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PEACE AND SECURITY COUNCIL
410TH MEETING
24 DECEMBER 2013
ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA

PSC/PR/BR.(CDX)

PRESS STATEMENT

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The Peace and Security Council of the African Union (AU), at its 410th meeting held on 24 December 2013, was briefed by the Commission on the evolution of the situation in South Sudan.

Council, recalling press statement PSC/PR/BR.(CDIX) adopted at its 409th meeting held on 18 December 2013, as well as the press statement issued by the Chairperson of the Commission on 21 December 2013, reiterated its grave concern at the escalating crisis in South Sudan, which has evolved from a political dispute to an armed conflict, with the prospect of rapidly deteriorating further into ethnic clashes and a full-fledged civil war.

Council expressed Africa's deep dismay and disappointment that the continent's newest nation should descend so rapidly into internal strife, and at the failure of political leaders in the country to live up to the hopes and aspirations of their citizens and to respond to the goodwill and solidarity expressed by Africa and the rest of the international community. Council expressed special alarm at the escalation of ethnic mobilization by belligerents, and emphasized that such mobilization of ethnic forces has the potential of causing untold human suffering, tearing apart the social fabric of South Sudan in a manner that causes irreparable societal division and damage, and undermining the institutions of government and security, including the cohesion of the national army, and the viability of the South Sudanese State.

Council also expressed profound concern at the deepening humanitarian crisis in South Sudan and the plight of civilians exposed to attacks and violence by armed groups. Council strongly condemned the attacks against innocent civilians, including the targeting of ethnic groups and other communities, as well as other violations of human rights, notably against women, children and other vulnerable groups. Council further condemned the attack against a camp of the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), on 19 December 2013, in Akobo, which resulted in the death of two peacekeepers, and extended its condolences to the families of the victims, the Government of India and the United Nations.

Council reiterated its call for all concerned South Sudanese stakeholders to act in a spirit of patriotism and vision for the greater national interest. Council strongly urged the parties to the conflict to immediately stop ethnic mobilization, and strongly warned all those involved against the dire consequences of their actions. Council also called for an immediate end to any incitement, hostile or ethnic messages, and requested that an opportunity be provided for national figures, religious leaders and others to transmit messages of peace and reconciliation through national media and other appropriate outlets. Council reminded the parties to the conflict in South Sudan of their supreme responsibility of protecting civilians, and urged them to refrain from any actions that endanger civilians, and to facilitate the access and operations of humanitarian agencies and personnel in this respect.

Council expressed its full support for the call by the Chairperson of the Commission for an immediate humanitarian truce, as an opportunity to de-escalate the tension and stop the fighting, to provide urgent humanitarian access to civilians in need and to provide an opportunity for the initiation of political dialogue.

Council stressed the importance and urgency of an inclusive dialogue on all relevant issues, based on the respect of human rights, the rule of law and constitutional legality, as well as the rejection of the use of force, and underlined that such a dialogue is the only way in which the South Sudanese can address their problems and resolve their differences. In this respect, Council welcomed the expressed commitment of President Salva Kiir Mayardit to unconditionally engage in dialogue, and called on the other side to reciprocate. Council called on the South Sudanese authorities to consider releasing the political personalities currently detained in Juba, in order to facilitate dialogue and to encourage them to contribute positively to the search for a solution.

Council reiterated its support to the efforts being exerted by the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD), and welcomed, in this respect, the visit to Juba of a high-level IGAD ministerial delegation, which also included the AU Commissioner for Peace and Security and the United Nations (UN) Special Envoy, as well as the communiqué issued at the end of that visit. Council encouraged the Chairperson of IGAD and the AU High-Level Implementation Panel (AUHIP) to pursue efforts aimed at calming the situation and seeking a negotiated peaceful resolution to the conflict.

Council welcomed the efforts being made by the UN and other international stakeholders. Council encouraged all relevant states and organizations to use their influence with the South Sudanese stakeholders, so that they bring the current violence to an end and engage in unconditional dialogue. Council looked forward to the adoption by the UN Security Council of a resolution authorizing a temporary increase in the overall force level of UNMIS to support the protection of civilians and the provision of humanitarian assistance.

Council further welcomed the efforts of the Chairperson of the Peace and Security Council and encouraged him to pursue and intensify his consultations towards the early convening of a meeting of the Council at the level of Heads of State and Government, bearing in mind the urgency of the situation and the need for an enhanced African engagement and leadership in the search for a lasting solution.