that took place in the northern town of Bentiu, including in places of worship and hospitals, and within a United Nations base where IDPs were sheltering in Bor. We are very grateful to SRSO Hilde Johnson and UNMISS staff for the support they provided to our very short but intense mission.

I will restrict my remarks to elements that are relevant to my mandate. The violence that broke out on 15 December 2013, following a power struggle within the ruling Sudan Peoples Liberation Movement (SPLM) between former vice-President Riek Machar and President Salva Kiir, has quickly degenerated into ethnic violence. The recent brutal attacks in Bentiu, Unity state and Bor, Jonglei state, seem to have changed the trajectory of the conflict and, if such attacks are not immediately halted, could plunge the country into serious violence that could spiral out of control. In the current situation we see elements that we could categorize as risk factors of genocide and other atrocity crimes.

In Bentiu, more than 200 civilians of Dinka ethnicity were massacred and more than 400 others wounded, reportedly by opposition forces allied to former Vice President Riek Machar. According to United Nations reports, the attackers separated ethnic Dinka from ethnic Nuer civilians and then executed the Dinka and others perceived to support the government.

In Bor, armed elements reportedly affiliated to the Government forced entry into the UNMISS camp, in which displaced persons have been sheltering. They killed more than 50 civilians, mostly of Nuer ethnicity, and wounded around 100 others. This attack was allegedly carried out in revenge for the capture of Bentiu town by opposition forces. In our meeting with the IDPs in Bor, they expressed fear that the attacks could reoccur anytime and pleaded with the United Nations to relocate them to somewhere safer, preferably Akobo. They said that they knew some of the perpetrators and they do not feel safe in Bor, where they risk being targeted simply because they are Nuer. The UNMISS commander in Bor corroborated the statements of the IDPs, and informed us that the recent attack was well

organized and that attackers included individuals in uniforms of the army of South Sudan, the SPLA.

Another cause for serious concern has been the reported use of radio in some areas to spread messages constituting incitement to violence against all those perceived to support the government. It was reported that in Bentiu, fighters allied to Dr. Riek Machar incited the civilian population to attack the Dinka, even encouraging their supporters to commit acts of sexual violence against women. This is totally unacceptable.

Mr. President, in our consultations with senior government officials in Juba and with Dr. Machar, we noted with concern that both sides either denied attacks against civilians or justified them on the grounds that were carried out in self-defence against a vengeful group. If we are to ensure the protection of the civilian population in this country, the State must acknowledge that it has the primary responsibility to protect all South Sudanese irrespective of nationality, ethnicity or political affiliation and prioritise this responsibility. Blaming one group or another is simply irresponsible and dangerous.

UNMISS is doing its best under very difficult circumstances and should be commended. All leaders in South Sudan must assume greater responsibility to ensure that those under their authority do not commit serious violations of international human rights and humanitarian law. They should send strong messages to call for the unity and respect of all South Sudanese and take immediate measures to end the violence. I am glad that, in our meetings this week, both President Salva Kiir and Dr. Riek Machar affirmed the will to do this. I hope that they will now take concrete steps to act on their commitments.

Reports of homogenization of security forces by both camps are worrying, as we consider the risk of atrocity crimes. The perception that those supporting Riek Machar are predominantly ethnic Nuer and those supporting President Kiir are predominantly Dinka has heightened the risk that individuals could be systematically targeted on the basis of ethnicity. This polarisation is further compounded by reports of exclusion/discrimination on the basis of ethnicity. For example, in Bor the IDPs reported to us that they have denied access to medical care by government officials because they are Nuer.

The culture of impunity in South Sudan has contributed immensely to the current crisis. As we search for peace in this young nation, we must also ensure that those responsible for crimes committed there are held to account. There can be no peace without justice. The current culture of impunity will only undermine our efforts. We have learned this the hard way from events in other places, including from the genocide that took place 20 years ago in Rwanda. To the survivors of the genocide, we owe a pledge to take all possible measures within our power to protect populations from another Rwanda. There is no excuse for inaction.

In this regard, I welcome the IGAD mediation efforts and the role of the African Union led Commission of Inquiry on South Sudan, which aim to end the violence and to bring justice to the victims. Both President Kiir and Riek Machar informed us that they are investigating any serious violations committed by their respective forces and that those found

responsible shall be held accountable. We should hold them to this commitment. In our meeting with the members of the African Union Commission of Inquiry on South Sudan, I reiterated the expectations of the international community for the work of the Commission to be independent, thorough and credible and stressed that they should make sure that the Commission seeks not only to pursue measures for reconciliation and national healing but also places emphasis on accountability measures. The members of the African Union Commission of Inquiry requested technical assistance from the UN, in particular the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. We should do all we can to support their work. I was encouraged to note from my discussions with IGAD that the IGAD mediation envoys believe that accountability should be part and parcel of any agreement reached to end the fighting.

To conclude, Mr. President, we must continue to follow the situation in South Sudan closely, take whatever measures are most appropriate to protect the population from further suffering and prevent the situation from spiralling out of control. The risk that it could do so is clearly high, based on the risk factors that I have highlighted today.

UNMISS has saved lives by opening its gates to protect the population in Bentiu, Bor, Malakal and other places. The mission is under stress, however, and troop contributing countries should expedite the deployment of additional troops as part of the UNMISS force surge to enhance its capacity to protect the population.

If the parties do not clearly demonstrate their will and intention to end the violence and attacks against civilians, including incitement to commit violence, I believe the Council should consider taking additional measures against the parties to prevent the situation from deteriorating further.

We should all support efforts aimed at holding accountable those responsible for serious violations. The findings and recommendations of the report of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, which is about to be released, and other human rights reports, must be acted on, including - first and foremost - by the national authorities.

Finally, the issue of weaknesses in governance has to be addressed by development partners. In addition to the seeming disregard for the condition of the population, authorities have turned a blind eye to corruption. This corruption has also created a clear motivation for others to take up arms so that they can also access national resources for personal gain.

Today's violence in South Sudan is not motivated by the desire to change the country, but rather by self-interest goals related to accessing oil wealth and development resources. The international community must not be complicit in this agenda. Prevention of further violence therefore requires coordinated international response that includes a new posture by development partners. Any resolution should take this into account.

Excellencies, we must uphold our collective responsibility to protect the populations of South Sudan from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity, as well as their incitement. Ethnicity must not be used as a reason to incite violence or demonise, exclude or attack any community or section of the population in South Sudan.

Thank you.

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