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South Sudan: UN Cost-Cutting Threatens Peacekeeping Mission

Reducing Troops Would Put Civilians at Risk, Global Coalition Warns

(New York, July 6, 2011) -- The United Nations should ensure that peacekeepers have a strong mandate to protect civilians and should increase the number of troops deployed to South Sudan after the country becomes independent on July 9, 2011, a global coalition of eight international non-governmental organizations said today.

Later this week, the UN Security Council is expected to authorize a new peacekeeping mission in South Sudan to succeed the current United Nations Mission in Sudan (UNMIS). The UN secretary-general has recommended increasing the number of troops from the current 5,000 to 7,000. However, some member states have urged lower troop levels, citing cost concerns.

“We are concerned that the UN estimates were already too conservative,” said Susan Purdin, the International Rescue Committee’s country director for South Sudan. “Security Council members should treat the secretary-general’s recommendations as the minimum acceptable level of resources for the new mission. They should not be swayed by the desire to save money if that will put people’s lives at risk.”

The coalition pointed to increasing security threats in South Sudan, particularly near the north-south border, and the government’s lack of capacity to protect its civilians effectively as some of the key challenges the new mission needs to address.

“The increasing violence and human rights violations this year underscore the need for a robust and flexible peacekeeping presence in South Sudan,” said Daniel Bekele, Africa director at Human Rights Watch.

Between January and mid-May, violent clashes have displaced over 117,000 people and killed almost 1,400 in South Sudan alone, according to UN sources. Much of the violence has been linked to clashes

between the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) and armed militia groups, and large-scale inter-communal conflicts over resources.

The Security Council should ensure that the new mission receives sufficient resources to implement its mandate fully and to meet the many challenges ahead, the coalition of international human rights and humanitarian groups said.

“Now is not the time to be cutting costs by skimping on troop numbers,” said Monica Serrano, executive director of the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect. “The new UN mission in South Sudan must be adequately resourced to protect civilians so that we are not faced with bigger costs (both human and financial) in the future.”

The NGO coalition includes the following organisations:

1. Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect
2. Human Rights Watch
3. International Rescue Committee
4. Open Society Foundations
5. Oxfam
6. Pact Sudan
7. Refugees International
8. Trócaire

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