Mr. President,

Allow me to congratulate you for the leadership of the Council this month and pledge our full cooperation during the remaining part of your Presidency. I would also like to thank Mr. Hervé Ladsous, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, Ms. Ellen Margrethe Løj, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for South Sudan and Head of UNMISS, Mr. Adama Dieng, Special Adviser of the Secretary-General for the Prevention of Genocide and Ambassador Fodé Seck of Senegal, the chair of the South Sudan Sanctions Committee, for their briefing.
I would like to begin by expressing our appreciation to you and Members of the Council for giving us the opportunity to share our views on the Secretary-General’s letter of 9 November, 2016, to the Security Council, and on his Report on the security and humanitarian situation in South Sudan and the role of the United Nations Mission in South Sudan.

Reading these documents, there are allegations in the reports whose accuracy can be debated, but our intention is not to contest these allegations but simply want the Council and all concerned parties to get a better understanding of the root causes of the problems in order to develop appropriate remedies.

Mr. President,

South Sudan fully understands the driving motivation in the work of the United Nations, the African Union, and the Inter-Government Authority for Development and other international partners is the growing concern for the security, safety, and general welfare of our people. We share this concern not only because we are the country affected, but also because we are part and parcel of the United Nations and the International Community, and share the same moral values and normative principles. We also remember, with deep gratitude, the support we received from the International Community for our liberation struggle that led to our independence. The support we received from the United Nations and the international donor community for our newly independent country, which led to the establishment of UNMISS, is also something for which, our Government and people remain deeply grateful.

Mr. President,

The long struggle of our people that intermittently went on for half a century before achieving our independence was basically a quest for the ideals the United Nations stands for – peace, security, and the
enjoyment of all human rights. In other words, it was a pursuit of universal human dignity. That being the case, we must ask ourselves why South Sudan has suddenly descended into the current crisis.

To answer this question, the starting point must be that the objective of restoring peace and security, and addressing the humanitarian needs of our people, is first and foremost the major concern of the people and Government of South Sudan. If we fail, it should be recognized that the explanation lies, not in the lack of will, but in the limits of our national capacity to respond. The conflict has intensified divisions among our leaders and their people. We should, however be all aware that the crisis in South Sudan, indeed as in many other countries experiencing conflict, is a result of both internal and external factors. Rather than pointing fingers, we should all cooperate, realizing that we are in it together and in one way or another are all affected and share the responsibility for the crisis.

Mr. President,

In the hierarchy of shared responsibility, we fully recognize what the Secretary-General has highlighted in his observations on the situation and that the primary responsibility to protect all citizens, without discrimination on the basis of their ethnicity or political affiliation, rests with the Government. We also acknowledge that it is the responsibility of the Government to provide humanitarian needs for its people. That is the core of responsible sovereignty.

In the case of South Sudan, the critical question then becomes one of strengthening the capacity of the state to discharge these national obligations effectively, bearing in mind the principle that the international community has the complementary responsibility to provide a state in need with supplementary assistance to meet its national responsibility.
It should be recalled that South Sudan was grossly neglected by the colonial administration, and has been devastated by the long war that erupted in 1955 a few months before independence on January 1, 1956. It should therefore be recognized that the country continues to lack the necessary capacity to deal with the grave challenges in a robust manner. These challenges emanate from both internal and external factors, particularly the continuing legacy of the long war between North and South Sudan. Both sets of causes require diligent efforts from the two countries and the international community to be effectively addressed in a constructively dialogue.

Mr. President,

The necessary support from the world bodies to address these interconnected crises must strengthen the institutions whose primary responsibility is to protect the people. This support should be based on a genuine mutual respectful cooperation that does not infringe on the sovereignty of the Republic of South Sudan. It should also be premised on the fact that there is an elected and legitimate Government in South Sudan that fully represents the will of the people. It is, of course, undeniable that the country is now divided and that it is also the responsibility of the Government, supported by the international community, to restore the unity of the leaders and their people. However, nowhere in the world can a sovereign Government accept an armed rebellion. As we have seen in comparable situations, it is the responsibility of the international community to assist Member States to stop and eliminate armed rebellion against an elected Government.

South Sudan also agrees with the Secretary-General that inclusivity of all the ethnic groups and political factions should be the desired objective as long as these groups adhere to the democratic principles and the rule of law. The international response to our situation has, however, been characterized by a persistent tendency toward moral equivalency.
that does not apportion accountability for the crises, or recognize the difference between the elected government and an armed rebellion. It is important for the international community to identify those genuinely striving to find workable solutions through legal institutions and those undermining the efforts to restore peace, unity and stability, particularly by resorting to violence.

An example of this misleading tendency toward moral equivalency is the statement in the Report that categorically asserts the lack of inclusivity in the political process and the increasing feelings of political marginalization among other ethnic groups, many of whom believe the Government is pursuing a policy of Dinka domination across the country. Rather than make an assertion based on presumed “feelings,” a responsible observation must look into the composition of the Government at all levels. It is a glaring fact that members of the Nuer group and other smaller ethnic groups have always been well represented at the senior levels of the Government and the army, and indeed, throughout the bureaucracy.

It should be remembered that the Dinka are the overwhelming majority across the country and their numbers cannot be minimized by any notion of proportional representation. But although the Dinka are the largest group in the country, South Sudan has over sixty ethnic groups and there is no self-interested way any one group can dominate all the other groups. If anything at all, the Dinka national leadership has tended to bend over backward not only to ensure the representation of all groups, but also to counter any fears of Dinka domination. To assert the opposite is to be blind to the facts, stress the tendency to stigmatize one group and promote a self-fulfilling dangerous propaganda.

Mr. President,

As the popular saying goes, actions speak louder than words. President Salva Kiir Mayardit in his commitment to peace, security, stability, and
the general welfare of all his people has repeatedly demonstrated his
determination to end the crisis in the country. Far from promoting Dinka
domination, he promoted the unity of South Sudan by incorporating
Nuer militias into the SPLA to the point where over 70% of the army is
Nuer. It is however, these former militias who became Riek Machar’s
rebel army. And yet, Nuer representation in the Government and the
army remains significant, and the President has maintained his
commitment to the policy of inclusivity.

We want to draw the attention of the Council to the appointment of
Gen. Taban Deng Gai as First Vice President so that the peace process is
not held hostage by the absence of Riek Machar from the country. First
Vice President Gai is already demonstrating his commitment to move
the peace process forward. It should be remembered that he was a
signatory to the initial security arrangement of the Machakos Protocol in
2004 and his contribution to the liberation struggle is well known to the
people of South Sudan. He was also the leader of the SPLM/A IO
Negotiating Team. Since his appointment as First Vice President, Gai has
been given full support by the President to implement the Agreement
and through its established modalities, address the grievances of our
people.

While there is no intention to exclude any citizen from the political
process, there is no justification, locally or internationally, to support Riek
Machar’s continued armed rebellion against an elected government. It
is a misleading assumption to assert, as the Report does, that Riek
Machar “retains significant political and military support.” The implication
is that this support is from the Nuer community. But in addition to Taban
Deng Gai’s role as First Vice President, and a number of other Nuers in
important positions in Government, significant numbers of the Nuer
ethnic group fled into Dinka areas and are living peacefully with their
host Dinka communities. There are of course genuine grievances among
members of various groups, including sections of the Dinka that need to
be addressed. The Government is however committed to correcting the
differences among groups, some of which go deep into the history of inequitable development in the Sudan and now South Sudan, but this should not be confused with the tendency of political entrepreneurs to exploit ethnic politics.

We must acknowledge that recognizing the efforts of the Government is a source of encouragement to continue positive reforms, while disregarding these efforts can be a disincentive. In addition to Gai’s appointment, the President recently made several decisions by Republican Orders: one instructing the Ministerial Committee of the Transitional Government of National Unity charged with implementation of the Joint Communique and resolution 2304 (2016) to expedite and complete its work within 14 days and the other establishing a Humanitarian High Level Oversight Committee led by the Minister of Cabinet Affairs to work towards removing all impediments affecting humanitarian operations in the country. The President also established by Republican Order a National Planning Committee, chaired by the Minister in the Office of the President, to enhance the security and production of oil, launch infrastructural projects, and stimulate external support. As these entities are intended to address the relevant aspects of the crises confronting the country, their active coordinating role should be recognized and respected by our international partners to ensure more effective partnership in providing assistance to the country. Close partnership with existing Government institutions is crucial not only to achieving positive results, but also to enhancing the capacity of the Government to be more effective in the delivery of vital services to the people of South Sudan.

Mr. President,

Permit me now to comment on two other issues that have been of concern to the International Community and considerable debate recently: the proposed Regional Protection Force, and the formation of a Hybrid Court. Both proposals have been accepted by the
Government of South Sudan. It must, however, be recognized that there are significant challenges associated with both the Force and the Court that should be constructively addressed.

The Regional Protection Force should be approached cooperatively with the active engagement of the Government of South Sudan and in a manner that reinforces and strengthens the command and control of our armed forces and respect for the rule of law. International involvement should be a supplement or reinforcement, rather than a replacement, to the Government's efforts to protect its own people, in accordance with its national responsibility. The Hybrid Court should also be seen as complementary to the national judicial responsibility for justice. In that connection, it must carefully balance the quest for justice and accountability with the promotion of peace and national reconciliation. For both the Protection Force and the Hybrid Court to succeed, cooperation and constructive partnership with the Government are critical. As such, we have agreed to implement the Agreement of the Joint TGoNU-UNSC Communiqué of the 4th September 2016 in the spirit of cooperation to advance peace, security, stability and reconciliation in our country.

Mr. President,

I would also like to comment on the proposed arms embargo on all the parties engaged in the conflict. Although the motive of this proposal as it aims to end the violence that continues to devastate the country, it is unfortunately another indication of the moral equivalency that does not distinguish between a legitimately elected Government and an armed rebellion intent on overthrowing the Government. We continue to stress that it is the responsibility of the Government to protect all its citizens and defend its borders. To deny the Government the necessary means for discharging that responsibility is to basically undermining its sovereignty, which is totally unacceptable.
Finally, much has been said about increasing violence targeting ethnic groups and violations of UNMISS Status of Forces Agreement. Without challenging the accuracy of these allegations, what should be highlighted is that they do not in any way reflect Government policy. It is not deniable that incidents occur on the ground that responsible authorities may not be aware of and therefore, cannot be control on the spot. It is however important that the Report of the Secretary-General documents specific cases where measures were taken by elements at the lower levels of the operational hierarchy in violation of the agreed guidelines, which, when brought to the senior authorities, were corrected. This further underscores the problems of capacity and the need for capacity-building support from the international community.

Mr. President,

To conclude, we recognize that our country is confronting severe challenges, and that our national capacity to deal with the crises is severely constrained. We do need the complementary support of the international community not only because South Sudan is a Member State of the United Nations, but also because the Government and the People of South Sudan are the beneficiaries of this cooperation. However, such cooperation should not in any way be at the cost of our hard-won independence and national sovereignty. We trust that the United Nations and our international partners will respond to our aspirations and concerns to promote constructive and productive partnerships.

I thank you, Mr. President and Members of the Council for your kind attention.