**Netherlands Advocacy paper South Sudan, 16 October 2026**

**South Sudan: Silence is no longer an option**

Fifteen years after independence, South Sudan remains in a deep political, humanitarian and security crisis. Armed conflict, intercommunal violence, sexual and gender-based violence, displacement, human rights violations, poverty, corruption and the consequences of climate change shape the daily lives of large parts of the population. South Sudan is closely connected to Sudan. Conflicts are fuelled by the interplay between national level and local conflicts with neighbouring and international actors competing over political and economic interests which can intensify political struggles. The war in Sudan generates further refugee flows, increasing economic pressure, shortages of basic services and heightened security risks. At the same time, political tensions in South Sudan risk escalating further. The country's first elections since independence are scheduled for 22 December 2026 while serious disagreements persist between the parties that signed peace agreements that remained largely unimplemented with continuous extension of the transitional period. These developments have far-reaching consequences not only for the people of South Sudan, but for the stability of the entire region.

**Elections require the right conditions**

The 2018 Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (R-ARCSS) was supplemented by a so-called 'Roadmap' in 2022 to extend the transition period from a transitional government to a peaceful and democratic political system, with elections initially scheduled for December 2024 which were postponed to 22 December 2026 again extending the transition period ending in February 2027. Implementation of the peace agreement remained largely incomplete. According to the UN Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan, key provisions remain unimplemented, including the unification of security forces, key elements of the constitutional process and the establishment of transitional justice mechanisms. At the same time, political tensions, armed clashes, restrictions on civil society and impunity intensified. People need security, access to reliable information, freedom to organise and speak, a genuine political dialogue, inclusive participation and a trusted way to resolve disputes.

**Protection and participation of vulnerable groups**

A credible transition process must explicitly take into account the realities faced by particularly vulnerable groups. Women, young people, displaced families and people living in remote areas must not be treated as an afterthought in decisions about the country's future, but must be recognised and involved as political actors. Older people possess valuable experience in conflict resolution, community life and social cohesion. Persons with disabilities have a right to equal political and social participation. Refugees must likewise be given the opportunity to participate fully in the political process.

**The role of civil society, churches and women in local-led peacebuilding and mediation**

The failure to establish inclusive dialogue for truth, healing and reconciliation at all levels is contributing to further militarisation, armed mobilisation and destabilisation across the region. Church-led and women-led peacebuilding and mediation, locally led peace initiatives and youth networks, therefore require urgent and sustained support. Women, who represent more than half of the population must be actively involved in peace and civic education, political and electoral leadership and decision-making processes. Churches in South Sudan have a strong grassroots presence across communities and maintain relationships with regional and international actors, including the African Union, the C5 countries (high-level diplomatic committee: South Africa, Algeria, Chad, Nigeria, Rwanda), the Troika (Norway, UK, US), the European Union, regional actors and other stakeholders. They play an important role in peacebuilding, mediation, advocacy and civic education. Stronger collaboration is needed between civil society and faith-based organisations both within South Sudan and internationally.

In their **statement of 5 October 2026 "Silence is no longer an option", South Sudanese church leaders** called for the immediate cessation of hostilities, the protection of civilians, safe humanitarian access, an end to the mobilisation of armed youth, and strengthened dialogue, peace and reconciliation mechanisms. Church leaders through ecumenical collaboration urge all parties and communities to choose restraint over retaliation, dialogue over confrontation, and reconciliation over revenge.

Warnings about violence are no longer sufficient, preventing further violence has become an immediate necessity.

**What we ask of the Dutch government and its EU partners**
Investments in inclusive dialogue for truth, healing and reconciliation at all levels, civic education and community resilience can help reduce the human and financial costs of renewed conflict. Peace cannot be built through top-down peace agreements or security measures alone. It must be matched by investments in conflict prevention, inclusive dialogue for truth, trauma healing and reconciliation, local mediation, civic education, (transitional) justice, women's political participation and leadership, youth participation and livelihoods. Women, young people, church leaders as well as local civil society organisations continue to work for peace, social justice, social cohesion and a shared future. The Netherlands and the EU should continue support to these local peace actors and place their perspectives at the center of policy towards South Sudan.

We therefore ask the Netherlands and the EU to take four practical steps. First, use coordinated diplomacy and the Dutch Embassy in Juba actively for peace. Second, increase political pressure for an inclusive and credible transition process. Third, provide flexible funding to locally led peacebuilding and mediation. Fourth, protect civilians and civic space and help end impunity.

**1. Use coordinated diplomacy and the Dutch Embassy in Juba actively for peace**
Prioritise locally led peacebuilding - including church and women-led -, mediation and reconciliation. Maintain systematic engagement with church and civil society peace actors and work together with other diplomatic missions and South Sudanese civil society and churches to coordinate regional political pressure; promote inclusive dialogue for truth, healing and reconciliation at all levels and promote structural reform to avoid repeated extensions of transitional arrangements that primarily benefit the political elite.

**2. Increase political pressure for an inclusive and credible transition process**
Support an inclusive political process in which the voices of church and civil society peace actors – particularly women and young people – are systematically incorporated. Promote inclusive dialogue for truth, healing and reconciliation at all levels and promote coordinated regional engagement ahead of the December 2026 scheduled elections. Within the EU, and towards UN Security Council members, AU, C5 and IGAD, advocate for an inclusive and credible political transition process and for elections only when credible conditions for the promotion and protection of human rights before, during and after the elections have been established.

**3. Provide flexible funding to locally led peacebuilding and mediation**
Flexible funding is needed for local peacebuilding, mediation, reconciliation, trauma healing, with participation of women in leadership and young people, to enable them to shape and lead sustainable peacebuilding efforts. Provide multi-year funding for initiatives led by South Sudanese civil society and the church, carrying a historical burden of accompanying the South Sudanese people through suffering, war, displacement and national uncertainty. The people-to-people peace initiatives, the ecumenical accompaniment contributing to the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2005, the church-led Action Plan for Peace (APP) are evidence-based examples that reconciliation is possible and inclusive dialogue for truth and healing at all levels can interrupt cycles of violence in the darkest hours.

**4. Protect civilians and civic space and help end impunity**
Urge all parties to the conflict to comply with international humanitarian law and human rights law.
Support the continuation and implementation of the UNMISS mandate.
Strengthen the protection of women and girls from sexual and gender-based violence. Support the continuation of international human rights monitoring and investigations, and hold the South Sudanese government and all parties to the conflict accountable for ensuring the safety of civil society, peacebuilders, humanitarian workers, human rights defenders and journalists.

**Conclusion**
Widespread concern about South Sudan's political trajectory, protection of human rights before, during and after elections and the risk of renewed war demands coordinated action and support to inclusive dialogue for truth, healing and reconciliation at all levels; stronger civilian and civic space protections, meaningful participation of women and marginalised communities and coordinated efforts by the Dutch government, EU and international diplomatic community, civil society, church and women leaders and regional actors to support a peaceful and credible transition process in South Sudan. As one local peace partner emphasised, "*South Sudan does not need the international community to choose sides, South Sudan needs the international community to choose peace. Give South Sudanese space, resources, and support to build peace. Churches, women leaders and grassroots organisations are prepared."*

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*Signed by:*

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Inter-Church Peace Council (Interkerkelijk Vredesberaad)
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