



PRESS RELEASE

**Near Verbatim Transcript
Press Briefing by SRSG and Head of UNMISS, Nicholas Haysom
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Welcome to everyone, including those tuning in live to Radio Miraya.

I'm pleased to share with our listeners today key points from my recent briefing to the Security Council in New York, and to exchange views on the situation in South Sudan.

During my briefing to the Security Council, I highlighted three recent significant developments in the implementation of the Revitalized Peace Agreement:

Firstly, South Sudanese leaders have produced a Roadmap which extends the transition for two-years and provides feasible timelines to implement the essential benchmarks of the peace process, which in turn will lead to free, fair, and credible elections in December 2024. It is an important development demonstrating consensus among the key signatories on the way forward, through a South Sudan-owned process. We hope it will serve to recommit the parties to the objectives and goals set out in the peace agreement.

The Roadmap will enable the United Nations to provide support to the South Sudanese in at least two of the critical processes required before elections can be held. One is the preparations for elections itself and the other is the drafting of a new constitution. This second process will require South Sudanese to deal with the fault lines and divisions which have seen the country break into conflict on two occasions in the last decade.

Secondly, we have seen the graduation of a significant part of the first batch of the Necessary Unified Forces. We believe this offers the promise that the transitional government can begin creating a truly national South Sudan Armed Forces. This could serve to mitigate intercommunal violence and protect citizens through an effective and professionalized security sector.

As I emphasized to President Kiir and First Vice President Machar at my last meetings with them respectively, neither the Roadmap nor the graduation of the Necessary Unified Forces is an end point in South Sudan's journey on the path to democratic transition. It brings new challenges including the sustainment, accommodation, payment, ranking, and deployment of the forces, which remain a concern for the Security Council.

Thirdly, the President and the First Vice-President have managed to resolve the Parliamentary impasse, which will enable the Transitional National Legislature to consider important laws and bills that are critical for reforms contemplated by the peace agreement. These are necessary for the establishment of the institutions which the UN can support and will create the conditions for prosperity and democracy.

Even with these positive developments, as I shared with the Security Council, intercommunal conflict continues to fuel repeated cycles of violence. These have the potential to erode the gains made towards sustaining peace across South Sudan.

Most recently, the fighting between SPLM/A-IO opposition forces and the Kitgwang and Agwelek factions has displaced thousands of people within Upper Nile, to Jonglei, Unity states, and parts of Sudan. Over 14,000 have been displaced and sought refuge at the Malakal Protection of Civilians (POC) site.

UNMISS is working with State authorities and humanitarian agencies to support sustainable solutions in Malakal. It is urgent to prevent overcrowding, the outbreak of disease, as well as maintain peace within the community living within the UN Protection of Civilian site.

We also strongly condemn the violence in Mayom, Unity State, and in Rualbet and most recently Anet in Warrap, resulting in casualties and the mass displacement of women, children, and the elderly. In recent days, the Twic/Ngok Dinka Conflict has created a new wave of refugees in Abyei, Warrap and Northern Bahr El Ghazal. Since 23 September about 3,500 vulnerable persons have been displaced to various bomas in Twic County.

UNMISS is trying to create zones of protection in conflict hotspots within our means and capacity. For example, last month, an integrated peace team led by UNMISS visited Ikotos, Eastern Equatoria, to meet with community leaders. They began a process of seeking common ground through dialogue following a series of cattle raids and clashes between local communities and some national security forces.

We are backing this grassroot up with national-level efforts. Here, I can refer to the South Sudan National Livestock Conference, held on 1 to 3 September in Juba, where the UN is working in partnership with the government for a closer look at the issue of cattle- and migration related violence. I welcome the spirit of inclusive honest dialogue and problem-solving in which ministers, governors, parliamentarians, and the Vice Presidency and civil society engaged on this issue that plays a central role on the fabric of South Sudanese society.

One issue that the Security Council remains deeply concerned by is the increasing trend of conflict-related sexual violence. This could be effectively addressed if all concerned parties and relevant authorities put a stop to using sexual violence as a weapon, condemn the practice, and ensure accountability for perpetrators.

In this and other regards, the Mission is strengthening its support to the justice chain in each state by supporting accountability, through the delivery of mobile circuit courts and courts martial, targeted training and mentoring focusing on criminal investigations, and enhanced capacity to address crimes that risk destabilizing the peace.

Let me turn to humanitarian issues. I reminded the Security Council that conflict and climate continue to devastate communities and drive humanitarian needs up, particularly four consecutive years of flooding have already impacted hundreds of thousands of people across the country this year.

This year, more than two-thirds of South Sudan's population, 8.9 million people, will need humanitarian assistance. But access to people in affected locations remains challenging due to impassable roads, flooded airstrips, and insecurity on the waterways. Let me emphasize that addressing insecurity especially along the Nile will improve humanitarian operations and our response, as well as commercial activities and livelihoods.

While the Mission is redoubling efforts by engaging national political stakeholders and partners, including non-signatories and civil society at the national level, at the regional level, I have engaged with principal actors during my visit to Khartoum on my way to New York to update on developments and to galvanize support for the peace process. I continue to remind partners and stakeholders that the Roadmap provides a fresh opportunity to align all our efforts. An opportunity in our view that should be utilized wisely and effectively.

Let me reaffirm that UNMISS, together with regional partners, notably the African Union and IGAD, and the international community, will continue to support the parties in fulfilling their obligations to the people of South Sudan.

Before I close, I would like to address the recent media reports of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse by some aid workers at the Malakal Protection of Civilian site.

Firstly, we would want to assure South Sudanese that the allegation contained in the media report will be thoroughly investigated. Even though the article does not implicate UN staff directly, we take no comfort. As long as there is an imbalance in power between aid workers and aid beneficiaries, the UN must itself take note of the consequences of this phenomenon in all areas where we are present. Secondly, we reassure that the UN System has long maintained a zero-tolerance policy for Sexual Exploitation and Abuse. There are reasons for this approach.

Sexual exploitation and abuse by aid worker whether in the United Nations, implementing partners and associated personnel, is a betrayal of trust of a vulnerable population that we are all sworn to protect. The harm caused to victims is lasting, as is the damage to the aid community seeking to assist South Sudanese beneficiaries. Anyone suspected will be investigated and punished whoever they are and without restriction. This has long been the case.

But this is not enough, it is critical that the zero-tolerance policy is emphasized to staff – whether civilian or uniformed. For this reason, instruction in the UN protocol on SEA is obligatory, including the duty to report incidents which come to the knowledge of any staff members.

This is also not enough. We have recognized the necessity to drive this policy through an accessible complaint procedure. The UN has established 14 community-based complaint centres to encourage the reporting of complaints, as well as 13 Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) taskforces to systematize and enforce the approach.

The UN has also recognized the importance of protecting and supporting victims, placing them at the centre of our prevention and protection approach. We have established three centres to promote the victim-based approach and additional centres are planned. We have noted the reduction in complaints against UN and UN related staff. But this too should not be regarded as enough. I have repeatedly enquired from responsible UN officials whether we are doing anything we shouldn't, or not doing anything we should, to sustain our prevention efforts regardless of who employs the perpetrator.

Thank you for listening and I am ready to take any questions you may have.

Questions and answers

Q: I just wanted more clarification on this recent media report of sexual exploitation or sexual abuse in Upper Nile. Now, if you go through their report, there's a part which says that over the past period, humanitarian agencies have been complaining about how the UN mission in the country is handling issues to do with sexual exploitation. They are saying that you are not putting much effort to ensure that this situation is addressed. What's your response to this question?

A: To be blunt, I should say that the report is incorrect. We place a lot of emphasis on dealing with this issue. But we've come to recognize that the issue is pervasive and long lasting. You have never properly dealt with it and you have to keep dealing with it all the time. At the heart of the issue is the imbalance of power between aid workers and aid beneficiaries, which means that there is a possibility of exploiting that imbalance of power, and even though the allegations are addressed in that report to non-UN staff, we regard it as potentially applying to UN staff. We don't take, as I mentioned, we don't take any comfort from it.

We will be continuing to investigate with our usual rigor all incidents. Let me stress no incident is passed over and all are investigated fully through investigative units. What we do know also is there is underreporting and so we need to continue to approach the phenomenon even if we are not the recipient of complaints. We are required to investigate exactly what is happening in every area where we are present. The other thing just to emphasize is apart from the allegations which are related to what was called a UN site, but this is obviously not necessarily mean it is a UN sponsored issue.

We have also published a report around conflict-related sexual violence which happened in the Leer based intercommunal conflict and which, if you've read that report, is truly horrifying. Now

our view is that even if there are these allegations in this latest media report, we're not going to hold back on our duty to report and to monitor conflict-related sexual violence in other areas. We see ourselves as having a continuing obligation on behalf of the victims of that violence to also continue to raise and report it.

Q: I would just like to understand something on the latest position of the UN Security Council on the arms embargo on South Sudan. What is the latest position of the UN Security Council? There still are continuing complaints from the South Sudanese Government that the imposition of the arms embargo continues to stifle efforts for the implementation of the peace agreement.

Looking at the ongoing efforts made by the parties on the implementation of the peace agreement, why is still the UN Security Council reluctant on lifting the arms embargo?

The last question is: the work on the permanent constitution making seems to be slowly ongoing, and yet despite the fact that this extension of the transitional period of the unity government, time always continues to run out. I would just like your comment on this matter.

A: On the arms embargo, the Mission itself is not the sponsor or the author of the arms embargo.

It's a decision taken by the Security Council based on its assessment of whether such a measure is necessary to reduce the levels of violence. But I want to point out that the Security Council has provided a procedure for the arms embargo to be waived if it's necessary to secure arms, for example, for any of the purposes contemplated in the peace agreement.

And we would want to encourage those who want access to arms to deepen and make irreversible the peace process to avail themselves of that process. And I note that the Chinese Government has in fact used that way to secure, purchase and deliver non-lethal related equipment, provisions and uniforms.

Secondly, I should mention that the Security Council, in its meeting last year, decided to link the arms embargo to a set of conditions which would see it lifted, and those conditions include such issues as demonstrable proof of the capacity of the country to deal with arms and explosives. It also includes issues such as progress on the graduation of the Necessary Unified Forces and other benchmarks which are set out in that particular caveat. I think South Sudan may have made some progress on some of those issues and could make further progress if it chose to do so. It's possible, we certainly have offered the government all assistance to have the arms embargo lifted on account of the achievement of those benchmarks, and will continue to do so.

On the constitution making process, you've correctly pointed out that it's taking a long time to get going. We've noted that the process contemplated in the law which provides for the constitution making process is quite complicated: establishment of certain committees, the law itself has to be passed, and so on. So, we would also join you in encouraging both the legislature and others who have an interest in that constitution-making process to encourage those who are responsible for passing the law, which is required to launch the process as well as encourage the bodies who are responsible for engaging in the process to do so.

For our part, we stand ready to supply expertise, comparative experience, and we have made this clear both to the relevant ministries as well as the legislature. We think it's important towards the

central reason offered for the extension and the peace agreement and it's on the basis of an estimate of how long it would take to properly complete a constitution-making process that the timeline was extended by two years. The opposition parties in particular said we need at least two years based on the advice they had received from the Max Planck Institute and that clearly means that they don't think it's a quick fix in which a couple of clever professors draft a new constitution.

They clearly indicate that what is required is an inclusive process which involves all sectors of society or regions of South Sudan sharing their views and engaging on the really important issues which will define the arrangements by which South Sudanese live together.

Q: I have like two short questions. I was reading a press release from the UN panel of Experts on Human Rights in South Sudan and they have warned the international community that if the donors and the international community are not serious in monitoring and handling the issues in South Sudan there is a likelihood of millions of people to be displaced from their homes.

There is a possibility of exodus of millions of people going into neighbouring countries as refugees and they would be putting pressure on the aid agencies in the neighbouring countries. As a mission, do you agree with this analysis? Is it a correct analysis?

If it is a correct analysis, if you agree with Madam Sooka, the chairperson of this Commission, what is the Mission doing in order to prevent the likelihood of what they have talked about?

Secondly, you have been to New York. The 77th session of the UN General Assembly just concluded. But what is the perception of the international community towards South Sudan, especially after the announcement of the Roadmap which postponed elections for two years and given the fact that many people are saying leaders just want to stay in power. So what is the perception of the international community towards South Sudan? Are they positive or negative?

A: Can I just deal with the second question first?

I think, as in my presentation on most recent developments, there was generally a positive response.

And I think people are looking forward with some optimism and expectation that South Sudan will deliver on its promise to implement the rest of the peace agreement in the outstanding period, that they won't take the extension as an excuse to sit back and do nothing and I will be communicating that view to the authorities.

There were quite a few members Member States who made it clear that they were supporting the Roadmap on the basis that there would be a consultative approach to completing the benchmarks and secondly that there would be real progress in meeting those benchmarks. They qualified their support by their expectation on both those items.

In addition, many of the Members raised concerns about the ongoing violence in the country and their apprehension that it could set back the peace agenda.

In regard to the Human Rights Commission's report yesterday, I have just seen it. Madam Sooka clearly draws attention to the worst possible outcome of the spiraling violence if it's left, if no attempt is made to bring it under control. I would want to believe that it's possible for the South

Sudanese to create the conditions to go forward and complete the transition without serious violence.

I mentioned before that it's my hope that the outcome of the graduation of the Necessary Unified Forces will lead to a better capacity, greater capacity to deal with intercommunal violence and to roll that particular phenomenon back.

It will require, though, the engagement of South Sudanese people at grassroots level to find the ways and the compromises by which they can live together with the neighbors with which they're in conflict. But it will also require the engagement of the national government, in my view, to assist communities in resolving the tensions including particularly the one I mentioned the conflict which is erupted in the north.

Q: The just the day before yesterday, South Sudan authorities inaugurated this cybercrimes and computer misuse court here in Juba. Now as the head of UN mission in South Sudan, do you think it's necessary for South Sudan to have this particular court because if you look at how South Sudanese are reacting to this, I think that is one of the ways to freeze their freedom of expression. Do you think this court is going to prevent South Sudanese from sharing their views?

A: Sorry, can you tell me which court is this?

Q: They call it Cybercrimes and Computer Misuse Court.

A: You know, I'm really not an expert in that court, but I do know that it's a phenomenon which is increasingly the subject of legislative attention around the world, people are saying cyber security and cyber-related issues require at least some collective discussion. I would hope that while appreciating the possibility that what comes out of that process could restrict online communication, I would want to believe that it's also possible to guarantee open expression also through appropriate legislation. We will certainly - and I give you this as a marker going forward - want to concentrate, also in our communications with the government, on the importance of freedom of expression if the country is due to undergo elections, which is a robust, competitive political process and requires the freedom to express your opinions and your views. And we think this is particularly important for South Sudan as it enters this period before elections.

Q: In your earlier statement, you mentioned that 8.9 million people would require humanitarian aid this year. Given the situation of flooding and the roads are impassable, some of the airstrips are submerged in flooding, with the economic situation, what do you think is the plight of the people and what is the immediate plan for the UN to respond to the humanitarian needs?

A: Well, I need to share with you that the mission itself, my mission, which is separate from all the rest of the UN agencies and partners, has been particularly engaged in simply trying to mitigate the effects of the flooding on communities by building dykes and preventing the flooding from destroying people's houses and livelihoods. But we recognize that the bigger question is whether we can sustain the level of humanitarian aid from the rest of the world. And I think somebody asked me a question earlier which I didn't answer, which was what was the perception of South Sudan?

I should just share with you that at least part of my efforts in my trip to New York and to other places, has been to put South Sudan on the map. In a context in which people's attention are drawn either to Russia and Ukraine conflict, to what's happening even in this region like what's happening in Ethiopia and in Sudan. For some countries, South Sudan looks like a country at peace and we are trying to say no, there are real problems and don't let South Sudan fall off the agenda. It has to stay on the agenda, but particularly in regard to the continuing need for humanitarian aid.

The humanitarian part of the UN family is certainly hoping to scale up its advocacy for further aid for South Sudan and to draw the world's attention to the challenges which South Sudan faces.

Q: Just to follow up, what would be the funding that could be required to serve this 8.9 million people?

A: I know that the humanitarian appeal, which is an appeal collected by the UN agencies and which goes out to the world and requests people to support it, has gone out. When I last looked at it had only been filled to the extent of 34% (currently 45% funded). That figure may have increased more recently as we've attempted to have the world focus its attention on South Sudan. But that figure, the level at which support is being provided, is not enough at the moment to meet the needs of South Sudan.

Q: Let me take you back to the UN Security Council issue. During the International Peace Day, the government says the UN Security Council is being manipulated by the powerful countries to intimidate developing countries. What is your comment on this?

Secondly, during the South Sudan Oil and Power Gas conference, the chairperson of the African oil gas says it is time for the UN Security Council to lift the sanctions because it is crippling the economy and as a result it continues to make South Sudan dependent on humanitarian aid. What is your take on this?

A: There are various parts to that question, but let me just briefly summarize by saying I don't think the arms embargo is the cause of the extraordinary humanitarian need faced by the country at the moment. What is required, of course, is a robust development plan and if I can use the opportunity, while I have you here, to encourage you to attend the launch tomorrow of the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework, this is the embodiment of our commitment to serve. That's the UN commitment to serve the South Sudanese people. But the framework itself was created in collaboration with the government, with civil society including NGO's, academia and the media, and the private sector, as well as development partners. And it is designed to address the national priorities as framed by South Sudanese, as well as prepare for an advance on the future plan for tomorrow including the development of a strategy to deal with the conflict and the national development strategy. So, I want to encourage you to attend. It will be countersigned by my deputy, DSRSR Sara Nyanti, and the President and it will at least allow you to share in the priorities which we in the UN do see as critical for progress going forward.

Q: I want to know if the intercommunal conflict is related to migrations, cattle raiding or land issues. Then on Abyei, what is the stand of the UN and the international community on the issue of Abyei?

A: I'm not going to comment on the Abyei question. It is not part of my mandate, but it is a part of other people's mandate, so I don't want to talk about how they should be dealing with the Abyei issue, but it's obviously a complicated one as you know, and one in which the government is currently seized, as I understand it. We would of course want to see a resolution of the Abyei issue as soon as possible.

On the causes of the intercommunal conflict, is it what they call transhumance, which is the movement of cattle across agricultural land, whether it's cattle rustling itself, or whether it is intertribal conflict or history, almost in every area there's a different phenomenon - a driver of that conflict. But I think we recognize that overall, development and the provision of livelihoods is the answer. The proper use of the assets of this country, the incredible land, the access to water, the use of its natural resources, including oil but also including wildlife, as ways of generating livelihoods, all are possible, but they require a level of peace so that the conditions are there for the country to make use of those opportunities.

Q: Just some more clarification on the issue of the arms embargo. You know, you did say that the UN Security Council had provided ways on how the South Sudan government can acquire arms if it wants to. If you may try to state some of the ways put forward by the UN Security Council on how a country like South Sudan, in the situation it is in, can acquire arms.

Finally, as the head of UNMISS, what is your opinion, your position, especially on the calls by the South Sudanese Government that the UN Security Council should lift the arms embargo because it continues to create some hardships on the implementation of the peace?

A: I am not going to respond on the advantages and disadvantages of the arms embargo because I am like a civil servant, the Security Council tells me what we have to do and what the policy is towards the country and so we respect it's right to do that and it's not for people in the field to say it's making a mistake, or it's misunderstood its role.

But you asked specifically on the ways in which they can avoid the arms embargo. There are two ways that I principally suggest. The first is to meet the conditions which the Security Council has set out, which, if met, they would lift the arms embargo. They principally relate to security sector issues and the formation of the Necessary Unified Forces. The second way is to apply to the committee which the Security Council has set up to monitor the arms embargo for a waiver, in other words, a non-application of the arms embargo, that's what a waiver means, and for the purposes of supplying goods which would otherwise be banned under the arms embargo. They can be delivered to South Sudan if it falls within any purpose contemplated by the peace agreement. So, if it's for peace and you can link the request for peace, the Security Council has indicated, as it had even in practice, that it will favorably consider such a request.

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