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Urgent Action Needed on Peace Agreement for South Sudan

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ADDIS ABABA (19 October 2022) -- South Sudan's conflict has become increasingly complex but the level of suffering for millions of civilians remains intolerable, said UN experts visiting Ethiopia for talks with the African Union on the peace process. Members of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan were in Addis Ababa to urge African countries and other stakeholders to renew their support for implementation of the peace agreement for South Sudan, whose people face one of the gravest humanitarian crises in the region that rarely makes headlines.

"Every new extension of the timelines for implementation of the peace agreement, and indeed every passing day of inaction, means not just time lost, but lives lost," warned UN Commissioner Barney Afako during the visit. "Every month we see thousands of South Sudanese cross borders, stream into the UN-run protection site or move around the country trying to dodge an ever-shifting mosaic of violence that hardly registers regionally or internationally. Aid agencies struggle even to raise enough money to feed the victims because South Sudan has become invisible in the wake of other crises around the world," he added.

From 12 to 18 October 2022, they held meetings with the Africa Union (AU) leadership, departments and Member States, the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD), diplomatic corps and UN representatives, civil society and other actors.

Progress has been extremely slow in implementing the 2018 Revitalized Peace Agreement for South Sudan. Under the agreement, a Hybrid Court, a Commission for Truth, Reconciliation and Healing (CTRH) and a reparations process should have been established more than two years ago. Core aspects of the peace agreement, including the unification of security forces, have been plagued by persistent dispute between the parties on allocation of ratios of representation and resources. The parties to the agreement have also consistently failed to meet deadlines set for critical reforms and the establishment of the transitional justice bodies, without a credible justification for the delays.

"South Sudan's peace process cannot implement itself; the people of South Sudan whose lives depend on it, want to see more energy expended on breathing life into this document. We urgently need the African Union to take the next steps necessary to set up the Hybrid Court for South Sudan, and support the Truth Commission and the other processes that will give the men with guns serious pause for thought," said the Chair of the UN Commission, Yasmin Sooka.

"At present South Sudan is a haven for those who commit the most atrocious violence. As a result, nearly nine million South Sudanese still need humanitarian assistance to survive. That's a staggering three quarters of the population. People are being killed, maimed, raped and made homeless and we know from other countries that a credible truth and justice process is the only way to stop this."

In meetings in Addis Ababa, the UN Commissioners emphasised thatafter four years South Sudanese are deeply disappointed with the disjointed and piecemeal progress on key provisions of the peace agreement. They pointed out critical provisions of the agreement whose implementation needs to be completed - including the recent graduation of the first batch of unified security forces, and national consultations and other preparations towards establishment of the truth commission. A clear plan to prepare and adopt a permanent constitution is a critical step that will enable South Sudanese to define their own future and provide the basis for the conduct of elections to conclude the transition.

The Commissioners stressed that the political interests of the parties to the peace agreement must not be allowed to impede South Sudan's path towards healing, recovery and a sustainable peace.

"Those we met understood that the Government of South Sudan should clearly articulate what it can realistically achieve over the period of the extension of the peace agreement", said Commissioner Andrew Clapham. "We must avoid a situation where we return to

the drawing board in two years with no meaningful results to show the people of South Sudan. The causes of past delays must be clearly identified and rectified. As guarantors to the peace agreement, the African Union, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and regional and international development partners should continuously use all the tools at their disposal to push for and support timely implementation."

The commitment to establish transitional justice mechanisms by parties to the South Sudan peace agreement is a culmination of an extensive inquiry conducted by the African Union in 2014. South Sudanese told the African Union at the time that they wanted a genuine truth-seeking process, accountability for those responsible for committing atrocities, reparation for victims, and wide-ranging reform of the security, judicial, governance and economic sectors. In 2015, African Union Heads of States insisted that South Sudan pursues measures that were holistic and mutually reinforcing, to deal meaningfully with the causes and consequences of the 2013 conflict, promote national healing and reconciliation, and prevent recurrence of similar atrocities.

Background

The UN Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan is an independent body mandated by the UN Human Rights Council. It was first established in March 2016, and its mandate has since been renewed each year. The Commission will next report to the Council at its 52nd Session in early 2023.

For more information about the UN Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan, see its webpage, and follow @UN_HRC and @UNCHRSS on Twitter.

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