

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 13, 2023

The Honorable Antony Blinken
U.S. Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
Washington, D.C. 20520

The Honorable Janet Yellen
U.S. Secretary of the Treasury
U.S. Department of Treasury
Washington, D.C. 20220

The Honorable Linda Thomas-Greenfield
U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations
United Nations
New York, N.Y. 10017

Dear Secretary Blinken, Secretary Yellen, and Ambassador Thomas-Greenfield:

We write to you to express our continued deep concern regarding the situation in South Sudan. The U.S. Senate spoke clearly on this issue with the unanimous passage of S.Res.380 on December 9, 2021. We urge the administration to deepen its engagement on South Sudan with an eye toward accountability for spoilers to the peace process, corruption and human rights violations, and a path to sustainable peace, including free and fair elections—the country’s first as an independent state. A key opportunity to do so is the upcoming renewal of the mandate of the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS).

Since achieving independence in 2011, the people of South Sudan have been failed by their leaders—who perpetuate deadly conflict and political impasse to serve their self-interests. Extensive reporting by the UN Security Council’s Panel of Experts, UN Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and others has detailed abuses committed to include widespread sexual violence, mass killings, and other atrocities. The humanitarian situation in South Sudan is dire, with over two-thirds of the population, almost 9 million people—half of them children—in need of aid, according to the Congressional Research Service.¹ The U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs says that in South Sudan, “[p]eople’s lives have been shattered by years of conflict, social and political instability, unprecedented climate shocks, ongoing violence, frequent displacements, the impact of COVID-19 pandemic, food insecurity and multiple disease outbreaks.”² The civil war that began in 2013 resulted in the deaths of as many as 400,000 people and the displacement of millions.³

¹ In Focus: South Sudan. Congressional Research Service, July 28, 2022. Report IF10218.

² OCHA. Urgent funding needed as multiple interconnected shocks plight the people of South Sudan. Relief Web, July 4, 2022.


³ Specia, Megan. 383,000: Estimated Death Toll in South Sudan’s War. New York Times, September 26, 2018.

South Sudanese leaders have also failed to make meaningful progress toward holding free and fair elections, a condition of both the 2015 Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in Republic of South Sudan and the 2018 Revitalized Agreement. Elections have been repeatedly postponed. Most recently, elections planned for early this year were pushed to late 2024.⁴ There is no doubt that the people of South Sudan must have an opportunity to choose legitimate leaders, but the conditions do not exist currently in South Sudan to enable such an exercise. The United States, alongside our partners in the international community, must be clear about real expectations and benchmarks for drafting a permanent constitution and the credible conduct of elections, which will include a vital role for UNMISS. Alongside this however, we must be prepared to take action against those, even at the highest levels, who continue to impede South Sudan's transition.

Last year, the United Nations Security Council extended the UNMISS mandate through March 15, 2023. The renewal of the mandate this month provides an opportunity to review US and multilateral policy toward South Sudan and consider changes intended to accelerate progress toward free and fair elections, improve humanitarian conditions, and crack down on human rights violators and public officials who abuse their positions for private gain. We also urge the administration to consider whether additional sanctions and other accountability measures on senior officials in the South Sudanese government, military, and National Security Service, or individuals and actors in the region who enable corruption and the perpetuation of conflict in South Sudan, could contribute to the pursuit of these goals. Finally, we reiterate the call by the Senate, made through the unanimous passage of S.Res.473 on May 11, 2022, for the U.S. to advocate with other UN member states to redouble efforts to renew and enforce the UN arms embargo and other sanctions on South Sudan, which are set to expire on May 31, 2023.

To date, the international community has failed to meaningfully contribute to changing the course of events in South Sudan. We encourage you to seize the opportunity presented by the renewal of the UNMISS mandate to make needed changes to support the people of South Sudan on their path toward peace and democracy, while holding accountable those who have denied it to them.

Sincerely,




Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator



Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator

⁴ Machol, Deng. South Sudan again delays its 1st election, until late 2024. The Associated Press, August 4, 2022.



Cory A. Booker
United States Senator



Christopher A. Coons
United States Senator