

# The UN Mission in South Sudan is Failing Sexual Assault Victims: An Interview with Angelina of Hope Restoration South Sudan

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**MAY 2018:** “At least 120 women and girls, including pregnant and lactating mothers, and girls as young as four [years old] were raped and gang raped by one or multiple armed elements.”<sup>1</sup>

**NOVEMBER 2018:** “We found evidence of a pattern of attacks on women and girls... Survivors told us that armed young men, often with their faces covered to hide their identity, would beat, rape and rob them. Local authorities had been aware of ongoing sexual violence, but had failed to investigate.”<sup>2</sup>

**OCTOBER 2019:** “The conflict might have ended, but to be female in South Sudan is still dangerous.”<sup>3</sup>

**MAY 2020:** “Intercommunal fighting has been on the rise... having led to 658 deaths, 452 injuries, 592 abductions and 65 cases of sexual violence.”<sup>4</sup>

**SEPTEMBER 2020:** “[C]onflict-related sexual violence remained prevalent [last quarter] and was perpetrated by parties to the conflict, community-based militias and other armed elements, exploiting protracted insecurity and a lack of protection by authorities.”<sup>5</sup>

South Sudan has been marred by widespread sexual violence since its civil war broke out in 2013. Despite the peace agreement that was signed on September 12, 2018, the violence continues. The United Nations Mission in South Sudan, referred to as UNMISS, recounted these incidents in its September 2020 situational report.<sup>6</sup> But even while detailing the “prevalence” of sexual violence perpetrated by “parties to the conflict,” including government forces, the same report revealed that UNMISS had already begun withdrawing its forces from sites where it had been protecting civilians since the beginning of the war.<sup>7</sup> These sites are called Protection of Civilian sites, or POCs, and the UN created them when civilians fleeing the war’s violence fled to UN bases for safety.

The withdrawal announcement came on September 4, 2020 when David Shearer, the Head of UNMISS, declared that after “careful planning going back almost a year, UNMISS has begun to progressively withdraw its troops

<sup>1</sup> United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, *Indiscriminate Attacks Against Civilians in Southern Unity April - May 2018*, UNMISS, 2018.

<sup>2</sup> Tut Pur, Nyagoah, “South Sudan: Does Juba Even Care About Protecting Girls From Sexual Violence?,” Human Rights Watch, February 11, 2019, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/02/11/south-sudan-does-juba-even-care-about-protecting-girls-sexual-violence>.

<sup>3</sup> Cone, Devon. “Still in Danger: Women and Girls Face Sexual Violence in South Sudan Despite Peace Deal.” Refugees International, October 17, 2019. <https://www.refugeesinternational.org/reports/2019/10/15/still-danger-women-girls-face-sexual-violence-south-sudan-peace-deal>.

<sup>4</sup> UN News, “Victims of intercommunal violence in South Sudan deserve ‘justice, truth and reparations’: Bachelet,” UN News, United Nations, May 22, 2020, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/05/1064792>.

<sup>5</sup> United Nations, Security Council. *Situation in South Sudan Report of the Secretary-General, S/2020/890*. United Nations, September, 8 2020. Available at [https://unmiss.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/secretary-generals\\_report\\_on\\_south\\_sudan\\_8\\_september\\_2020\\_0.pdf](https://unmiss.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/secretary-generals_report_on_south_sudan_8_september_2020_0.pdf).

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

and police from the Bor and Wau POCs.”<sup>8</sup> The announcement shocked the residents of the sites and other local actors. September 4th was the first time they had heard about the transition, so many were alarmed to learn it was already in progress. Worse even than UNMISS withdrawing its protection was that the POCs were being transferred over to the

authority of the South Sudanese government forces that have played a substantial role in the violence that led civilians to seek refuge in the POCs in the first place. UNMISS’ decision and the process by which it was made have sparked outrage and concern from humanitarians around the world, and even from former UNMISS personnel for the safety of POC residents.<sup>9</sup>

## A Brief Overview of South Sudan’s Civil War

South Sudan gained independence from Sudan on July 9, 2011. In July of 2013, President Salva Kiir began firing government leaders, including his Vice President Riek Machar. In December of that year, Kiir accused Machar of plotting a coup to oust him and take over.<sup>10</sup> Although Machar denied the allegations, increasing tension between the two led to fighting between forces loyal to Machar and those loyal to Kiir, which quickly escalated into civil war. In the first month of conflict, over 400,000 people were displaced.<sup>11</sup> The fighting also took on an ethnic dimension, with Kiir’s supporters being mainly from the Dinka ethnic group and Machar’s supporters being predominantly Nuers.<sup>12</sup> Multiple paramilitary groups joined in throughout the war, often splitting into new factions and causing infighting.

Numerous ceasefires were attempted between 2014 and 2018, but fighting would break out again shortly after a ceasefire was declared. In 2015, a peace agreement was signed and Machar was later reinstated as Vice President, but within a few months he was fired again and went into exile as conflict escalated again.<sup>13</sup> The most recent peace agreement, signed in September of 2018, called for a transitional government in which Machar and Kiir would again share power. This agreement is said to have ended the civil war, although creation of the government has stalled and political and intercommunal violence continues.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>8</sup> David Shearer, “Press Conference,” February 9, 2021, Juba, South Sudan, found at <https://unmiss.unmissions.org/near-verbatim-transcript-srsghed-unmiss-david-shearers-press-conference-0>.

<sup>9</sup> Hayden, Sally, “UN peacekeepers withdraw from South Sudan civilian protection sites,” The Irish Times, The Irish Times, October 29, 2020, <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/world/africa/un-peacekeepers-withdraw-from-south-sudan-civilian-protection-sites-1.4393475>.

<sup>10</sup> BBC News, “South Sudan profile - Timeline,” BBC, August 6, 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-14019202>.

<sup>11</sup> Mercy Corps, “The facts: What you need to know about the South Sudan crisis,” Mercy Corps, accessed on February 12, 2021, <https://www.mercycorps.org/blog/south-sudan-crisis#crisis-south-sudan-start>.

<sup>12</sup> Council on Foreign Relations, “Civil War in South Sudan,” Global Conflict Tracker, Council on Foreign Relations, accessed on February 12, 2021, <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/civil-war-south-sudan>.

<sup>13</sup> Mednick, Sam, “After 6 years of war, will peace finally come to South Sudan?,” Al Jazeera Media Network, February 23, 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/2/23/after-6-years-of-war-will-peace-finally-come-to-south-sudan>.

<sup>14</sup> UN News, “South Sudan: Progress on peace agreement ‘limps along’, UN envoy tells Security Council,” UN News, United Nations, September 16, 2020, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/09/1072502>.

So how did UNMISS conclude it was time to withdraw its protection from the POCs while at the same time emphasizing the continually high rates of violence, especially sexual violence, against civilians? How did UNMISS go from not even mentioning its plan to South Sudan's public for an entire year, to enacting it almost overnight in September?

To learn what happened, I sat down (virtually) with Angelina, the Founder and Executive Director of [Hope Restoration South Sudan](#). Hope Restoration is a South Sudanese non-governmental organization (NGO) that provides holistic services to survivors of gender-based violence (GBV). The organization provides counselors for psychosocial support, documents and advocates for justice in GBV cases, and provides livelihood training in tailoring and gardening. In addition to its GBV prevention and response work, the organization advocates for broader policy solutions to the violence.

Angelina and her organization have been advocating for survivors for over ten years. So when she heard that UNMISS was suddenly beginning to abandon the POC sites in September, she was not only disappointed but shocked: “They had the plan from [at least] March and we are getting the information in September when they are transitioning most of the POCs. They have not even found out if where they’re sending the people is going to be safe, whether leaving them alone in the camps with the National Police is going to be safe.”

Other local NGO leaders and civilians living in the sites were equally shocked about the news. UNMISS' public June 2020 report—published just three months before the transitions started—does not mention a plan to transition any of the sites.<sup>15</sup> Although the September report mentions that UNMISS consulted “humanitarian actors” in the transition decision, neither report mentions any consultation with local organizations or with civilians themselves.<sup>16</sup>

The broader humanitarian community shares Angelina's fears about the transitions. One humanitarian worker in October expressed concerns that “the requisite analysis to ensure that civilians will be safe hadn't been done,” and that UNMISS was “not doing this because they think the sites are now safe. They are doing this because they do not want the responsibility.”<sup>17</sup> An assessment by the Conflict Sensitivity Resource Facility in South Sudan also found that the majority of POC residents still consider themselves to be under threat outside the POCs.<sup>18</sup>

When I asked Angelina what people's general safety concerns were, she revealed a dark truth, one that has been almost completely ignored by UNMISS itself: the government forces UNMISS is transferring authority to are the same forces responsible for raping, torturing, and slaughtering South Sudan's civilians. These forces are the reason the POCs exist in the first place, as sanctuaries from the government's violence. Angelina gave me

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<sup>15</sup> United Nations, Security Council, Situation in South Sudan Report of the Secretary-General, S/2020/890, United Nations, September, 8 2020, available at [https://unmiss.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/secretary-generals\\_report\\_on\\_south\\_sudan\\_8\\_september\\_2020\\_0.pdf](https://unmiss.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/secretary-generals_report_on_south_sudan_8_september_2020_0.pdf).

<sup>16</sup> David Shearer, “Press Conference,” February 9, 2021, Juba, South Sudan, found at <https://unmiss.unmissions.org/near-verbatim-transcript-srsghad-unmiss-david-shearers-press-conference-0>.

<sup>17</sup> Hayden, Sally, “UN peacekeepers withdraw from South Sudan civilian protection sites,” The Irish Times, The Irish Times, October 29, 2020, <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/world/africa/un-peacekeepers-withdraw-from-south-sudan-civilian-protection-sites-1.4393475>.

<sup>18</sup> Harragin, Simon and the Conflict Sensitivity Resource Facility, “Back on their feet: The role of PoCs in South Sudan and the potential for returning ‘home,’” ReliefWeb, Conflict Sensitivity Resource Facility, October 2020, [https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/CSRF-Analysis-Back-on-their-feet-the-Role-of-PoCs-in-South-Sudan-and-the-potential-for-returning-home.Final\\_October-2020.pdf](https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/CSRF-Analysis-Back-on-their-feet-the-Role-of-PoCs-in-South-Sudan-and-the-potential-for-returning-home.Final_October-2020.pdf).

an example: “the governor of Unity [one of South Sudan’s states], many people are not happy with him because he contributed too much in the killing of a lot of people in Bentiu... And you cannot come and tell me the person who has killed my brother, my uncle, my mom, [has come to] protect me. It’s not adding up.”

The government’s atrocities since the beginning of the civil war are well-documented. According to a former UNMISS staff member, the “government has been the primary source of civilian suffering and casualties in the country since 2013, openly waging ethnic conflict and conducting ethnic cleansing in some areas.”<sup>19</sup> Government forces have committed looting, kidnappings, arbitrary detentions, mass gang rapes against both civilians and foreign aid workers, intentional starvation, murder, and according to the UN itself, war crimes.<sup>20</sup> In 2018, Amnesty International documented one particular government offensive in which troops attacked civilians in Unity state.<sup>21</sup> They killed 232 civilians, gang raped at least 120 women and children, burnt down 21 homes, and displaced 31,000 people in one two-month period.<sup>22</sup> Prior to this incident, government forces had already displaced over 10,000 people in the region since 2014.<sup>23</sup>

Put another way, transferring the sites to the South Sudanese government “is akin to putting hyenas in charge of goats.”<sup>24</sup> I asked Angelina

how it was possible that civilians and others on the ground did not know about UNMISS’ plan for so long. She tells me, “I would say [UNMISS] did it purposely.” UNMISS has a long history of action, or more often inaction, that jeopardizes the safety of South Sudan’s people. An Independent Special Investigation of UNMISS, ordered by the UN Security Council in 2016, found “poor performance by peacekeepers in protecting civilians from sexual violence in the vicinity of the protection of civilian sites. On at least one occasion... attackers assaulted a woman just metres away from the entrance to protection of civilian site 1, in plain sight of UNMISS troops and United Nations police. Despite the woman’s screams, they did not react.”<sup>25</sup>

Angelina denounced UNMISS in March of 2019 for failing to act to protect women and girls from sexual violence:

In March during the UNMISS review that was in New York, when I was briefing the Security Council about the issues of 150 women that were raped [near the POC site] in Bentiu, I was also there with David Shearer. I tried to explain even in the Council that we have an issue. If the UNMISS mandate has to be renewed, UNMISS needs to tell us in total, what are they going to change in their mandate? Because they don’t do much.

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<sup>19</sup> Hayden, Sally, “UN peacekeepers withdraw from South Sudan civilian protection sites,” The Irish Times, October 29, 2020, <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/world/africa/un-peacekeepers-withdraw-from-south-sudan-civilian-protection-sites-1.4393475>.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Amnesty International, “‘If they catch you, they’ll kill you’ War Crimes in Unity State, South Sudan,” Amnesty International, accessed on February 12, 2021, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/09/war-crimes-in-unity-state-south-sudan/>.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Buoth, Dak, “UNMISS should reconsider premature withdrawal from POC sites,” Sudan Tribune, September 12, 2020, <https://sudantribune.com/spip.php?article69816>.

<sup>25</sup> United Nations, Security Council, *Executive summary of the independent special investigation into the violence in Juba in 2016 and the response by the United Nations Mission in South Sudan*, S/2016/924, United Nations, November 1, 2016, available at: <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/N1635591.pdf>.

I said sometimes UNMISS does not respond even when women are raped across from where the [POC] centers are. And I gave the practical incident of what happened in our location in Lehr some years back. A 14-year-old girl was raped not far from [a UN] compound and they could not even fire bullets up. When I put pressure on the [UNMISS] commander, they said “we are not supposed to fire.” I said “what are you doing with the gun then? Because it’s useless, you being there when people are raping women.” And I’ve been having those fights with David [Shearer], it’s been a nightmare.

Angelina’s is one of many criticisms of UNMISS, especially when it comes to failure to act on issues of sexual violence. Most notably, in 2015 the international humanitarian organization Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) accused UNMISS of a “complete and utter failure” to protect South Sudan’s people from “the most horrendous incidents of sexual violence.”<sup>26</sup> MSF reported that year that even children were targeted, with boys being castrated and left to bleed out while girls as young as eight years old were subjected to gang rape.<sup>27</sup>

However, despite the proliferation of brutal sexual violence right outside the POCs and UNMISS’ failure to address it, the sites have

saved hundreds of thousands of civilians inside them from attack since the beginning of the civil war.<sup>28</sup> One African news source summed up the fraught dynamic, saying “the POCs have offered civilians the prospect of finding safety behind hardened perimeters and the protection of UN peacekeeping forces, no matter how ambiguous such protection has proved in practice.”<sup>29</sup> The Sudan Tribune also acknowledged that, even given UNMISS’ failures, it has “played a singular and significant role in our country. Many of our vulnerable children, women and the elderly people are alive today because of UNMISS protection.”<sup>30</sup>

Thus, it is precisely UNMISS’ failures outside the POC sites that necessitate their continued services inside them. UNMISS’ withdrawal announcement has triggered protests from those living in the camps, who had no input in the decision and who fear for their safety.

One protest leader from the Bor POC site was alarmed at how quickly everything happened, saying that the “U.N. withdrew its troops on September 1st, it didn’t inform us. In the morning we got that there was no [UNMISS] military protection inside the Bor POC. People are moving from block to block because of fear.”<sup>31</sup> Another protestor claimed that the transition “was not discussed” with civilians

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<sup>26</sup> Jones, Sam, “UN accused of ‘shocking’ lack of action over murder and rape in South Sudan,” The Guardian Guardian News and Media, December 14, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2015/dec/15/un-accused-of-shocking-lack-of-action-over-murder-rape-south-sudan>.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Craze Naomi Pendle, Joshua, “A Fantasy of Finality: The UN Impasse at the Protection of Civilian Sites in South Sudan,” African Arguments, Royal African Society, September 23, 2020, <https://africanarguments.org/2020/09/a-fantasy-of-finality-the-un-impasse-at-the-protection-of-civilian-sites-in-south-sudan/>. (even as UNMISS has encouraged civilians to leave the sites, there were still over 180,000 people living in the POCs as of June 2020).

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Booth, Dak, “UNMISS should reconsider premature withdrawal from POC sites,” Sudan Tribune, September 12, 2020, <https://sudantribune.com/spip.php?article69816>.

<sup>31</sup> Ghai Deng, Deng, “UNMISS Withdraws Troops from South Sudan IDP Camp,” VOA, Voice of America, September 7, 2020, <https://www.voanews.com/africa/south-sudan-focus/unmiss-withdraws-troops-south-sudan-idp-camp>.



in the sites.<sup>32</sup> Many cited a lack of trust in the government's ability and willingness to protect them, wishing that UNMISS would acknowledge and consider these concerns.<sup>33</sup>

Angelina explained to me why now is not the right time to make these transitions:

We are in [the midst of implementing] a peace agreement [and] the two main parties were here from February this year, and from February this year, honestly, they are not moving. We are all just sitting here, there is nothing that is moving. The formation of forces has not happened; the formation of the local governments has not happened. The governors, yes, they were appointed but they are not even functioning because we still have [one governor] that has never been appointed up to today, so technically the entire government system is not working. So where do you want to send people to? We still have an issue... the safest place people can be right now is only the POCs.

I asked Angelina, where do we go from here? Now that UNMISS has already transitioned two of the five sites, what is next? What should happen to the POCs, and how can civilians' safety be assured? Angelina had four recommendations for moving forward:

1. **UNMISS must halt the transitions and remove the South Sudan National Police Force from the POC sites until the peace agreement has been fully implemented.** Given the failure of prior peace agreements and ceasefires to create lasting peace, civilians do not trust the current peace agreement to

protect them from further violence. Angelina recommends, "let's make sure this peace agreement is implemented in totality. Let also the country do the election of 2022, and let's observe how it goes. And then we can all have confidence and say, okay this country has done the election, they have formed their government, everything is working. Now there will be no need for the POCs."

2. **UNMISS must consult local actors, especially women-led local NGOs.** Angelina stresses that local organizations are best suited to navigate the complex cultural, ethnic, and power dynamics playing out in the country. Women-led organizations are especially well positioned to give feedback, as they talk to women about issues such as sexual violence and gendered power dynamics that women are less likely to tell those outside their communities. She says, "For one thing that UNMISS needs to do, they need to be consultative enough before they take any action. South Sudan is a very complex country. If you take one person's ideas, it's going to be a problem in the conclusion. And one key problem with UNMISS that they have been having is hearing only most of the time one side... They tend to consult with [International] NGOs and they leave national organizations out of the consultation. And that has been [frustrating] because those on the front lines, those in the community, they are local partners. So if you want to get information, you need to maximize and build a relationship with the local partners, see how best you can have a meeting to hear from their side."

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Craze Naomi Pendle, Joshua, "A Fantasy of Finality: The UN Impasse at the Protection of Civilian Sites in South Sudan," African Arguments, Royal African Society, September 23, 2020, <https://africanarguments.org/2020/09/a-fantasy-of-finality-the-un-impasse-at-the-protection-of-civilian-sites-in-south-sudan/>.

And also meet with the women-led organizations. Because our conflict in South Sudan, when you try to look at it, when men fight, they end up raping women, they end up displacing women, they end up killing women. So you can only get such information from women-led organizations that “A, B, C is happening at this location, at that location, and this is what we think that the local people will want you to do.” That way, if [UNMISS] becomes comprehensive enough, they will not have much of the issues that they have been having, like backlash. Because they can get better advice on something that will help them not to enter into more problems.

- 3. Funding must be directly allocated to local NGOs that know the communities and are best suited to combat gender-based violence.** While UNMISS had a budget of \$1.18 billion last year,<sup>34</sup> the Mission did little to stop sexual violence outside of its sites. In contrast, Hope Restoration South Sudan often provides free gender-based violence response services to survivors and relies on volunteers instead of paid staff to provide services due to its lack of funding. Angelina expresses her frustration at the lack of funding and resources for South Sudanese-led organizations with knowledge of the cultural, political, and social context in South Sudan:

And the other thing to the international community is to also understand that serving the South Sudanese needs South Sudanese interventions. Whatever support that is coming to the country, they should not just say that

local organizations do not have the capacity. We have the capacity and we can do it better because we understand the local context and we are living in it. We know what is happening in the country.

We need to also look at it this way: when you look at the Grand Bargain,<sup>35</sup> there is that component of the localization agenda... but in direct implementation it has been dragging. And when we come to the cost-effectiveness, local partners are more cost-effective in terms of implementation of the projects. Because they don't have the business of too much overhead, because it's not even there. We don't even have issues of a very high salary scale for the staff... Because the reality, in this country, once you give an amount of funding, let's say it's \$500,000 to an international organization and you give \$200,000 to a local organization, you go down some years for the monitoring of the projects, trust me you will see that the local has done far much better, they have covered more of the beneficiaries compared to the international organization. And these are people that are not going to move away. In case of any conflicts, they are within the community. So for me, I always said, giving a local grant is more cost-effective...

So my message to you outside here... is always advocate for more funding for women-led organizations in the country because when we have resources, that's when we can do more. When we do not have resources, we cannot do much. We just keep moving in circles but we cannot have the community as we want it.

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<sup>34</sup> Congressional Research Service, “United Nations Issues: U.S. Funding of U.N. Peacekeeping,” CRS Reports, U.S. Congress, updated November 2, 2020, Available at: <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/IF10597.pdf>.

<sup>35</sup> The Grand Bargain is an international commitment made by donors and humanitarian aid organizations to prioritize funding directly to local actors, as opposed to larger international non-governmental organizations. The goal is to localize aid and give people living on the ground the tools to provide relief to their own communities with minimal outside intervention. Agenda for Humanity, “Grand Bargain,” Agenda for Humanity, United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, updated July 2019, <https://agendaforhumanity.org/initiatives/3861>.



4. **The international community must pressure the government and UNMISS to implement the peace agreement while prioritizing gender-based violence prevention and response.** Angelina notes that little progress has been made on the peace agreement since 2018. She says that the parties to the agreement rarely meet, and that she is unaware of any substantial efforts to move the process along:

There is nothing that is happening [with the peace agreement], and we don't even know what kind of pressure the international community is giving [the government] so that they really move. Because if they are not moving, there will be an opportunity for spoilers to come in and spoil this peace and we might go back to what happened in 2013... So to avoid this, we request the international community to put pressure on all the parties to make sure they do implementation of this peace agreement.

Sadly, even since my interview with Angelina, UNMISS released a new December 2020 situational report detailing how it plans to continue the transitions at all POC sites. The report attempts to convey greater collaboration and transparency than the September report, claiming that in “all three [POC] locations, the transitions were a result of close coordination and joint planning between the Mission and humanitarian partners operating at the sites and extensive engagement with relevant stakeholders, including the authorities in Juba and the states, security forces and police,

as well as with representatives of internally displaced persons.”<sup>36</sup> It is unclear who the “representatives of internally displaced persons” are, but UNMISS does not claim to have done any widespread outreach with IDPs themselves, or to have included any local NGOs or civil society organizations in any decisions.

The December report concludes that the POC transitions have been “successful,” and declares that “efforts are proceeding in an equally inclusive and consultative manner towards preparing the redesignation of the remaining protection of civilians sites in Bentiu and Malakal.”<sup>37</sup>

Even as UNMISS concludes that its actions and timing are justified due to improved civilian safety, a December 2020 UN Security Council report on the independent strategic review of UNMISS states that “conflict-related sexual violence and sexual and gender-based violence continue to be committed by a variety of armed actors in South Sudan, across geographic locations, largely with impunity, in the context of political conflict, intercommunal violence and criminal activity.” The report finds that South Sudanese government authorities often entirely deny the occurrence of sexual violence, and that survivors of sexual violence have “grossly insufficient access to services.”<sup>39</sup> It is difficult to reconcile UNMISS’ actions with the Security Council’s findings of widespread sexual violence.

Despite the protests, despite international humanitarian concern, and despite the continuation of large-scale sexual and other

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<sup>36</sup> United Nations, *Security Council, Situation in South Sudan Report of the Secretary-General, S/2020/890*, United Nations, September, 8 2020, Available at [https://unmiss.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/secretary-generals\\_report\\_on\\_south\\_sudan\\_8\\_september\\_2020\\_0.pdf](https://unmiss.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/secretary-generals_report_on_south_sudan_8_september_2020_0.pdf).

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> United Nations, Security Council, *Report on the independent strategic review of the United Nations Mission in South Sudan pursuant to Security Council resolution 2514 (2020), S/2020/1224*, United Nations, December 15, 2020, Available at [https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/S\\_2020\\_1224\\_E\\_0.pdf](https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/S_2020_1224_E_0.pdf).

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

violence around the country, UNMISS has again failed to heed the feedback and concerns of the people it claims to protect. It is up to the international community, in partnership with organizations like Angelina's, to stop UNMISS' withdrawal from the POCs, or we risk complicity in further violence.

*This piece was written in honor and memory of Barbara Harrell-Bond whose pioneering work, starting in the early 1970s on refugee*

*advocacy and the importance of refugee consultation, critiques refugee provision and underpins the discipline of refugee studies. For more information about Barbara, visit <https://refugees.org/honoring-the-legacy-of-barbara-harrell-bond>. For more information about Barbara's foundation, visit <http://www.barbaraharrellbond.org>.*



The U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI), established in 1911, is a nongovernmental, not-for-profit international organization dedicated to addressing the needs and rights of refugees and immigrants. Through its network of field offices and affiliates, USCRI provides America's newcomers with a comprehensive package of essential services to meet their basic needs upon arrival. USCRI protects immigrant children who arrive in the U.S. without parents or resources, ensuring that the children receive the legal, social and health services they require. In addition, USCRI works with survivors of human trafficking across a multi-regional network of service providers in every state—providing emergency assistance including: access to housing; healthcare; education; employment opportunities; legal assistance; and language training. USCRI advocates for the rights of refugees and immigrants both nationally and globally, helping to drive policies, practices and law.

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