

Beat: Miscellaneous

UN Security Council condemns downing of UN helicopter in S. Sudan

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USPA News - The United Nations Security Council on Wednesday condemned the shutdown of a UN-chartered helicopter in the volatile northern region of South Sudan a day earlier, urging a swift and transparent investigation to hold those responsible accountable. The Council, which is composed of China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, the United States, and ten non-permanent members, said Tuesday's downing constituted a "grave violation" of the 2011 Status of Forces Agreement and jeopardizes the continued operations of the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS).

"The members of the Security Council strongly urged UNMISS and the Government of South Sudan to conduct a swift, thorough and transparent investigation of this attack," the Council said in a press statement. "They emphasized that those responsible for the attack must be held accountable and all necessary measures to avoid such attacks in the future must be taken." The incident happened on Tuesday afternoon when a Russian helicopter chartered by UNMISS crashed about 10 kilometers (6.2 miles) south of the oil town of Bentiu in northern Unity State, killing three Russian crew members and seriously injuring a fourth. The aircraft, owned by Russian airline UTair, was on a routine cargo flight from the city of Wau in northwestern South Sudan to Bentiu. UTair previously said the helicopter had been shot down by ground fire about 3 kilometers (1.8 mile) from the destination airport, but Wednesday's Security Council statement was the first confirmation of an attack from the United Nations. It remains unclear who was responsible for the downing, though local media in South Sudan have blamed rebel forces. Speaking earlier on Wednesday, Canadian Foreign Minister John Baird said he was concerned about the deadly attack. "Canada urgently calls on both sides to respect agreements they have made toward preventing more violence and bloodshed in the area and to cease military engagements," he said. "They must also allow UNMISS to carry out its mandate to protect civilians and facilitate full, safe, unhindered humanitarian access to all parts of South Sudan." South Sudan, which became the world's newest country when it broke away from Sudan in 2011, has witnessed widespread violence between rebel and government forces since an apparent coup attempt in December 2013. A fresh ceasefire deal was signed by both sides on Monday and called for work toward a permanent ceasefire and to form a national unity government within 45 days.

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