



Security Council

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Letter dated 18 August 2025 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council

The Security Council, in its resolution [2760 \(2024\)](#), requested that I conduct and provide to the Council, no later than 15 August 2025, a strategic review of the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA) assessing the mission's reconfiguration, military and police posture, force deployments and strategy integrating military, police and civilian efforts, and provide detailed recommendations regarding: UNISFA; the mission's effectiveness and efficiency, including the effectiveness and efficiency of equipment supply and personnel rotations; and options for gradually adapting its civilian, police and military components, as appropriate.

In response to that request, a strategic review was conducted by an integrated team from the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, the Department of Peace Operations, the Department of Operational Support, the Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Horn of Africa, the Department of Safety and Security, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. Representatives from the United Nations country teams in the Sudan and South Sudan, the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) and the United Nations Office to the African Union were also consulted. A subset of team members travelled to the Sudan, South Sudan, Abyei and Ethiopia from 28 April to 10 May, and others participated remotely. The strategic review team met with high-level government officials in Port Sudan and Juba and engaged with representatives of the local administrations, traditional leaders and the Ngok Dinka and Misseriya communities in Abyei.

The strategic review was conducted in an environment in Abyei that has undergone significant changes since the previous strategic review of UNISFA in September 2021 ([S/2021/805](#)). Since that time, the outbreak of conflict in the Sudan in April 2023 has deeply affected the situation in Abyei, including by halting the political process between the Sudan and South Sudan on the final status and border issues, causing an influx of displaced people into Abyei, and increasing the proliferation of weapons in the area. The conflict in the Sudan has also created operational challenges for UNISFA, forcing the mission to redesign its supply routes and creating security and logistical barriers for the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism. At the same time, developments south of Abyei have resulted in increased political uncertainty in Juba, the flaring of intercommunal tensions between the Ngok Dinka and Twic Dinka and the deployment of South Sudanese security forces in southern Abyei.



In the previous strategic review, it was stated that the political and security context in Abyei had significantly improved since the initial deployment of UNISFA and that the Governments of the Sudan and South Sudan were highly unlikely to address their differences through military confrontation in Abyei. In the review, I proposed a reconfiguration of the mission with a new posture that was lighter and more responsive, accompanied by a shift to a United Nations multinational peacekeeping force with a reduced troop ceiling. I also proposed an increase in the mission's civilian component capacities and the establishment of a dedicated programme of peacebuilding, led by the United Nations country teams of the Sudan and South Sudan and supported through programmatic funding from UNISFA.

Following the strategic review in 2021, and at the direction of the Security Council in resolution [2609 \(2021\)](#), UNISFA has deployed a reconfigured multinational force with a troop ceiling reduced from 3,550 to 3,250 and established the Joint Programme of the Resident Coordinators in the Sudan and South Sudan in Abyei. While the Council maintained the authorized United Nations police deployment level at 640, including 148 individual police officers and three formed police units, only up to 60 individual police officers have been deployed due to lack of agreement on the part of the Government of the Sudan. That figure represents an increase from the previous limit of 50, following consent provided by the Sudan in February 2024. The appointment of a civilian Deputy Head of Mission, which was first requested by the Security Council in resolution [2469 \(2019\)](#), has not happened for the same reason.

Changed context

The political and security context in Abyei has shifted significantly since the previous strategic review of UNISFA, as regional developments have increasingly affected the situation in Abyei. The conflict in the Sudan and political tensions in South Sudan have complicated relations between the two countries over Abyei, shifting the focus of security concerns within the region and affecting local intercommunal dynamics. Despite the changed context, interlocutors in Port Sudan, Juba and Abyei were unanimous in emphasizing the continued value of UNISFA as a stabilizing force in Abyei until a political solution for the area is found.

Barriers preventing the resumption of the political process

The political process related to the final status of Abyei and border issues remains stalled in view of the ongoing conflict in the Sudan and internal political developments in South Sudan. The most recent formal engagement between the two countries on Abyei was a meeting of the high-level committees of the two countries in early April 2023, just days before the outbreak of the conflict in the Sudan. At that meeting, economic cooperation and other issues pertaining to Abyei were discussed.

During discussions with the strategic review team, Sudanese and South Sudanese government representatives reiterated their commitment to the principles of the Agreement between the Government of the Republic of the Sudan and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement on Temporary Arrangements for the Administration and Security of the Abyei area, concluded in 2011. Both countries expressed their appreciation for the work of UNISFA in providing stability and security in Abyei and signalled an openness to receiving greater support from the United Nations and other partners in facilitating political engagement in relation to Abyei.

The Sudan reiterated its support for the creation of the joint institutions detailed in the 2011 Agreement, including the joint administration and the Abyei Police Service, and expressed the view that implementation of the 2011 Agreement and other bilateral agreements relating to Abyei was the only path towards reaching a final settlement for

the area. Sudanese authorities rejected any unilateral actions in Abyei, including moves made earlier in 2025 by South Sudanese officials to approve the results of the 2013 community referendum. They expressed concern regarding the ongoing presence of South Sudanese security forces in the southern part of the Abyei box. The Sudan expressed openness to resuming formal discussions with South Sudan on Abyei and border issues, including engagement between the two co-chairs of the Abyei Joint Oversight Committee and a meeting of the Joint Political and Security Mechanism, and welcomed the role of the United Nations in supporting such engagement.

South Sudan expressed a willingness to resume contact with Sudanese officials in relation to Abyei, but stressed the need for support from the United Nations or the African Union in facilitating formal dialogue. The South Sudanese authorities highlighted the importance of the referendum on the final status of Abyei enshrined in the protocol between the Government of the Sudan and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army on the resolution of the Abyei conflict, adopted in 2004, and expressed concern at what they described as the settlement of Misseriya nomads in the Abyei box. While appreciating the role of UNISFA in providing security in Abyei, South Sudanese officials stressed that the current deployment was insufficient to cover the entire area and pressed for additional peacekeepers.

In view of the challenges to political engagement between the Sudan and South Sudan, interlocutors expressed the view that the matter of Abyei and border issues had not been prioritized in recent years. Authorities from both countries communicated that they would welcome the enhanced engagement of the African Union in support of dialogue.

Growing complexity in intercommunal relations

Since the previous strategic review of UNISFA, intercommunal relations in Abyei have become increasingly complex, as the focus of tensions has broadened from the historical dispute between the Ngok Dinka and Misseriya communities to include dynamics involving the Twic Dinka and Nuer communities. This added complexity has required UNISFA to adapt its response, in particular by increasing its focus on the protection of civilians and support for intercommunal reconciliation in southern Abyei.

In February 2022, clashes erupted between the Ngok Dinka and Twic Dinka communities over the land south of the River Kiir and north of the Abyei boundary. The violence has caused significant loss of life and civilian displacement as armed youth groups from both sides have become more involved. It has also led to the deployment of South Sudan People's Defence Forces soldiers in southern Abyei, with the stated intention of quelling conflict and in contravention of the 2011 Agreement. Recently, violence between the Ngok Dinka and Twic Dinka has seen a decrease, which was buttressed by an agreement signed by youth leaders of the two communities in April 2025 with the facilitation of UNISFA, UNMISS and other partners. Despite such encouraging progress, however, the underlying land dispute remains unresolved and grave tensions persist.

In parallel, the growing presence of Nuer community members in Abyei, including those who were displaced from Unity State in South Sudan and others who migrated for economic reasons, has also added complexity. Nuer community members have been accused of cattle rustling, creating tensions with the Misseriya community, and supporting both sides in the dispute between the Ngok Dinka and Twic Dinka communities. In an uptick in violence primarily between Ngok Dinka and Nuer communities in early 2024, two UNISFA peacekeepers were killed while performing their duties in protecting civilians.

As of August 2025, violence between Ngok Dinka and Misseriya communities has decreased and relations have improved, supported by efforts of UNISFA and other partners to achieve reconciliation, such as intercommunal conferences undertaken before and after the yearly cattle migration season. Despite that trend, increasing rates of criminality are a growing flashpoint in the relationship, and this matter was raised as a priority by members of both communities. Ngok Dinka community members expressed concern regarding the perceived increase in settlement by Misseriya into northern Abyei, saying that it would affect the results of the envisioned referendum on the final status of the area.

The growing influence of the Rapid Support Forces inside Abyei also represents significant risks for future relations between the two communities, particularly if Rapid Support Forces members continue to expand in such areas as Amiet market, where the Ngok Dinka and Misseriya communities both have a significant presence and additional weapons, checkpoints and criminality have the potential to aggravate disputes.

The continued threat of intercommunal violence and other risks to civilian populations in Abyei exist in a context of limited law enforcement and widespread impunity and continue to present serious concerns with regard to human rights and the protection of civilians. In view of the evolving situation in Abyei, women and girls continue to face distinct vulnerabilities, including heightened exposure to insecurity and barriers to essential services. Reports from community interlocutors and humanitarian actors point to sexual and gender-based violence, particularly in areas affected by displacement.

Increased presence of armed groups

The war in the Sudan and shifting intercommunal dynamics in Abyei and South Sudan, especially the adjacent areas south of the boundary, have contributed to an increased presence and influence of armed groups, in violation of the demilitarized and weapons-free status of Abyei.

In view of the rise in tensions in southern Abyei from February 2022, the Tit Baai and the Titweng – the armed youth self-defence groups of the Ngok Dinka and Twic Dinka communities respectively – were mobilized. Both groups carry weapons openly and have established checkpoints along the main supply route that act as a barrier to the free movement of goods and people. Following the signing of an agreement between youth leaders from the two communities in April 2025, some progress has been made in reducing checkpoints and minimizing their visible presence. However, these armed structures continue to exist and present an ongoing challenge to stability and the rule of law in Abyei.

Starting in October 2022, South Sudan deployed an estimated 700 South Sudan People's Defence Forces and South Sudan National Police Service personnel to Abyei, with the stated purpose of addressing violence between Ngok Dinka and Twic Dinka communities. They remained in southern Abyei at the time of writing. Their presence is a potential barrier to the resumed political process in relation to Abyei and has led to repeated violations of the freedom of movement of UNISFA, something that has limited the mission's ability to implement its mandate to protect civilians. These armed actors remain in southern Abyei despite ongoing appeals to South Sudan for their withdrawal.

Most recently, members of the Rapid Support Forces or associated individuals have been frequently observed in northern Abyei and Amiet market. In May 2025, representatives of the Rapid Support Forces accompanied Misseriya traditional leaders in engaging with the leadership of the Ngok Dinka community in Abyei town in support of peaceful coexistence between the two communities. Nonetheless, the

members of the Rapid Support Forces have reportedly contributed to the rise in criminality in Abyei, including as the perpetrators of vehicle thefts, and have reportedly made illegal arrests inside the Abyei box. They have also been responsible for interfering in the work of the community protection committees, including by temporarily occupying the community protection committee office at Dari market in May. Community members in Abyei expressed particular concern regarding the activities of Rapid Support Forces elements in the far north of Abyei. The presence of the Rapid Support Forces is also a concern for the security and safety of peacekeepers in northern Abyei.

Expansion of Amiet market and the rise in criminality

Amiet market, which has long served as a point of interaction and commerce for the Ngok Dinka and Misseriya communities in central Abyei, has expanded rapidly. The population in and around the market has grown from an estimated 10,000 people before the outbreak of the Sudan conflict in April 2023 to roughly 50,000 people today, as those fleeing fighting in the Sudan settled alongside other recent arrivals, such as Nuer community members displaced by flooding in Unity State. By the time of the strategic review, Amiet market had become a nucleus for trade, driven not only by its increased population but also by the demand for fuel and other goods generated by the war in the Sudan.

As Amiet market has continued to grow, it has seen a spike in criminality. The greatest increases have occurred in the market area itself and the parts of the main supply route leading to and from it (see annex). Throughout the Abyei area, criminal incidents including armed robbery, assault and carjacking rose from 1,712 incidents in 2023 to 2,373 in 2024, and 1,627 have already been recorded in the period from January to June 2025. Rising criminality, especially in the section of Amiet market where the communities meet, is a central concern as a potential trigger for intercommunal violence. In May 2025, a series of motorcycle thefts on the main supply route targeting the Ngok Dinka community led to deadly confrontations with and reprisals against members of the Misseriya community.

Criminality in and around Amiet market has been exacerbated by the proliferation of weapons, the increased circulation of goods and cash and the presence of Rapid Support Forces and other armed group persons. The joint community peace committee and joint protection committee, which are supported by UNISFA and bring together members of the Ngok Dinka and Misseriya communities in Amiet market, respectively to promote peaceful coexistence and contribute to law and order, are valuable community-led efforts to maintain stability. However, the market's rapid expansion is severely challenging both of those structures, and the joint protection committee, which is unarmed, is not properly equipped to address crime carried out by perpetrators with firearms.

Rising demand for humanitarian assistance and basic service delivery

A significant influx of displaced people into and within Abyei has increased the demand for humanitarian assistance. The dispute between the Ngok Dinka and Twic Dinka communities, which began in February 2022, has led to the displacement of more than 30,000 people towards Abyei town. Since the outbreak of the Sudan conflict, United Nations humanitarian partners report that, as at 31 July 2025, 37,787 people had crossed into Abyei, and a significant proportion had opted to settle in host communities in northern and southern Abyei. In recent years, there have also been significant flows into and out of the Abyei box of Nuer community members driven out by flooding in Unity State or seeking economic opportunity.

Humanitarian actors have worked under difficult conditions to address the increased needs, since governance structures and basic service delivery in Abyei are already severely limited. The war in the Sudan has added additional operational challenges by cutting off the northern supply route for humanitarian goods and reducing the number of implementing partners present in the northern part of the Abyei box. In the South Sudan Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan for 2025, it is noted that more than 200,000 people across Abyei are currently facing emergency levels of acute food insecurity. Economic hardship, high inflation rates in the Sudan and South Sudan, and the lack of basic social services exacerbate the situation. In the Plan, it is further noted that in 2025, an estimated 300,000 people will require humanitarian assistance, up from approximately 280,000 people in 2024 and 250,000 people in 2023.

Challenges to the operations of the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism

Since the previous strategic review the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism has faced a series of security and operational challenges that have affected its ability to implement its mandate. This situation began in 2021 with pressure from local communities, which forced UNISFA to withdraw from the Sector 1 headquarters of the Mechanism in Gok Machar, South Sudan, and its team sites 11 (Safahah/Kiir Adem) and 12 (Sumayah/War Abar) between August and October 2021. Despite continuous engagement with South Sudanese authorities, the Mechanism remains absent from its Sector 1 and unable to implement its mandate there.

Security concerns associated with the outbreak of the Sudan conflict necessitated the relocation, in June 2023, of international civilian staff from the Mechanism headquarters in Kadugli, the Sudan. The closure of Sudanese airspace since the start of the conflict has prevented aerial monitoring of the Safe Demilitarized Border Zone. The Mechanism has continued to conduct ground monitoring and situation assessment patrols from its team sites 21 (Tishwin) and 22 (Abu Qussa/Wunkur).

Security concerns associated with the Sudan conflict have also prevented flights to resupply the Mechanism headquarters via the Kadugli airport, forcing UNISFA to rely on ground convoys from Abyei escorted by peacekeepers. However, this is no longer possible following an incident in February 2025 in which a resupply convoy en route to Kadugli was stopped at a Rapid Support Forces checkpoint in West Kordofan State. Eight civilian drivers were forcibly taken from the convoy along with four peacekeepers who had volunteered to join them for their protection. They were returned only 35 hours later. Eight fuel trucks contracted by the United Nations were seized during the incident and have not been returned. Following the incident, a UNISFA contractor cited force majeure to suspend the resupply of fuel to Kadugli. Separately, two UNISFA helicopters travelling from Kadugli to Abyei were fired upon by an unconfirmed party in June 2025; something that did not result in damage, but forced the helicopters to return to Kadugli. Longer-term arrangements for the resupply of the Mechanism remain under consideration. In the meantime, fighting between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North Abdelaziz al-Hilu faction in the area around Kadugli continues to cause security concerns.

Responding to change

In view of the significant regional developments of the past four years, including the conflict in the Sudan and political uncertainty in South Sudan, coupled with the changes experienced in Abyei, interlocutors in the Government of the Sudan, the Government of South Sudan and within the communities in Abyei continue to assert the value of UNISFA as a stabilizing force for the area. This role has taken on a

renewed importance in the light of such mounting challenges as the presence of the Rapid Support Forces and South Sudan People's Defence Forces inside Abyei and the increased pressure on intercommunal relations due to the growing population and rising criminality.

In light of the shift in conditions on the ground, UNISFA must adapt to maximize its ability to respond effectively to mandate implementation challenges across a spectrum of issues. The recommendations set out below are envisaged to be implemented within existing resources, in the light of the difficult financial situation of the Organization.

Reinvigorating the political role of the mission

With the Sudan and South Sudan preoccupied with domestic challenges and the political process in relation to Abyei and border issues on hold, there is a risk that a protracted pause in political engagement between the two countries on Abyei could allow the progress that has already been achieved to unravel. In the previous strategic review, attention was drawn to improvements in the political context such that, despite the lack of a political settlement, it was highly unlikely that the two countries would attempt to address their differences through military confrontation in Abyei. The Abyei area continues to benefit from that progress. However, particularly amid the political and security changes shaping Abyei and the region, it is crucial that the mission and its partners intensify their efforts to safeguard the improvements in the political context as noted in the 2021 strategic review.

For this reason, I underscore the need for UNISFA to take on a reinvigorated political role in close coordination with the African Union and the Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Horn of Africa, among others, with the primary objective of facilitating engagement between the Government of the Sudan and the Government of South Sudan with regard to Abyei and border issues. This undertaking will be supported by other good offices capacities of the Secretariat, including those at Headquarters. Efforts should begin with small steps, focusing on informal contacts and technical-level discussions to build trust and confidence.

In the current circumstances, in which the Sudan and South Sudan are focused on the internal political and security dynamics, it may not be realistic to expect major progress on the final status of Abyei and border issues. However, supporting the parties in maintaining relations and regular diplomatic communication on those issues and helping to prevent backsliding must be a key goal despite uncertainty regarding the future. In discussions with the strategic review team, both Sudanese and South Sudanese authorities expressed an openness to receiving support from the United Nations for that purpose.

The lack of political capacity in UNISFA will affect this effort. Despite the Security Council having requested the appointment of a civilian Deputy Head of Mission, who would undertake a crucial role in providing support to the parties, the position remains vacant due to the continued lack of agreement on the part of the Sudan regarding the appointment. To address this situation, it is critical that UNISFA is able to deploy a civilian Deputy Head of Mission as requested by the Security Council. Given the openness expressed by the Sudanese and South Sudanese authorities to a reinvigorated political role for UNISFA in facilitating dialogue, I urge the Government of the Sudan to confirm its support for the appointment. I also call upon the Security Council to request the Government of the Sudan to facilitate the early deployment of the civilian Deputy Head of Mission, particularly as the situation continues to evolve in Abyei and the wider region.

UNISFA will also draw on the political expertise provided by the civilian Deputy Head of Mission to support its work with the communities with a view to promoting peaceful coexistence inside Abyei. This expertise is increasingly critical in that area, particularly as regional developments, an increased population, the proliferation of weapons and the rising influence of armed groups contribute to increased intercommunal tensions within the Abyei box.

Responding to operational necessity and reassessing what the parties need from the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism

The situation of the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism headquarters in Kadugli, the Sudan, has become extremely challenging. Because safety considerations and airspace closures prevent the use of the Kadugli airport, and the base is effectively cut off from ground resupply following the seizure by the Rapid Support Forces of a UNISFA logistics convoy en route to Kadugli in February 2025, the Kadugli base has temporarily relocated most of its headquarters staff and is at risk of running out of essential supplies. Aerial monitoring flights have been halted since the start of the Sudan conflict, and there are security concerns with regard to troop rotations and medical evacuation amid fighting between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North Abdelaziz al-Hilu faction in the area.

For those operational reasons, the mission has begun temporarily reducing its presence in Kadugli until the security situation improves. Most UNISFA contingent troops guarding the base, along with other personnel based in Kadugli, will be relocated to Abyei, joining those staff members of the Mechanism headquarters who moved to Abyei earlier in 2025. Relocation of the South Sudanese and Sudanese national monitors will be assessed in the context of the need for an overall reduction in footprint. Some contingent-owned equipment and movable United Nations assets will be relocated from Kadugli to Abyei, requiring the support and cooperation of the Government of the Sudan. The functions of the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism headquarters will be led from the UNISFA headquarters in Abyei. The Mechanism's team sites 21 (Tishwin) and 22 (Abu Qussa/Wunkur) will continue mandate implementation activities, resupplied directly from Abyei.

While the decision to temporarily reduce the presence at the base in Kadugli was made due to operational necessity, there remains a broader political question regarding the continued value of the Mechanism to the parties. In discussions with the strategic review team, the Sudanese and South Sudanese authorities expressed general support for the Mechanism. However, given the changing dynamics in the border area, the lack of bilateral engagement, the continued closure of the Sector 1 headquarters in Gok Machar and of its two team sites, and the Mechanism's markedly reduced ability to carry out its mandate, it is necessary to reassess the needs of the parties with regard to the continuation of the Mechanism.

In this regard, the Sudan and South Sudan are requested to engage with each other to discuss and communicate to the United Nations what support the two countries require from the Mechanism. UNISFA stands ready to support this engagement, and the reinvigorated political role for the mission proposed above will help to facilitate these discussions. It is essential for the parties to provide their views, in light of genuine concerns regarding the continued viability of the Mechanism amid the changing environmental and operational challenges I call upon the Security Council to reinforce this request.

Prioritizing support to security and safety in Amiet market

Following the rapid expansion of Amiet market as a trade hub and the accompanying increase in criminality, the capacity of UNISFA to provide adequate

support to security in and around the market is increasingly overstretched. In interactions with the review team, local community representatives were unanimous in calling for UNISFA to increase its presence and improve its protection efforts, particularly in Amiet market, where perceptions of insecurity had risen considerably. Interlocutors were clear that the issue of criminality in Amiet market was also a concern as a flashpoint for intercommunal tensions.

Given that the primary problem in Amiet market is criminality, rule of law considerations must be at the centre of the mission's response. The ideal capacity to deliver that response would be the three formed police units authorized by the Security Council for UNISFA. However, due to the lack of agreement from the Sudan, the mission has been unable to deploy these units, despite continued requests from the United Nations to the Government of the Sudan. Of the 640 police personnel authorized by the Council, including 148 individual police officers and three formed police units, only up to 60 individual police officers have been deployed. During the strategic review team's engagement with the authorities in Port Sudan, Sudanese officials continued to reject additional United Nations police deployments, calling instead for the establishment of the joint security and administrative institutions envisioned in the 2011 Agreement.

The deployment of all authorized formed police units remains a key priority to enable UNISFA to carry out its mandate. I reiterate my call for the Government of the Sudan to enable that deployment urgently. In the meantime, in the absence of formed police units, and only until such a time as those units can be deployed, UNISFA will establish a security mechanism for Amiet market, involving individual police officers, a civilian liaison officer and 120 troops. That proposal would be implemented within the current ceiling for uniformed personnel. The troop-contributing country providing troops for the security mechanism will be requested, to the extent possible, to deploy personnel with expertise in providing security support to rule of law objectives. Working in a closely coordinated manner, the military unit will focus on increasing safety and security in Amiet market, while individual police officers and the civilian community liaison officer would provide increased support to the unarmed community-based structures in the market, particularly the Joint Community Peace Committee and the Joint Protection Committee. Adopting a "dispute resolution chain" approach, the security mechanism will seek to secure the Amiet market area and the routes leading to it, including by deterring armed criminality, supporting the detention facility of the joint protection committee and promoting peaceful coexistence between communities. Part of the support to the community-based structures will be for individual police officers, with guidance from the civilian liaison officer, to advise the joint protection committee on cases in which detention should be used.

The response of UNISFA to criminality in Abyei, particularly in Amiet market, will be closely guided by the mission's rule of law support strategy, which ensures coordination across mission components and with the work of the agencies, funds and programmes of the United Nations and other partners. The response will continue to ensure a gender-sensitive approach, including by addressing sexual and gender-based violence. UNISFA will continue to request support from the standing capacities of the United Nations to help to address challenges to the rule of law and plan activities to reduce community violence in order to mitigate risks posed by armed groups and reduce intercommunal violence. In the absence of functioning judicial institutions and unified administrative structures, efforts to promote accountability will be designed to be pragmatic and community-sensitive, while also being aligned with international human rights law and other standards for the rule of law.

Strengthening whole-of-mission protection efforts throughout Abyei

While Amiet market has experienced an outsized impact from the developments affecting Abyei and the region, other parts of the area are facing similar challenges. Community leaders and civil society members consistently emphasized to the strategic review team the need for UNISFA to do more to protect civilians, in the light of the population influx and the proliferation of weapons throughout the Abyei box, continued concerns regarding intercommunal tensions and the presence of South Sudanese security forces in southern Abyei, and the expansion of Rapid Support Forces activity in northern Abyei. To that end, UNISFA will recalibrate its whole-of-mission protection approach to reflect the evolving threats faced by civilians in the box. A more proactive working group for the protection of civilians will be essential to driving this effort, as will threat assessments that take into account the differentiated impacts of insecurity on women, men, boys and girls.

On the physical protection front, the military posture of UNISFA will be designed to be preventive, flexible, visible and community oriented. Force deployment will be recalibrated to prioritize areas of greater security concerns by redeploying troops from locations with lower threat levels. For that purpose, consideration will be given to areas identified by the communities as being of particular concern, such as the Farouk area near the northern boundary of Abyei, and efforts will be made to equip troops with appropriate language support so that the community can be reached and trust can be built. In addition, a whole-of-mission effort will be applied in order to strengthen early warning mechanisms to detect emerging threats against civilians and to enable coordinated responses.

Community engagement will be prioritized and systematized as a core pillar of the mission's protection strategy. It is critical that the civilian and uniformed components work together, particularly during Force patrols, which represent the most frequent form of contact with the community. UNISFA will also capitalize on the work of its community liaison office to address disputes before they escalate, through community dialogue activities and the meaningful participation of women and young persons. Despite the recommendation set out in the previous strategic review for the expansion of the community liaison office, substantive civilian capacity within UNISFA remains low, both in absolute terms and relative to comparable United Nations peacekeeping missions. In view of their critical importance as a pillar of the whole-of-mission protection strategy, the expansion of the community liaison office and other civilian substantive posts is warranted. However, given the financial constraints facing the Organization, I intend to prioritize maintaining existing civilian substantive capacities, with any additional requirements to be met, as far as possible, within the existing staffing resources of the mission. This includes retaining expertise in key areas, such as community liaison, human rights, protection of civilians, gender and the rule of law, for which no other civilian capacity in the mission exists.

While incidents of sexual and gender-based violence continue to be reported, the full scope of such incidents remains difficult to ascertain due to underreporting and stigma. UNISFA will continue to respond to this pattern with sustained gender-responsive protection strategies.

As misinformation, disinformation and hate speech continue to exacerbate tensions in Abyei, UNISFA will strengthen its community-focused communication efforts to counter harmful narratives and foster trust. Clear, consistent and two-way communication about the mission's activities will also be critical to manage expectations and build trust with regard to the work of UNISFA.

Supporting peacebuilding and facilitating humanitarian aid

The Joint Programme of the Resident Coordinators in the Sudan and South Sudan in Abyei, whose establishment was recommended in the previous strategic review of UNISFA, has become a critical component of the mission's peacebuilding efforts in the area and an indispensable tool in working towards building conditions conducive to constructive discussions between the Sudan and South Sudan on the final status of Abyei. In view of the lack of government structures in Abyei, basic service delivery and other activities performed through the Joint Programme are important means of addressing some of the root causes of conflict. Particularly in the current environment – which is marked by rising needs, limited resources available to humanitarian and development partners, an influx of people into Abyei and disrupted supply lines via the Sudan – the Joint Programme is more crucial than ever and would warrant being expanded. However, in recognition of the challenging financial situation facing the Organization, I recommend that the current funding level for the Joint Programme be maintained, and that it be made a priority in mission planning and budgetary processes.

To enhance the effectiveness of activities implemented through the Joint Programme, UNISFA will establish mechanisms to ensure complementarity with the mission's broader programmatic efforts. These mechanisms should promote coherence with quick-impact projects, which are aimed at addressing the immediate needs of Abyei residents while fostering trust between the mission and local communities, and with United Nations civil-military coordination activities that support basic service delivery and contribute to a more secure and stable environment. Close collaboration with United Nations country team partners will be essential to achieving integrated and sustainable outcomes. In response to the lack of government structures in Abyei, much of the work of the Joint Programme has been focused on improving basic service delivery, including in the areas of health, water, sanitation, hygiene and food and nutrition. In meetings with the strategic review team, community members also emphasized the importance of livelihoods-based programming. To promote sustainability in Abyei, UNISFA and the United Nations country teams will gradually increase support for livelihoods, including targeted assistance in agricultural cultivation, animal husbandry and related activities, linked with the mission's parallel security efforts.

UNISFA has established a strong collaboration with United Nations partners to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid and the free movement of humanitarian personnel. This continues to be a top priority for the mission. Where feasible, UNISFA will give priority to "area domination", rather than the use of mandatory armed escorts, as a means of protecting movement without restricting humanitarian response.

Achieving greater efficiency and effectiveness in mission support

With the Sudan conflict in its third year, resupply, personnel rotation, medical evacuation and other functions of UNISFA now have to be carried out through South Sudan. Until conditions permit the resumption of such functions through Khartoum and Kadugli, mission support will be pivoted more decisively towards the current de facto route through Entebbe, Uganda, and Wau, South Sudan, including the possible expansion of the mission's logistical and operational capacity in Wau.

In this regard, UNISFA will conduct, and implement the findings of, an assessment as to which mission support functions and posts would be more effective and would provide greater cost efficiency if located in Entebbe or Wau. In Wau, the mission will build on existing arrangements, including the enhanced use of shared resources, to strengthen cooperation with UNMISS. Similarly, in Entebbe, UNISFA will examine possible agreements with the Regional Service Centre and the other

United Nations peacekeeping operations that use the Centre, in order to foster cooperation and realize efficiencies. For the same reasons, consideration will also be given to relocating certain functions to the United Nations Global Service Centre in Brindisi, Italy.

In order to adjust staff capacity to the changing situation in Abyei and global fiscal constraints, an immediate civilian staffing review is necessary. UNISFA will undertake an analysis to ensure an efficient mix of military and civilian enablers to maximize effectiveness while avoiding duplication of services. Consideration should be given to other measures, such as the expanded use of aerial monitoring technologies to assess main supply routes, and the use of telemedicine services will also be considered. In view of changes to the mission, maintaining efficient environmental risk management systems remains an important priority while additional environmental efficiency measures will be implemented to reduce costs.

Looking towards the future of Abyei

With the Sudan and South Sudan still focused on pressing domestic concerns, the current environment does not permit substantive consultations between the parties to develop benchmarks and indicators for a mission transition, as requested in Security Council resolution [2760 \(2024\)](#). The centrepiece of any future exit strategy for UNISFA remains a political process driven by the Sudan and South Sudan and leading to an agreement regarding the final status of Abyei and issues related to their shared border. The African Union has a critical role to play in facilitating this process. I call upon it to redouble its engagement with regard to Abyei and border issues between the Sudan and South Sudan. The United Nations stands ready to provide support, including through the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Horn of Africa and through the reinvigorated political role of UNISFA as proposed above.

While working towards a resumption of the political process, UNISFA will prioritize efforts to create and maintain conditions on the ground that are conducive to peace. These conditions are under increased threat, and regional developments, including the presence of South Sudanese security forces in southern Abyei, the increased influence of the Rapid Support Forces and the influx of displaced people are affecting Abyei in a variety of ways. The work of UNISFA in protecting civilians, supporting the rule of law and facilitating peaceful coexistence between communities, remains critical. With a view to securing a peaceful future for Abyei beyond peacekeeping, UNISFA will continue to encourage the expanded presence of the agencies, funds and programmes of the United Nations and to support their vital role in peacebuilding. The Joint Programme of the Resident Coordinators in the Sudan and South Sudan in Abyei is helping to point the way towards this future and must continue to be a priority. UNISFA will also continue its close coordination and cooperation with UNMISS, which is critical in facilitating the implementation of its mandate.

UNISFA will regularly reassess and report to the Security Council on the openness of the Sudan and South Sudan to participating in joint consultations towards developing benchmarks and indicators for a responsible, successful and durable mission transition. I also underscore the importance of the deployment of formed police units and intend to report to the Security Council on efforts undertaken by the mission and its partners to achieve that goal.

I would be grateful if you could bring the present letter to the attention of the members of the Security Council.

(Signed) António **Guterres**

Annex

Map of criminal incidents, January 2021–April 2025

