

Opening Remarks

SRSG PRESS CONFERENCE – 22 November 2018

Good morning everyone and thank you for coming along today.

And welcome to our Radio Miraya listeners who are tuning in live to this press conference.

I'd like to talk briefly about three key issues:

- The strategic positioning of UNMISS peacekeepers in the Upper Nile;
- UNMISS' efforts to support displaced people returning to their homes;
- And our ongoing support for the implementation of the peace agreement.

Yesterday I travelled to the Upper Nile, visiting Malakal, Kodok and Renk. I'm pleased to say that the security situation in the area has improved and people are beginning to return to the area from Aburoc, Sudan and other places where they sought refuge during the height of the conflict.

As the implementation of the peace agreement progresses, local authorities tell me that they expect the number of returnees to increase. It is therefore important that UNMISS helps provide a secure environment to support people coming home and so that humanitarians can feel safe delivering assistance to them.

In that regard, we are looking to boost our forces in Kodok where we will establish a new base to support peacebuilding in the area so that people can have the confidence to return. That means we will need to reconsider the amount of effort we put into other areas.

We will, as we always do, fully consult all parties over the coming months, as we make decisions about our presence in various areas, including the Upper Nile.

There is a lot of work to do in Kodok before our presence is fully established. For example, we face significant logistical challenges in transporting heavy equipment, not just for our base construction, but also to rehabilitate the roads and the airstrip. But we are committed to moving as quickly as possible and are grateful that we have the full support of the authorities there.

There is a real opportunity to make progress in this strategically important area. In the past days, we have seen encouraging engagement between Government forces and the opposition at a civilian-military outreach event organized by our civil affairs team. We have also organized meetings between the Malakal Governor and people from the POC.

Other similar meetings are taking place spontaneously across the country which we are also assisting with. We will continue to facilitate these kinds of reconciliation and peacebuilding activities.

The priority for us around the country is to create a safer environment in communities so that people have the trust and confidence they need to leave Protection of Civilians sites and return home.

POC camps were set up to provide sanctuary to vulnerable civilians facing an imminent threat of physical violence during intense conflict. There is no doubt that many lives have been saved as a result.

But POCs are a last resort not a long-term solution. They are certainly not a place where children should grow up if we want them to reach their full potential.

In the past few months, we have found that 95% of the new arrivals at the POCs in Juba, for example, are not in immediate fear for their lives or in real need of protection. They are simply looking to access services and reunite with family.

Our priority should therefore be to support communities and provide services in the areas that people want to return to.

We will therefore work in full cooperation with our humanitarian partners to re-establish services in communities over time rather than continuing to use POCs as a convenient hub for delivering aid or because of a lack of housing.

There is also a fairness issue. We need to ensure that those who go home are not disadvantaged because they don't receive education and healthcare while those living in the POC do.

One of the greatest challenges is finding land for people in the POCs to return to. This is the responsibility of the government - both national and local. The homes of some people living in POCs have been illegally occupied by others. It is also the responsibility of the government to ensure these are vacated for families to move back to.

UNMISS will certainly do all it can to facilitate the safe return of those who choose to leave POCs and go home. And, as I said, we will work closely with humanitarian agencies on this process.

Finally, on the issue of our support for the implementation of the peace agreement. I was pleased to speak at the recent celebration in Juba and to see parties that have previously been divided by violence coming together in a public sign of unity.

This sends a strong message to the citizens of this country that they are genuinely committed to ending the suffering and building durable peace.

The big challenge ahead is continuing to build trust and confidence between the parties – and between the parties and the people.

That is not just a job for the signatories. All of us – the UN, the international community, political and religious leaders, civil society – need to encourage trust so that peace can flourish.

The UN is absolutely committed to working with all the parties as a partner. We will use our resources and our presence to support reconciliation and peacebuilding across the country.

In terms of the resources that we have, there has been a lot of discussion about a potential increase in the number of peacekeepers serving with the UN Mission in South Sudan.

We have recently had a visit from the IGAD military assessment team and our Force Commander is meeting with the Chiefs of Defense Forces from various African countries as we speak.

It is appropriate that IGAD makes its recommendation to the UN Security Council which is the ultimate decision-maker about the composition of UNMISS and its mandate.

We hope that they will keep in mind the capacities of the total UNMISS force of 14,500 that is present across South Sudan which contributes to building durable peace.

Speaking at the Security Council last week, the Chief of UN Peacekeeping, Jean-Pierre Lacroix said that it was critical that any modification to UNMISS' mandate must retain a single peacekeeping force with one unified command and control structure and the priority of protection of civilians.

It is my real hope that we will reach the day when the presence of UNMISS is no longer required and we will depart leaving our colleagues from the UN agencies here to help build South Sudan's development.

For me, this will be the ultimate sign of UNMISS having successfully achieved its mandate.

I will finish there and I'm happy to take any questions.