

Advance edited version

Distr.: General
10 June 2026

Original: English

Human Rights Council

Sixty-second session

15 June–10 July 2026

Agenda items 2 and 10

**Annual report of the United Nations High Commissioner
for Human Rights and reports of the Office of the
High Commissioner and the Secretary-General**

Technical assistance and capacity-building

Technical assistance and capacity-building for South Sudan

Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights*

Summary

The present report, prepared pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution 58/31, gives an overview of the technical assistance and capacity-building activities provided by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights through the Human Rights Division of the United Nations Mission in South Sudan to the Government of South Sudan. It covers the period from January to December 2025.

* The present report was submitted to the conference services for processing after the deadline for technical reasons beyond the control of the submitting office.

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution 58/31 on technical assistance and capacity-building for South Sudan. In its resolution, the Council requested the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), in cooperation with the Government of South Sudan and relevant mechanisms of the African Union, to continue to assist South Sudan in addressing human rights challenges in the post-conflict transition by providing the Government with the necessary technical and capacity-building support, in accordance with the terms of the resolution. The Council also requested OHCHR to present a comprehensive report at the sixty-second session on the support provided to the Government of South Sudan, to be followed by an interactive dialogue with the participation of representatives of the African Union.

2. The report, which covers the period from January to December 2025, outlines the technical assistance and capacity-building support provided to the Government of South Sudan by OHCHR through the Human Rights Division of the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) and its other relevant components, to help address the main human rights challenges in the country. It also contains recommendations for the Government and other stakeholders to strengthen the promotion and protection of human rights in the country.

II. Methodology

3. The present report is based on information collected and corroborated in accordance with the OHCHR methodology on human rights monitoring. During the reporting period, human rights monitoring remained significantly constrained by insecurity, poor road access, and the presence of armed groups in remote hotspots, particularly in rural and cattle-camp areas. The report draws on human rights challenges documented by the Human Rights Division through its headquarters in Juba and field offices countrywide.¹ However, the liquidity crisis – particularly the closure of five out of eleven field offices – significantly constrained the Division's capacity to fully implement key activities, including advocacy and engagement on priority human rights issues in the locations affected.

4. The information on technical assistance needs is also based on direct engagement with the Government of South Sudan and other stakeholders. Recommendations from projects implemented by the Division in collaboration with other UNMISS components² and with the United Nations country team also inform the present report. Activities undertaken during the reporting period were guided by capacity gaps identified by the Government of South Sudan, outlined in the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (the Revitalized Peace Agreement) or observed by the Human Rights Division.

III. Human rights situation

5. In 2025, South Sudan experienced a marked deterioration of the human rights situation, driven by escalating political tensions, intensified armed hostilities and persistent localized violence. The scale, intensity and geographic spread of violence reflected a rapidly worsening security environment as well as a serious erosion of protection guarantees owed to civilians under international human rights law and international humanitarian law.

¹ This includes the Juba Field Office and the Yei Company Operating Base in Central Equatoria State.

² The Rule of Law Advisory Section, the Women's Protection Advisory Unit, the Protection Transition and Reintegration Section, the Child Protection Unit, the Communications and Public Information Division and the United Nations Police.

6. The Human Rights Division documented 1,158 conflict-related incidents resulting in human rights violations and abuses and violations of international humanitarian law, affecting 5,108 victims – 2,299 killed, 2,015 injured, 547 abducted, and 247 subjected to conflict-related sexual violence – representing a 40% increase compared with 2024. This sharp rise occurred despite significant access and monitoring constraints, underscoring the gravity of the situation.

7. Violence was perpetrated primarily by parties to the conflict, notably the South Sudan People's Defence Forces and the Sudan People's Liberation Army in Opposition, as well as their affiliated armed elements, alongside community-based militias and civil defence groups. The 40% increase in civilian victims reflects systematic failures in the protection of civilians and persistent inability or unwillingness by parties to the conflict to uphold their obligations under international humanitarian law and international human rights law. Civilians were not only incidentally harmed but were recurrently exposed to indiscriminate and targeted attacks, including aerial bombardments and assaults on civilian objects, indicating a patterned disregard for the principles of distinction, proportionality and precautions. Civilians increasingly bore the brunt of hostilities, highlighting a deepening protection crisis across multiple regions of the country.

8. Amid the deteriorating political and security situation, regular monitoring of the human rights situation in South Sudan was crucial to identify evolving challenges and areas requiring targeted interventions. This continuous assessment enabled the Human Rights Division, within its capacities, to deliver tailored technical assistance, including training addressing specific human rights concerns and capacity gaps, in line with Human Rights Council resolution 58/31.

IV. Technical assistance and capacity-building support to the Government on the implementation of the transitional justice process under chapter V of the Revitalized Peace Agreement

9. The Government continued to take steps to advance the transitional justice process under chapter V of the Revitalized Peace Agreement following the adoption of key pieces of legislation establishing the Commission for Truth, Reconciliation and Healing and the Compensation and Reparation Authority. The passage of these laws by the Transitional National Legislative Assembly, and the President's subsequent assent in 2024, marked a critical achievement in the implementation of chapter V of the Revitalized Peace Agreement.

10. Building on this legislative progress, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Office at the African Union and the Human Rights Division provided technical assistance to the Ministry of Justice and Constitutional Affairs, the Transitional National Legislative Assembly, the Reconstituted Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission and civil society organizations in support of the operationalization of the Commission for Truth, Reconciliation and Healing, and the broader implementation of chapter V of the Revitalized Peace Agreement.

11. With the support of the Human Rights Division and UNDP, the Ministry of Justice and Constitutional Affairs developed a Transitional Justice Strategic Plan during 2024 and 2025, which aims to provide an overarching framework for the promotion of human rights, institutional reform, legal harmonization, and alignment with broader peacebuilding priorities. The strategy sought to enhance coherence among transitional justice mechanisms, to strengthen coordination with national and international partners and to ensure that implementation is grounded in the country's constitutional and legal context.

12. Under the law establishing the Commission for Truth, Reconciliation and Healing, the Government of South Sudan, through the Ministry of Justice and Constitutional Affairs, is responsible for forming a selection panel to nominate four South Sudanese commissioners out of a total of seven commissioners.³ To support this South Sudanese-led process, the Human Rights Division held 15 consultations with the Ministry of Justice and Constitutional

³ Commission for Truth, Reconciliation and Healing Act 2024.

Affairs and provided technical and advisory services on the Transitional Constitution of South Sudan and the functioning and procedural integrity of the selection panel. Guidance on effective outreach strategies, including the use of multimedia, was provided to broaden access for prospective applicants to the Commission for Truth, Reconciliation and Healing.

13. With technical support from the Human Rights Division, UNDP and the Reconstituted Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission, a national stakeholders' conference was held on 8 November 2025. During the conference, participants nominated representatives to serve on the selection panel, through a transparent and participatory process. The list of nominees was subsequently submitted to the Ministry of Justice and Constitutional Affairs for consideration. The selection panel was constituted and formally endorsed by the President of South Sudan in October 2025. Throughout this period, the Human Rights Division maintained constructive engagement with the Ministry of Justice and the selection panel to promote adherence to procedures envisaged in the Commission for Truth, Reconciliation and Healing Act and inclusive practices.

14. According to the law establishing the Commission for Truth, Reconciliation and Healing, the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, in consultation with the Secretary-General of the United Nations, is mandated to initiate the process for selecting the remaining three non-South Sudanese commissioners. The Chairperson is required to submit a shortlist of six candidates to the Minister of Justice and Constitutional Affairs for the selection of the three commissioners.

15. To fulfil this requirement, the African Union Commission, the Human Rights Division and UNDP worked jointly through an African Union–United Nations joint task force to oversee the recruitment process. The positions were advertised, applications were received and screened, and the joint task force finalized a shortlist of six qualified candidates. The African Union Commission has finalized the recruitment process for the non-South Sudanese commissioners and is in the process of submitting the names to the Ministry of Justice and Constitutional Affairs, thereby completing the selection process as required by law.

16. While progress has been made towards the establishment of the Commission for Truth, Reconciliation and Healing, the creation of the Hybrid Court for South Sudan continues to face significant challenges. The continued delay in operationalizing this essential accountability mechanism risks leaving serious violations unaddressed and may undermine public confidence in the broader transitional justice process envisaged under chapter V of the Revitalized Peace Agreement.

17. One of the key outstanding steps is the completion of the necessary instruments between the African Union and the Government that would guide the process of establishing the Hybrid Court. Further delays in establishing and operationalizing the Hybrid Court for South Sudan continue to weaken the credibility and deterrent effect of the transitional justice framework set out in chapter V of the Revitalized Peace Agreement. This reality underscores the urgent need for renewed cooperation on this matter between the African Union and the Government to move the process forward. Establishing the Hybrid Court remains essential for addressing serious violations of international law, promoting accountability for grave crimes, deterring future abuses and reinforcing victims' rights to justice and effective remedy.

18. To address the persistent human rights challenges and protection-of-civilian concerns in the country, the Human Rights Division implemented a comprehensive nationwide programme aimed at advancing accountability, transitional justice and civic space, and the prevention and response to conflict-related sexual violence.⁴ Working in close partnership with government entities, the African Union and civil society, the Human Rights Division delivered these interventions with the aim of reinforcing core institutions and empowering communities affected by human rights violations and abuses, including those committed during armed conflict.

19. Over the course of the year, the Human Rights Division conducted 137 capacity-building activities, reaching 7,290 participants, including 3,274 women. The participants included, among others, members of the security forces, the justice sector and

⁴ See sect. VIII below for further details.

civil society organizations. These efforts contributed to strengthening rule of law and accountability mechanisms, supporting transitional justice processes, enhancing protection responses and expanding civic space. The progress achieved during the reporting period, as elaborated below, underscores the importance of sustained engagement, strong partnerships and coordinated action in the consolidation of human rights protection in South Sudan.

20. All technical assistance and capacity-building support provided to government security forces was delivered in full compliance with the United Nations Human Rights Due Diligence Policy. In 2025, the Human Rights Division strengthened the implementation of the policy through a revised standard operating procedure, introducing umbrella risk assessments to ensure timely and consistent vetting. The Human Rights Division completed 96 risk assessments, all of which were accompanied by tailored mitigation measures such as enhanced monitoring, continued human rights training, corrective actions, technical support and/or safeguards for victims and survivors. These measures ensured that United Nations support to government security forces enhances respect for international human rights law, international humanitarian law and international refugee law.

V. Technical assistance to human rights institutions, civil society organizations and other stakeholders

21. During the reporting period, the Human Rights Division provided technical and institutional support to the South Sudan Human Rights Commission and to state human rights commissions across the country. Through 20 training sessions benefiting 877 participants (including 286 women) and 36 structured engagements, the Human Rights Division strengthened the operational capacity, independence and effectiveness of these national and state-level bodies. The support included capacity-building on monitoring and reporting, transitional justice, conflict-related sexual violence prevention, documentation standards and international human rights mechanisms.

22. The work of the Human Rights Division led to improvements in institutional capacity. For example, community representatives in Bentiu⁵ formed the 10-member Transitional Justice Working Group in Leer county after receiving training on transitional justice in April 2025. This group has since been regularly engaging local authorities on truth-seeking and reconciliation priorities.

23. During August and September, capacity-building interventions by the Human Rights Division also produced tangible improvements in monitoring, investigation, documentation and reporting practices by state human rights commissions. The Upper Nile State Human Rights Commission conducted its first round of independent monitoring missions to detention facilities and submitted written reports of its conclusions to authorities. Members of the Western Bahr el Ghazal State Human Rights Commission who participated in training sessions organized by the Human Rights Division successfully identified overcrowding concerns at Wau Prison and escalated these issues through formal advocacy channels, prompting State authorities to deploy additional judicial personnel to expedite case handling.

24. The Human Rights Division also strengthened coordination mechanisms between the state human rights commissions, civil society, government actors and other protection stakeholders. Under the guidance of the Human Rights Division, the Central Equatoria Human Rights Forum became a more structured platform for dialogue on rule of law, civic space, transitional justice and other human rights challenges. These forums brought together state ministries, justice actors, security forces, civil society organizations and humanitarian partners to collaboratively develop policy recommendations, coordinated monitoring strategies and more reliable communication channels.

25. Capacity-building support provided to state human rights commissions equipped members with the skills to operationalize transitional justice mechanisms in their areas. In the last quarter of 2025, state human rights commissions in Central Equatoria State, Upper Nile State and Western Equatoria State actively participated in transitional justice dialogues

⁵ Unity State.

and contributed to the formation of transitional justice working groups. Technical support strengthened local leadership in truth-seeking and accountability processes.

26. The infrastructural and logistical support provided significantly improved the visibility, mobility and effectiveness of state human rights commissions throughout the country. Facilities supported by Quick Impact Projects in Bentiu, Rumbek and Wau improved the ability of the state human rights commissions to maintain their presence and to respond to emerging protection risks in a more consistent manner. The provision of a vehicle to the Central Equatoria State Human Rights Commission enabled more frequent field monitoring visits to detention centres, rural communities and other sites that had previously been inaccessible. More timely assessments of the human rights situation on the ground have been the result.

27. The Human Rights Division's support to the South Sudan Human Rights Commission and respective state commissions in their coordination of key national events, such as the celebration of International Human Rights Day, helped to raise public awareness of human rights issues and strengthened national ownership of human rights principles. Through rallies, community dialogues, radio programmes and multi-stakeholder round-table discussions, the national and state human rights commissions positioned themselves at the centre of the public discourse on human rights, reinforcing their visibility and relevance within the national protection architecture.

28. Through targeted interventions, the Human Rights Division significantly enhanced the effectiveness, credibility and independence of the country's national and state human rights commissions. The combination of capacity-building, strategic guidance, infrastructural support and joint monitoring contributed to improvements in human rights monitoring and reporting, greater responsiveness to human rights violations and abuses, and more vigorous engagement in efforts to promote and protect human rights. It equipped the national and state human rights institutions with the knowledge, tools and operational support needed to fulfil their mandates. The Human Rights Division has helped to position these institutions as key actors in advancing accountability, protecting vulnerable populations and promoting a culture of respect for human rights across South Sudan. This sustained investment represents a critical contribution to building a resilient national human rights system capable of driving long-term reforms and supporting lasting peace and justice efforts throughout the country.

29. The Human Rights Division also strengthened the capacity of national and state human rights institutions through technical assistance and operational support aimed at enhancing their capacity to contribute meaningfully to the country's transitional justice process. Capacity-building activities provided the South Sudan Human Rights Commission with a deeper understanding of its constitutional mandate as it related to transitional justice and equipped its members with skills to engage more effectively with civil society actors and other stakeholders. To further reinforce the institutional functionality of the Commission, the Human Rights Division secured dedicated office space for the Commission in Juba for one year, enabling it to resume regular human rights monitoring and advisory responsibilities.

30. At the state level, the Human Rights Division facilitated the establishment, launch and operationalization of State Transitional Justice Committees in Lakes, Northern Bahr el Ghazal, Warrap and Western Bahr el Ghazal States. Through sustained technical guidance, the Division supported these multi-stakeholder structures – comprising state authorities and civil society representatives – in assuming leadership roles in coordinating state-level transitional justice initiatives. As a result, local preparedness improved for the eventual operationalization of the Commission for Truth, Reconciliation and Healing. Collectively, these interventions strengthened institutional capacity, expanded the geographic reach of transitional justice efforts and reinforced national ownership of the process.

31. Civil society organizations remained central to transitional justice efforts. The Human Rights Division prioritized strengthening civil society engagement through sustained technical assistance to, and in coordination with, the Civil Society Transitional Justice Working Group, which served as the principal platform for strategy-setting, resource mobilization and national advocacy. To build competence and ensure inclusive participation, the Human Rights Division organized and facilitated 16 transitional justice workshops in Juba targeting women's groups, youth leaders, victims/survivors, and organizations of

persons with disabilities. Six additional workshops were facilitated in Central Equatoria, Lakes, Unity, Upper Nile, Western Bahr el Ghazal and Western Equatoria States. These training sessions focused on transmitting practical knowledge on truth-seeking, reparations, victim participation and community-level outreaches. The sessions strengthened partners' understanding of the Commission for Truth, Reconciliation and Healing and of the Compensation and Reparation Authority.

32. Complementing capacity-building, the Human Rights Division provided technical and logistical support to the Civil Society Transitional Justice Working Group to help convene seven forums in Juba. These forums expedited information-sharing, harmonized advocacy messages, and fostered the development of coherent civil society positions on the establishment of transitional justice mechanisms. Technical support was also delivered for the formulation of the Working Group's 2026 Strategic Action Plan on Transitional Justice, which strengthened planning, prioritization and coordination frameworks across networks.

33. To broaden its engagement with diverse audiences nationwide, the Human Rights Division facilitated 15 radio talk shows in collaboration with the Civil Society Transitional Justice Working Group and faith-based organizations. The radio shows enhanced public understanding of the Commission for Truth, Reconciliation and Healing and the Compensation and Reparation Authority, while emphasizing the essential roles played by civil society and grass-roots communities in shaping and monitoring transitional justice processes.

34. As a result, the Transitional Justice Working Group organized a total of six activities, including the Stakeholders' National Conference on the Selection Process for Transitional Justice Mechanisms, in Juba,⁶ a workshop on transitional justice mechanisms and processes, in Tambura county,⁷ and a round table on transitional justice mechanisms, in Wau.⁸ These progressive outcomes show how civil society actors have become better coordinated, better informed, and more effective in mobilizing public support and engaging communities through outreaches and sensitization campaigns, workshops, round-table discussions and focus group dialogues due to the support rendered by the Human Rights Division. A broader national dialogue on truth, reparations, reconciliation and accountability emerged, reinforcing national ownership of the transitional justice agenda.

35. Despite these achievements, significant challenges remain on the transitional justice front, including the need to operationalize institutions, to ensure adequate funding and to encourage the requisite political support. Nonetheless, the progress achieved to date reflects a gradual shift from normative commitments towards practical implementation. Sustained engagement, transparency and inclusive participation will be essential to consolidate these gains and translate them into tangible outcomes for victims, survivors and affected communities.

VI. Engagement with parties to the conflict on other human rights and civilian protection concerns

36. The interventions of the Human Rights Division resulted in some improvements in the operational behaviour of security actors, particularly in conflict-affected areas. For instance, following direct advocacy by the Human Rights Division on the protection of

⁶ From 14 to 16 May 2025, the CSO Stakeholders' National Conference on the Selection Process for Transitional Justice Mechanisms in South Sudan was convened under the auspices of the South Sudan Civil Society Forum, and drew participants from civil society organizations under the Transitional Justice Working Group, faith-based organizations, women's groups, organizations of persons with disabilities and youth groups.

⁷ On 26 May 2025, the Human Rights Division, in collaboration with the Western Equatoria Human Rights Commission and with Vision South Sudan, conducted a critical one-day workshop on transitional justice mechanisms and processes, in Tambura county.

⁸ On 22 and 23 July 2025, the Human Rights Division, in collaboration with the Community Empowerment for Progress Organization, held a two-day round table on transitional justice mechanisms, in Wau.

civilian infrastructure in Yei⁹ and Yambio¹⁰ in January 2025, the local leadership of the South Sudan People's Defence Forces took steps to vacate schools previously occupied by troops, restoring access to education for hundreds of children and easing tensions with affected communities.

37. Capacity-building activities also strengthened command responsibility and internal oversight within security institutions. In March and April 2025, training for commanders and intelligence officers serving with the South Sudan People's Defence Forces on international humanitarian law and the lawful use of force under it resulted in the issuance of internal directives reinforcing discipline during operations and prohibiting the use of excessive force. In several instances, senior officers reported that the training provided by the Human Rights Division had prompted them to initiate internal inquiries into allegations of arbitrary arrest, ill-treatment and obstruction of humanitarian access, demonstrating improved responsiveness to civilian complaints and human rights concerns.

38. By facilitating dialogue between respective commanders from the Sudan People's Liberation Army in Opposition and the South Sudan People's Defence Forces, the Human Rights Division helped to prevent escalations in local tensions and supported the re-establishment of joint coordination forums, both of which contributed to improved civil-military relations and safer community environments in Lainya, Morobo,¹¹ Yambio¹² and Wau¹³ counties. The Human Rights Division engaged with armed actors to discuss issues related to restrictions of movement, interference with humanitarian activities and other security concerns.

39. In April and May 2025, five advocacy meetings were held with 15 representatives of the South Sudan People's Defence Forces, the Sudan People's Liberation Army in Opposition, the South Sudan National Police Service and the Unified Forces. These meetings assessed the relationship between armed actors in Western Bahr el Ghazal State, examined civil-military relations, reviewed strategies for enhancing civilian protection in Central Equatoria State, and assessed the security situation amid rising tensions between the Azande and Balanda communities which had led to internally displaced persons being displaced once again, from their camp in Western Equatoria State.¹⁴

40. The Human Rights Division also played a key role in strengthening protection-of-civilians initiatives among police and corrections units. Training delivered to South Sudan National Police Service officers on lawful arrest, detention safeguards, conflict-related sexual violence prevention, and victim and witness protection, in September and October 2025, resulted in the introduction of new procedures: such as designating separate interview spaces for survivors of sexual and gender-based violence during mobile court sessions in Bentiu and Leer counties, improving the handling of juvenile detainees in Bentiu,¹⁵ and enhancing documentation practices in police stations in Bentiu, Juba, Kuajok, Malakal, Torit and Yambio. Workshops with prison officers held in April 2025 improved compliance with the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the Nelson Mandela Rules), leading to improved conditions of detention and better treatment of inmates in Malakal.

⁹ Central Equatoria State.

¹⁰ Western Equatoria State.

¹¹ Central Equatoria State.

¹² Western Equatoria State.

¹³ Western Bahr el Ghazal State.

¹⁴ Following the removal of the Governor of Western Equatoria State on 10 February 2025, intercommunal violence between the Azande and Balanda ethnic groups and clashes between the South Sudan People's Defence Forces and the Sudan People's Liberation Army in Opposition led to mass civilian displacements.

¹⁵ The Human Rights Division, in collaboration with other components of the mission, transferred convicted juveniles from Bentiu Prison to the Wau Reformatory Centre in Western Bahr el Ghazal.

VII. Engagement by the Government with international human rights mechanisms

41. The Human Rights Division significantly contributed to the engagement by South Sudan with international human rights mechanisms, in particular the universal periodic review and the United Nations human rights treaty bodies. In December 2024, the Human Rights Division facilitated the validation of a comprehensive national implementation matrix of recommendations emanating from the universal periodic review process. This tool, developed by national stakeholders,¹⁶ serves as a framework for measuring the progress made by the Government of South Sudan towards bringing laws, procedures and practices into alignment with international human rights law. It is also designed to guide the drafting of the State report that is due in January 2027 for the fourth cycle of the universal periodic review. It was formally submitted to the Minister of Justice and Constitutional Affairs for endorsement in February 2025. Changes in leadership within the Ministry of Justice and Constitutional Affairs delayed the endorsement of this matrix in 2025.

42. The Human Rights Division continued to engage with the Ministry of Justice and Constitutional Affairs on its request for technical support for the establishment of a National Human Rights Council, envisaged as the national mechanism for the country's reporting and other treaty body obligations. This assistance included a three-day capacity-building workshop held from 24 to 26 June 2025 for 50 members of the prospective National Human Rights Council and officials of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The training included technical knowledge of the United Nations treaty body system, State obligations arising from ratified human rights instruments, and the validated matrix of recommendations of the universal periodic review. On 30 June 2025, the Human Rights Division facilitated the validation of civil society's midterm shadow report on the universal periodic review, reinforcing civil society's role in the independent monitoring of the human rights situation in South Sudan.

43. The technical assistance of the Human Rights Division generated several results, including strengthened national coordination, enhanced preparedness for upcoming State reporting obligations, and improved capacity within the institutions responsible for reporting and follow-up on international human rights mechanisms.

VIII. Conflict-related sexual violence

A. Main human rights challenges

44. In 2025, conflict-related sexual violence in South Sudan remained widespread amid escalating political tensions, recurrent armed clashes and a deteriorating humanitarian situation. These factors contributed to an enabling environment in which sexual violence persisted with impunity in most cases. The breakdown of local security arrangements, particularly in Central Equatoria, Greater Upper Nile and Western Equatoria States further exacerbated risks. Cycles of intercommunal violence and retaliation continued to fuel conflict-related sexual violence, as community-based militias, state security forces, and other armed actors, including armed youth, abducted women and girls and subjected them to rape, gang rape, sexual slavery, forced marriage and other forms of sexual violence. Prolonged flooding and displacement further heightened risks, exposing women and girls to attacks during flight and within internally displaced persons' and refugee camps.

45. The Human Rights Division documented 144 incidents affecting 247 survivors, including 163 women, 83 girls and one man, with some survivors only 7 years old. This represents a 37% decrease in incidents compared with 2024. However, the decline in documented cases did not reflect a reduction in severity: rape and gang rape accounted for 81% of the incidents, and abduction-related conflict-related sexual violence increased by 122%. Overall, while reported cases decreased, the available data indicate that

¹⁶ Government institutions, civil society organizations and the South Sudan Human Rights Commission.

conflict-related sexual violence patterns remained grave, underreported, and increasingly coercive, particularly in contexts of abduction and prolonged exploitation.

46. In several locations, credible allegations of conflict-related sexual violence could not be verified due to the inability of protection actors to safely access affected communities in a timely manner. The frequent mobility of these various armed actors and the prolonged captivity of survivors caused further delays in detection, complicating referrals and case follow-up. Additionally, incidents of conflict-related sexual violence continue to be underreported owing to social stigma and rejection, trauma, lack of trust in legal institutions, limited access to support services and fear of retaliation.

B. Impact of capacity-building and technical cooperation

47. Despite a highly constrained operating environment, the Human Rights Division and the UNMISS Women's Protection Advisory Unit provided technical support that contributed to improvements in the prevention of conflict-related sexual violence, early warning, coordination, and survivor-centred response. The Women's Protection Advisory Unit improved information flows between field offices and the UNMISS Force Headquarters through strengthened monitoring, analysis and reporting arrangements. This allowed for a timelier analysis of conflict-related sexual violence trends and for better-informed planning of patrols to combat conflict-related sexual violence. The enhanced coordination supported more targeted protection responses in high-risk locations.

48. Capacity-building for frontline service providers further reinforced institutional response frameworks. In Yei,¹⁷ where prolonged conflict has had a disproportionate impact on women, the Human Rights Division, in collaboration with the Ministry of Gender, Child and Social Welfare and the South Sudan Nurses and Midwifery Association, organized a two-day training programme for 30 health professionals, including 16 women. The training strengthened participants' capacity to respond to sexual and gender-based violence and conflict-related sexual violence through trauma-informed care, knowledge of legal standards and survivor rights, contributing to improved intake procedures, confidentiality practices and survivor management at Yei Civil Hospital.

C. Engagement with parties to the conflict on conflict-related sexual violence

49. Engagement with security institutions, within the framework of their respective action plans to address conflict-related sexual violence in South Sudan, remained central to the preventive strategy of the Human Rights Division. Although the mandate of the Joint Implementation Committee for the Armed Forces expired in December 2023, the Women's Protection Advisory Unit sustained advocacy for its renewal. In parallel, the Women's Protection Advisory Unit leveraged its engagement with the South Sudan People's Defence Forces' Military Justice Directorate, the South Sudan Opposition Alliance and the Sudan People's Liberation Army in Opposition to maintain dialogue on their respective obligations as laid out in the action plan on conflict-related sexual violence. These efforts helped preserve institutional awareness and kept corresponding commitments on the agenda despite prevailing political constraints.

50. The Women's Protection Advisory Unit continued to provide technical support to facilitate the implementation of the National Police Service Action Plan on conflict-related sexual violence. Oversight committee meetings were convened quarterly, resulting in the adoption of a standardized progress-tracking matrix for use across all states and in a commitment to conduct the first assessment of the National Police Service Action Plan since its launch in 2019. The National Police Service's proposal to establish an evaluation committee to carry out this task marked a significant step toward evidence-based planning and institutional accountability. Discussions on extending the Action Plan beyond its October

¹⁷ Central Equatoria State.

2025 expiration date reflected the National Police Service's renewed commitment to the prevention of conflict-related sexual violence despite persistent resource constraints.

51. The Women's Protection Advisory Unit also worked to strengthen police-community engagement by facilitating a community sensitization workshop that brought together 85 participants (54 men and 31 women) and was focused on enhancing police-community collaboration, promoting gender-sensitive policing practices, and reinforcing implementation of the National Police Service's Action Plan. These interactions contributed to improved trust in law enforcement structures and encouraged reporting from communities.

52. In its engagement with all entities, the Women's Protection Advisory Unit and the Human Rights Division maintained a strong focus on preventing and responding to conflict-related sexual violence, and on equipping military justice officials, investigators and community-based security personnel with survivor-centred approaches, referral pathways, and knowledge on accountability obligations. In several divisions, commanders adopted focal point systems for conflict-related sexual violence reporting and committed to integrating the Human Rights Division's guidance into their internal training programmes – extending capacity beyond those who took part in training.

IX. Accountability

A. Main human rights challenges

53. During the reporting period, significant structural challenges continued to undermine access to justice in South Sudan. Courts remained largely absent at the county level, with 32 functioning county courts across South Sudan, including eight (covering 25% of the population) in Central Equatoria, four each (covering 13% of the population) in Upper Nile and Warrap, three each (covering 9% of the population) in Eastern Equatoria, Lakes and Northern Bahr el Ghazal, two each (covering 6% of the population) in Jonglei, Western Equatoria and Western Bahr el Ghazal and one (covering 3% of the population) in Unity. This left traditional mechanisms to adjudicate criminal matters beyond their mandate, often with serious human rights implications.¹⁸

54. Limited political will impeded efforts to advance justice-sector reforms. The continued impunity of security forces, particularly the National Security Service, further weakened the administration of justice. The absence of a national legal aid framework and the chronic shortage of prosecutors and investigators contributed to prolonged and arbitrary detention, case backlogs and overcrowding in detention facilities.

B. Impact of capacity-building and technical cooperation

55. To address these constraints, UNMISS delivered targeted and sustained capacity-building and technical assistance that contributed to accountability and access to justice. Over the year, the Human Rights Division supported approximately 1,350 justice and security actors, including prosecutors, judges, police, military officers, prison personnel and legal practitioners, as well as civil society representatives and traditional authorities. Recipients' knowledge and skills were developed in areas such as criminal investigations, due process guarantees, detention monitoring, and human rights-compliant security

¹⁸ In areas, particularly at the subnational level, where there are no statutory courts, customary courts of different grades (A to C) have assumed jurisdiction in criminal cases – against the provisions of sect. 98 of the Local Government Act of 2009 which restricts their powers only to civil matters. With criminal cases taken suo motu and presided over by chiefs who are not trained in law, suspects brought before these customary courts are denied basic fair trial standards, such as the right to be brought before a competent court, the presumption of innocence, and the right to legal representation. In addition, suspects who are victims of criminal prosecutions in customary courts end up in overcrowded prisons that fall short of the minimum standards for the treatment of prisoners (as contained in the Nelson Mandela Rules).

operations. These efforts directly responded to structural gaps affecting the justice chain, including weak institutional capacity and the absence of coordinated legal aid services.

56. Accountability for violations committed by members of security forces improved through the Human Rights Division's support to statutory, military and mobile court processes across several states, including Eastern Equatoria, Northern Bahr el Ghazal, Unity, Upper Nile, Warrap, Western Bahr el Ghazal and Western Equatoria. Trials resulted in convictions and disciplinary actions against police officers and soldiers responsible for killings and other serious offences against civilians. In 2025, 253 criminal convictions were recorded with the support of UNMISS, including 34 involving members of security forces.¹⁹ Sentences included imprisonment, dismissals, demotions, and compensation orders for victims.

57. In Unity and Upper Nile States, the support provided by UNMISS to mobile and other ad hoc courts significantly strengthened accountability and improved access to justice for victims of serious crimes, including sexual and gender-based violence. In the towns of Leer and Bentiu,²⁰ 90 victims and witnesses received safe transportation, psychosocial assistance and legal counselling, enabling their effective participation in court proceedings. In Leer, the support to survivors marked a shift in the community's confidence in the formal justice system, with women voluntarily reporting crimes and seeking redress for forced and early marriages. A landmark case involved a 16-year-old rape survivor who, with assistance provided by UNMISS, secured both the conviction of the perpetrator and the dissolution of a forced marriage, setting an important precedent. In Bentiu, community engagement efforts contributed to an increase in reporting on sexual and gender-based violence from two cases in 2024 to 31 in 2025, also a sign of improved confidence in statutory justice mechanisms.

58. In Renk and Bunj,²¹ the Human Rights Division monitored proceedings involving 97 serious criminal cases, resulting in the conviction of 12 security personnel. UNMISS enabled the participation of nearly 80 victims and witnesses by facilitating transportation and psychosocial support and by helping reduce barriers such as intimidation, stigma and logistical constraints. These interventions strengthened the application of procedural safeguards, increased victim participation and contributed to the application of fair trial standards.

59. The Human Rights Division continued to support advocacy efforts and case reviews in order to address unlawful detention and expand access to justice for vulnerable detainees. This was achieved by providing support to legal aid providers, notably the Federation of Women Lawyers. Through this partnership, detainees who had been held for prolonged periods without trial, many of them women and juveniles, received legal assistance which led to 69 releases. These interventions not only resolved individual cases but also revived stalled investigations, reduced arbitrary detention, and improved case management within police and prison facilities.

60. Although significant structural and political challenges persist, overall efforts put forth by the Human Rights Division contributed to strengthened access to justice for victims of human rights violations and abuses, increased accountability, including for members of security forces, and improved functioning of justice institutions. The interventions made by UNMISS contributed to concrete improvements in case resolution, victim protection, and the credibility of judicial processes across multiple states.

¹⁹ Others were criminals convicted for crimes such as murder, theft, robbery and armed robbery, and cattle raiding and rustling.

²⁰ Unity State.

²¹ Upper Nile State.

X. Civic space and participation

A. Main human rights challenges

61. In 2025, civic and political space in South Sudan remained constrained due to persistent insecurity, institutional fragility, and unlawful restrictions on fundamental freedoms. Human rights defenders, journalists and civil society actors continued to experience surveillance, intimidation and harassment, which contributed to widespread self-censorship and reduced public scrutiny of government actions. The National Security Service remained the main perpetrator of such violations, as it continued to censor the media, to monitor civil society activities, to intimidate journalists and political activists and to target human rights defenders and activists who spoke out against unlawful policies or restrictive practices.

62. Between January and December 2025, the Human Rights Division documented 27 incidents of human rights violations related to civic space affecting 62 individuals, including 28 women. The violations included arbitrary arrest and detention (including incommunicado and prolonged detention), unlawful restrictions on freedom of expression and movement following release, reprisals for exercising the right to freedom of expression, violations of the rights to freedom of expression and association, intimidation of opposition leaders, interference with political participation through the closure of opposition party offices, and harassment of journalists and civil society actors.

63. Hate speech in political disputes, persistent gender inequality, and the marginalization of youth, persons with disabilities and other groups in vulnerable situations created significant barriers to meaningful participation in public life. Despite legal protections, women and marginalized communities frequently lacked access to information, faced targeted threats when seeking leadership roles, and remained underrepresented in civic and political processes.

B. Impact of capacity-building and technical cooperation

64. To address these challenges, the Human Rights Division focused on fostering institutional change through sustained capacity-building initiatives rather than isolated training sessions. Training-of-trainers programmes, joint engagement by the police and civil society, and targeted policy dialogues supported the practical application of international human rights standards in policing, advocacy, and public participation. The Human Rights Division conducted 12 major training sessions for law enforcement institutions, and facilitated 14 advocacy initiatives, strengthening networks that linked civic space, human rights and credible electoral processes. These activities reached approximately 2,500 individuals across the country.

65. Regular engagement by the Human Rights Division with civil society helped established coalitions of human rights defenders, women's groups, youth, and organizations of persons with disabilities. Coalitions now exist in all 10 states and the two administrative areas (Greater Pibor and Ruweng), which play a key role in local early warning mechanisms and in communicating policy ideas to state and national decision makers. For instance, civil society actors in Bor,²² Yambio²³ and Yei have led early warning and human rights monitoring, supporting prevention and accountability so that local voices help shape peace and governance.

66. Partnerships with wider parts of the United Nations system and other international actors, including the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the Defend Defenders Network and Amnesty International enabled the Human Rights Division to complement human rights expertise with technical and sector-specific capacity. Collaboration with UNESCO on national workshops to counter hate speech, and

²² Jonglei State.

²³ Western Equatoria State.

joint training-of-trainers initiatives with the Defend Defenders Network and the National Police Academy,²⁴ leveraged comparative experiences and expert knowledge to develop practical tools for journalists, media practitioners and law enforcement officers. These multi-partner initiatives strengthened sustainability, as national trainers and networks, and institutions, are now better equipped to continue monitoring and capacity-building initiatives beyond the duration of individual projects or events.

67. The Human Rights Division provided support to partners to participate in multi-stakeholder platforms, such as the national round tables on civic space,²⁵ the African Union's "Priorities for a secure civic and political space in electoral contexts" workshop²⁶ and the Central Equatoria State Human Rights Forum.²⁷ These initiatives signalled strong institutional support for the meaningful inclusion of civil society in sensitive governance discussions. This visible presence helped reinforce the legitimacy of civil society actors as partners in electoral preparedness, human rights monitoring, and early warning processes.

XI. Conclusions and recommendations

68. During the reporting period, technical assistance and capacity-building provided by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights through the Human Rights Division of the United Nations Mission in South Sudan, including in collaboration with other components of UNMISS, contributed to meaningful advancements in the promotion and protection of human rights across the country. In a context marked by escalating violence, shrinking civic space, widespread conflict-related sexual violence and persistent institutional fragility, the sustained engagement of the United Nations, amid limited financial resources, helped to strengthen national capacity, to reinforce accountability mechanisms, to support transitional justice processes and to expand protection for victims and affected communities. Targeted interventions improved access to justice, enhanced the operational behaviour of security forces, revitalized national and state human rights institutions, supported civil society participation, and strengthened the engagement of South Sudan with international human rights mechanisms. The consistent application of the United Nations Due Diligence Policy on Human Rights ensured that all assistance to security forces remained anchored in international human rights, humanitarian and refugee law standards.

69. While significant challenges remain and the human rights situation in South Sudan is deeply worrying, the progress achieved demonstrates that sustained, coordinated and inclusive technical cooperation can contribute to reducing protection risks, enhancing institutional resilience, and advancing the foundations for sustainable peace, justice and accountability. Continued political commitment, genuine national ownership, and strengthened partnership with regional and international actors will be

²⁴ On 24 and 25 June 2025, the Human Rights Division of UNMISS, in collaboration with UNESCO, the Defend Defenders Network and the National Police Service Police Academy, held a training-of-trainers for 42 high-ranking police officers (including 12 women) to enhance their role in ensuring public order and election observation, focusing on conflict management and de-escalation techniques.

²⁵ On 17 and 18 June 2025, the Human Rights Division, alongside the South Sudan Human Rights Defenders Network, held a high-level multi-stakeholder round table aimed at enhancing civic and political space. This meeting brought together 60 participants, including 25 women, to evaluate challenges and develop strategies for improving civic freedoms in the country.

²⁶ On 15 September 2025, the Human Rights Division gave a presentation entitled "Priorities for a secure civic and political space in electoral contexts", at the African Union workshop aimed at strengthening State institutions and civil society organizations. This session brought together 80 civil servants, including the Minister of the Interior, in discussions about human rights principles in electoral contexts.

²⁷ On 13 May 2025, the Human Rights Division supported the ninth Central Equatoria State Human Rights Forum, in Juba, under the theme of "Expanding civic and political space ahead of general elections". This forum brought together 70 participants, including members of the legislature and of civil society organizations, to discuss the need for human rights-based governance.

essential to consolidate these gains and ensure that the rights of all people in South Sudan are respected, protected and fulfilled.

70. Based on the findings contained in the present report and recalling recommendations from the previous report of OHCHR on technical assistance and capacity-building for South Sudan,²⁸ the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights makes the following recommendations.

71. To the Government of South Sudan:

(a) Take concrete and sustained measures to address entrenched impunity by ensuring that all allegations of human rights violations and abuses, as well as violations of international humanitarian law, are subjected to independent, impartial, prompt and credible investigations, and to ensure that those responsible, including individuals in positions of command or authority, are held accountable, in accordance with international standards.

(b) Take effective steps to expand and safeguard civic space by guaranteeing the full enjoyment of fundamental freedoms, in particular the rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly, including in the context of preparations for forthcoming electoral processes.

(c) Further strengthen the rule of law and the administration of justice by reinforcing investigative and prosecutorial capacities at the national and subnational levels, with particular attention to gender-responsive approaches, as a means of improving access to justice for all.

(d) Implement targeted reforms to address structural and operational deficiencies within the justice system, including customary justice mechanisms, to enhance their capacity to operate in a manner consistent with international human rights standards.

(e) Take concrete steps by finalizing the necessary legal, institutional and administrative arrangements to expedite the establishment of the Hybrid Court for South Sudan, in close collaboration with the African Union.

72. To the United Nations and the international community:

(a) Maintain and expand long-term technical assistance and capacity-building support, particularly in justice-sector reforms, prevention of conflict-related sexual violence, protection of civic space, and strengthening of national human rights institutions.

(b) Provide sustained support to civil society organizations, including those representing women, youth and persons with disabilities, to reinforce their role in human rights monitoring, documentation and advocacy, their participation in transitional justice processes and their engagement with international human rights mechanisms.

73. To the African Union:

(a) Maintain engagement with the Government of South Sudan on transitional justice and accountability, including through technical assistance to operationalize the Commission for Truth, Reconciliation and Healing, the Compensation and Reparation Authority and other institutions established under the Revitalized Peace Agreement.

²⁸ A/HRC/58/77.