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Item 8: Activity Reports of Members of the Commission & Special Mechanisms

vii) Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Women in Africa

Chairperson, Honourable Commissioners,

Amnesty International welcomes this opportunity to bring to the attention of the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Women in Africa the particular impact that the current conflict in South Sudan has had on the lives of women and girls.

Even before the outbreak of the conflict on 15 December, sexual and gender-based violence, particularly rape, early and forced marriage, and abductions, were a persistent problem in South Sudan.

In the current militarized environment, armed men are ubiquitous and civilian law enforcement is almost completely absent. Many women and girls are living without husbands or fathers — because they are fighting, have been killed, or are in hiding, afraid of being targeted. In mid-April, when opposition forces took Bentiu, the capital of Unity state, they reportedly broadcasted hate messages calling on men from one ethnic community to commit acts of vengeful sexual violence against women from another community. This context places women and girls at a heightened risk of sexual violence.

Indeed, numerous reports of sexual violence perpetrated by both government and opposition forces strongly indicate that conflict-related sexual violence is widespread. The United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) has noted that sexual violence has been a “consistent characteristic” of the conflict in all affected states.

Amnesty International has collected first hand information and testimonies that show the scale and brutality of sexual violence against women in South Sudan. For instance, a survivor of sexual violence living at the UNMISS protection site in Juba have recounted to us how a large group of soldiers came to her home in Juba's Eden neighbourhood on the morning of 18 December 2013. They took her and nine other women to an empty clinic where soldiers were staying and raped them. Fifteen soldiers raped this survivor over a period of approximately three hours. The soldiers

subsequently shoved sticks up the vaginas of six of the women, causing extensive bleeding. We believe these six women died as a result of their injuries.

In another instance, on the night of 25 February, at least four girls who had taken refuge at Christ the King Church in Malakal, Upper Nile state, were abducted by opposition forces and raped nearby. A mother recounted to us how three soldiers took her 13 year-old daughter and two other girls and raped them. She ran after her daughter until she fell down, hit by the butt of a gun. The soldiers took her daughter to a house, and raped her. Various other evidences gathered, including eyewitness testimonies, show the gruesome nature of the abuses, including how a pregnant woman were raped in Gandor, in southern Unity state, in the first week of February, crying "*leave me, you're my people, we're one country.*" This woman reportedly lost her baby subsequent to this rape.

Amnesty International urges the African Commission on Human and People's Rights to:

- Call on the parties to the conflict to cease all violations of international human rights and humanitarian law, in particularly acts of sexual violence;
- Call on the government to initiate prompt, effective and impartial investigations into all allegations of human rights and humanitarian law violations, including sexual and gender-based violence, and to bring those suspected of criminal responsibility to justice in open, accessible civilian courts and in fair trials;
- Call on the government to provide immediate and effective support and protection to survivors of human rights violations, particularly survivors of sexual violence;
- Continuously urge the Government of South Sudan to immediately ratify and domesticate the African Charter, the Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa, and other fundamental human rights treaties.