

## STATEMENT TO THE UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY, THIRD COMMITTEE

30 OCTOBER 2024

*Delivered by Mr. Barney Afako*

Your Excellency Chair, Mr. Zéphyrin Maniratanga, distinguished members of the Committee, and delegates.

On behalf of the Chairperson, Ms. Yasmin Sooka, and my colleague Mr. Carlos Castresana Fernández, we are honoured to brief you for the first time on the human rights situation in South Sudan, in line with our report presented to the Human Rights Council in March 2024.

First of all, we want to thank the Government of South Sudan for its cooperation with our Commission and with our staff who are based in Juba.

After decades of a difficult struggle for self-determination, South Sudan emerged in July 2011 as the world's youngest country, but with a divided, and highly militarised society. Tragically, its leaders returned that country to war, thereby dashing hopes for the emergence of a peaceful, prosperous and democratic society.

Conflict continues to inflict a heavy cost on South Sudan and its people. Hundreds of thousands have been killed, and millions forcibly displaced. Civilians have been targeted and traumatised, with women and girls systematically subjected to horrific sexual violence. Nearly 2.3 million South Sudanese are refugees; more than 2 million are internally displaced, and most of the population requires humanitarian assistance.

All parts of South Sudan have experienced subnational violence, often with ethnic dimensions, stoked by elites.

In Western Equatoria, terrified victims described to the Commission horrific attacks, including killings, sexual violence, recruitment and use of children in armed forces, abductions of women and children, and other cruel and inhumane treatment.

Although the 2018 Revitalised Peace Agreement laid the foundations for recovery and transformation, corrupt leaders have failed to pursue peace, accountability and democratic transformation. Instead, they have escalated their competition for power and resources. Their economic crimes and gross mismanagement have directly fuelled violence and repression, and deprived millions of basic rights to food, health and education.

Despite being rich in oil resources and arable land, South Sudan has therefore remained vulnerable to shocks. War in Sudan has driven another 800,000 people into the country, while disrupting its oil-exports and plunging the economy into deeper crisis. Climate-induced flooding has caused further displacement deepening the humanitarian crisis.

By diverting billions of oil dollars for their personal gain, unaccountable elites have reduced South Sudanese to precarious, undignified lives, depriving them of basic necessities.

Women and girls are deeply marginalized, and have borne the brunt of conflict, including appalling levels of sexual and other forms of violence. They fall behind across all social indicators, including health and education. Girls are frequently subjected to early marriage.

Children's lives have been blighted by conflict, predation and neglect. They are targeted through recruitment and abduction. South Sudan has one of the highest levels of infant mortality and acute malnutrition in the world. Education is woefully underfunded, with less than 40 per cent of children

starting school, and of those, less than one third completing primary education. Less than 10 per cent of eligible children are in secondary education. Girls fare the worst.

Without effective systems for investigating, prosecuting or ensuring remedies for violations, perpetrators, including the corrupt, are emboldened. A climate of impunity prevails. In the under-resourced justice sector, police, prosecutors and judicial officers are demoralized. Like most other civil servants, they have gone unpaid for months.

South Sudanese live under the shadow of repression and surveillance. The National Security Services operatives constantly monitor, harass, target and abduct civil society and perceived political opponents, including those outside the country. The media is subjected to censorship and reprisals.

South Sudan's leaders have consistently failed to implement the 2018 Agreement, including the unification of rival forces; transitional justice processes for dealing with past violations; the construction of an effective justice system; the establishment of robust mechanisms for economic management; and the adoption of a permanent constitution. Which would be south Sudan's first.

In September 2024, they once gain postponed elections after failing to make the necessary preparations. These leaders have stalled the transition; and are stealing South Sudan's future. They must urgently change course.

First, the leaders must urgently promote a credible and participatory constitution-making process, which would also provide the basis for the country's first national elections.

Secondly, they must promote accountability and recovery, by investing in the national justice system; by implementing legislation for establishing the Commission for Truth, Reconciliation and Healing, as well as the Compensation and Reparation Authority. But they must also engage the African Union urgently to establish the Hybrid Court for South Sudan in order to pursue appropriate criminal justice for the most serious offences.

Thirdly, they must stop the plunder. Corruption and economic management are depriving South Sudanese of their core rights. Stolen resources must be returned, and perpetrators punished.

Fourthly, they must protect and respect the equal rights of women and girls, who remain deeply marginalized and unsafe in the country.

Next, leaders must dismantle systems of repression: by ceasing arbitrary arrests, detentions, enforced disappearances, and the suppression of fundamental freedoms of association, assembly, expression and information, particularly by the National Security Services.

Lastly, they must invest in peace and end violent competition including subnational violence. Armed and political groups outside the transition must be engaged, including through the ongoing Tumaini Initiative facilitated and supported by the Government of Kenya.

In conclusion, we urge this Assembly not to abandon Sudan but to renew its support for the South Sudanese people by demanding that their leaders take concrete, corrective steps to conclude the political transition credibly, and to protect, respect and fulfil the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of its citizens.

I thank you.