



DEFENDDEFENDERS

East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project

UN Human Rights Council – 43rd regular session

**Item 4: Interactive dialogue with the Commission on Human Rights
in South Sudan**

Oral statement

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Madam President, dear Commissioners,

DefendDefenders welcomes your report, its focus on the political economy of the conflict and the impact of economic crimes on economic, social, and cultural rights. It sheds new light on South Sudan' situation.

Your findings are damning. They include crimes under international law and ongoing gross, widespread, and systemic human rights violations and abuses, including sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), restrictions to citizens' fundamental rights, and deeply entrenched impunity. The human rights situation in South Sudan remains one of the most serious in Africa, with the largest refugee and internally displaced people crisis.

DefendDefenders' recent research in the country (February 2020) confirms that the space for human rights defenders, civil society, and the media is under attack. Those working on issues deemed politically sensitive, including corruption, identification of perpetrators, and monitoring of the implementation of the Revitalised Peace Agreement (R-ARCSS), are reporting widespread surveillance by, and pressure from, security forces, notably the National Security Service (NSS), as well as patterns of threats, harassment, attacks, arbitrary detention, ill-treatment, and enforced disappearances. Fear and self-censorship are mounting.

Risk factors of further violations exist. In several areas, intercommunal tensions and violence, often with an ethnic overtone, are fuelled by conflicts over livelihoods and by impunity. As we speak, violence is increasing in Tonj and Pibor/Jonglei.

While welcoming the political step taken in late February with the swearing in of five Vice-Presidents, we caution that it is yet to transition into any human rights progress. Key provisions of the Peace Agreement, including Chapter II (transitional security arrangements) and Chapter V (transitional justice, including the establishment of the Hybrid Court for South Sudan) remain unimplemented. This, and recent history, should lead all stakeholders to a cautious approach.

Since 2016, the Human Rights Council, with the Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan, has successfully placed human rights and accountability at the centre of multilateral efforts to

address the country's situation and help its people. By doing so, it has also contributed to incentivising the parties to implement the Peace Agreement and helping regional actors to keep the momentum.

At this session, the Council continue sending the right message to all stakeholders by renewing the mandate of the Commission in full to allow it to pursue its vital work.

Thank you for your attention.