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Testimony to the U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations

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"The Situation in South Sudan"

Introduction

Chairman Menendez, Ranking Member Corker, Members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. I know that the subject before us is one about which you and other members of Congress care deeply. I regret to inform you that Special Envoy Booth is unavailable to testify today as he is in Addis Ababa working to get the peace process underway.

Situation in South Sudan

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Corker, three years ago today, on January 9, 2011, the people of South Sudan voted in overwhelming numbers for independence from the Republic of Sudan. After decades of war, they were peacefully and joyfully voting for separation and for a new future. Then Senator Kerry was there to witness that historic moment. The United States played a critical role in getting the world's youngest country on the map.

Today, tragically, the world's youngest country and undoubtedly one of its most fragile democracies is in danger of shattering. The United Nations has reported more than a thousand people have died and over 240,000 have fled their homes including a number of refugees in neighboring countries. Political rivalries have

taken on ethnic dimensions, atrocities are being committed, and men, women, and children are caught in the crossfire. This is not the future for which the people of South Sudan voted.

South Sudan's crisis began less than a month ago, on December 15th, with a political struggle that escalated into broader violence. However the fighting began, a few things are crystal clear. First, neither the United States nor the international community will countenance the armed overthrow of the democratically elected government. Second, hostilities must stop, any and all violence directed at civilian populations must end, and those responsible for perpetrating human rights abuses must be held accountable. Third, this crisis will not be solved on the battlefield. Although fighting started less than one month ago, the roots of this conflict are much deeper, and resolution can only come through immediate dialogue between the two sides and an inclusive reconciliation. Finally, all parties must permit immediate and unconditional humanitarian access to all in need, to tens of thousands of South Sudanese men, women, and children who are the real victims of this violence.

The United States has engaged in an all-out diplomatic effort to help bring an end to the fighting, with engagement by Secretary Kerry, National Security Advisor Susan Rice, and other high-ranking officials with President Kiir and former Vice President Machar as well as with the heads of state and foreign ministers in neighboring countries and around the world. We have galvanized support to end hostilities and open a broader dialogue between the two sides; called for accountability for atrocities; sought to secure the release of political detainees now being held in Juba.

But while we need a political settlement among the fighting parties, the immediate security situation remains critical – particularly for the thousands of internally displaced civilians who have sought the UN’s protection – and must be addressed as well. As the crisis began to unfold, we proposed and the Security Council unanimously adopted a resolution nearly doubling the authorized troop ceiling for UNMISS. In turn, we are now actively encouraging member states to provide additional troops and police units to the UN mission, including through the transfer of contingents from other missions in the region. As my colleague, Assistant Administrator Lindborg will discuss, we have just committed an additional \$50 million in emergency humanitarian assistance in response to pressing new needs arising from the crisis.

The President’s Special Envoy to Sudan and South Sudan, Ambassador Donald Booth – who, as I noted, could not be here to testify today because he is in Ethiopia – is actively trying to help resolve this crisis. Ambassador Booth has been in the region since December 22nd, working around the clock, as we all have in supporting his efforts. He has met repeatedly with President Kiir and other officials, had lengthy discussions with former Vice President Machar, secured the first official visit with the group of political detainees, and sat down with local religious leaders and civil society members to help find a way out of this crisis.

This is an all-out effort on our part, and given our special history in South Sudan, we are working closely with South Sudan’s neighbors, through East Africa’s Intergovernmental Authority on Development or IGAD, who are spearheading mediation efforts. A special summit on South Sudan was held at the head of state level just 12 days after the conflict began, and thanks to robust engagement, representatives of both parties arrived in Addis for negotiations just a few days

later. We are encouraged by IGAD's leadership in convening the parties and strongly support the efforts of former Ethiopian Minister Seyoum Mesfin and Kenyan General Lazaro Sumbeiywo to find a peaceful solution through political dialogue. South Sudan's neighbors are also providing asylum for new South Sudanese refugees who may number in the hundreds of thousands if the fighting does not end soon.

These negotiations offer the best hope for South Sudan and the region. An agreement to end hostilities will provide much needed time and space for dialogue to begin on the core political and governance issues that are at the root of this crisis. Both sides must recognize that there can be no military solution. We have made clear to the rebels that we will not recognize a violent overthrow of a democratically elected government. At the same time, we are encouraging the government to open political space to allow for greater inclusion. The United States also strongly believes that the political prisoners currently being held in Juba must be released. These individuals should join discussions in Addis to enlarge the chorus of those seeking constructive solutions to resolve this growing catastrophe. Each day that the conflict continues, the risk of all-out civil war grows as ethnic tensions rise, more civilians are killed, injured, or forced to flee, the humanitarian situation grows more dire, and those who have remained on the sidelines are pulled into the conflict.

Let me conclude by saying that I am gravely concerned that the crisis in South Sudan has the potential to escalate even further. While we do not know the scale of atrocities that have been committed thus far, there is clear evidence that targeted killings have taken place, with Dinka killing Nuer, and Nuer killing Dinka. Countless civilians, particularly women and children, have become victims of

violence perpetrated by both government and rebel forces alike. Each violent act threatens to return South Sudan to the cycle of violence and destruction that South Sudanese of all ethnicities and backgrounds voted to end when they voted for independence in 2011. Stopping the violence, and ensuring that Africa's newest nation continues to move forward rather than backwards, is of highest priority to the United States and the international community.

In addition to calling for an end to the violence, humanitarian access, dialogue, and the release of political prisoners in Juba, the United States is exploring the possibility of appropriate pressures against individuals on both sides who interfere with the peace and reconciliation process in South Sudan or are responsible for serious human rights abuses.

I want to thank you for your continued commitment to the people of South Sudan, and I look forward to your questions.