



Human rights expert group concludes first visit to South Sudan

JUBA/ADDIS ABABA (16 September 2016) -- Members of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan, established by the Human Rights Council in March this year, concluded its first mission to the east-central African country yesterday after having met with a wide range of actors.

During their one-week mission (8 to 15 September), the three Commission members * travelled throughout the country holding exchanges with government officials, the judiciary, the legislative Assembly, the diplomatic corps, United Nations actors, civil society organizations and internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) Protection of Civilians sites (PoC).

Speaking to the press in Juba, Commission Chairperson Yasmin Sooka said: “We travelled to Bentiu and made a stop in Malakal. The visit proved to be extremely useful as we were able to visit the Malakal UNMISS PoC site housing IDPs and obtained an extensive briefing on the human rights situation there”.

While meeting with government officials, the Commissioners touched on critical issues of accountability, particularly in respect of previous and current investigations and inquiries that the government has either conducted, instituted or committed to. These issues included the establishment of the Hybrid Court for South Sudan, the Bill amending the Penal Code to incorporate international crimes and the establishment of the Commission for Truth, Reconciliation and Healing.

The Commission observed the deplorable conditions under which IDPs live. Unfortunately, it could not visit the PoC site in Juba for security reasons but held a meeting with the PoC leadership on the human rights situation and the violations and abuses reportedly committed in Juba.

“We are deeply concerned at the slow progress on the implementation of the provisions of the Peace Agreement which is fundamental to ending the conflict, human rights violations and normalization of the lives of South Sudanese”, Sooka added.

The Commission members also held two meetings with women in the POC sites where they were able to hear directly from women on the human rights situation and the human rights violations and abuses they had suffered, including gang rape by armed men in uniform.

“Overall, we remain concerned by the diminishing space for journalists and civil society members who are subject to intimidation and harassment; by the lack of access for UNMISS and humanitarian actors to reach the most vulnerable; the escalation of sexual violence against women and girls”, said Commission member Kenneth Scott.

“Above all, we are concerned about the ongoing impunity and lack of accountability for serious crimes and human rights violations in South Sudan, without which lasting peace cannot be achieved”, added Scott.

The Commission thanks the Government of South Sudan for its cooperation during its inaugural visit to the country. The three members are currently in Addis Ababa where they are holding additional meetings with high-level officials from the African Union, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development, the Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission, etc. and will later travel to Uganda to interact with South Sudanese refugees and for further meetings in connection with their mandate**.

The Commission plans to return to South Sudan later this year before reporting to the Human Rights Council in March 2017.

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For more information please contact: Joseph Bonsu, + 41 79 444 55 15

Additional information about the Commission can be found here:

<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/CoHSouthSudan/Pages/Index.aspx>