



Government pledges to ratify key human rights conventions



Lawrence Korbandy, South Sudan Human Rights Commission Chairperson, speaking at celebrations in Juba. Photo credit: *Radio Miraya*.

The Government of South Sudan (GoSS) acknowledged on 10 December the urgent need to revise existing laws and enact new ones to ensure they met international human rights standards.

"We also need to ratify as soon as possible international and regional human rights instruments," said GoSS Legal Affairs Advisor Telar Ring Deng, reading a message from President Salva Kiir during International Human Rights Day celebrations in Juba.

"Top of these treaties is the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Maputo Protocol," he said.

Lawrence Korbandy, South Sudan Human Rights Commission Chairperson, said the young country faced several human rights challenges.

"One such challenge is the inadequacy of laws that are appropriate for upholding the rule of law and human rights in general," he said, calling on the government to hasten the ratification and domestication of key international and regional human rights instruments.

Speaking on behalf of South Sudan's civil society organizations, Marie Lorna lauded the government for steps it had taken so far to safeguard human rights of the nation's people.

"One is free to move anywhere, anytime," Ms. Lorna said. "There is

freedom of worship, right to own property, fair representation and participation in the public offices."

She then listed a series of human rights violations by the state apparatus, which included arbitrary arrest, illegal detention without trial, torture of suspects while in detention, restriction of freedom of expression and media and forced marriages.

Ms. Lorna added that the government had failed to respect the right to life of people and their security as well as employment of South Sudan's graduates, favouring foreigners with questionable academic papers.

In an interview with UN *Radio Miraya* last week, UNMISS Head of Mission Hilde F. Johnson also called on the government to hasten the ratification of human rights conventions. "South Sudan has to sign up to the critical human rights conventions, so that as a new and independent country it is anchored in a firm foundation of human rights," said Ms. Johnson.

She added that UNMISS had a strong human rights mandate to monitor, investigate, verify and report human rights violations.

"The main way to implement this mandate is to work very closely with the government of South Sudan to ensure human rights are respected," Ms. Johnson said.

UNMISS donates furniture to Juba school

Seeking to boost student morale and improve performance, UNMISS Public Information Office donated 13 desks to Atlabara West Basic School in the South Sudanese capital Juba on 16 December.

"This is our small way of contributing to the huge effort that is now required in building a better future for this country," UNMISS Spokesperson Aleem Siddique said.

Adding that children were vital part of the population, Mr. Siddique said it was imperative for the United Nations to support youth in the new nation.

"We hope that this small gift of the desks we have provided to the school here will help make the lives of the children a little bit better and motivate them to learn," he said.

Speaking during the handover, school headmaster Benaih Soma Logworong thanked UNMISS and its engineers, who built the desks, requesting continued support for the school. "I hope next year more will be coming," Mr. Logworong said.

He added that the school still had a shortage of textbooks, inadequate teachers, insufficient clean water, limited classrooms and a broken fence.

"You only have to go to one or two schools in South Sudan to see some of the huge challenges that the children face," Mr. Siddique said. "Many children have to bring their chairs to school."

UNMISS Project Engineer Layth Denno said he was happy to carry out the desk project and his local staff members more than willing to do the job. "That represents the feeling of the local staff -- how they want to serve their communities using UNMISS tools and facilities."

"Although the number of desks is very small, we are looking forward to having bigger projects," Mr. Denno added.

Margaret John, a 12-year-old primary three pupil expressed her delight in the new desks.

"Before we got the benches, we were sitting on the floor," she said. "So writing was difficult. But today, with the desks, I can write well and happily."





Investigation into November conflict begins in Unity

In tackling inter-clan conflict in Unity State, the state government set up a committee on 15 December in the capital Bentiu to investigate last month's clashes between youths from Rubkona and Koch counties that led to the deaths of an estimated 14 people.

State Minister of Information and Communications Gideon Thoar Kon said the Rubkona and Koch county commissioners would lead the investigation.

"We need to be tolerant and live together as one people," the minister said. "The government will decisively and appropriately deal with the perpetrators once the findings are presented."

Reasons for the violence, which began at the end of marital rites in Boaw, Rubkona County, were yet to be confirmed, said Minister Kon.

Residents said they were worried about a recurrence due to an absence of police in the area. In the past, human rights groups have attributed continued violence between communities to a lack of security systems to deter attacks.

Separately, a two-day workshop on the role of the legislative assembly in protection and promotion of human rights, organized by UNMISS, began today in Bentiu.

Speaking at the opening ceremony, which was attended by over 20 legislators, Brigadier Simon Maguek Gai said human rights protection and promotion were a national duty for all lawmakers.

"Accusations and counter accusations of human rights violations by SPLA (Sudan People's Liberation Army) and some officials of South Sudan in the past were as a result of mistakes," Speaker Gai said.

He urged his colleagues to improve their knowledge of human rights so that they were better able to enact laws and conventions on human rights.

UNMISS Unity State Coordinator Brigitte Oederlin reiterated the UN's commitment to the development of South Sudan.

The UNMISS mandate, she said, was peacebuilding, conflict mitigation, protection of civilians, human rights promotion and support for the government to strengthen its rule of law, security, justice and disarmament, demobilization and reintegration sectors.



Unity State Minister of Information and Communications Gideon Thoar Kon. Photo credit: UNMISS/Isaac Kelgbeh.

Polio vaccination campaign launched in Malakal



Upper Nile State Minister for Health Stephen Lor Nyiak. Photo credit: UNICEF.

Hundreds of thousands of children in Upper Nile stand to benefit from a four-day polio vaccination campaign launched on 12 December by the State Ministry of Health (MoH), UNICEF, World Health Organization (WHO) and other stakeholders.

Part of a nationwide effort to curb the disease, the campaign – the fourth and final this year – will run from 13 to 16 December, targeting over 370,000 children.

The previous three campaigns took place in February, March and November, said Paulo Okech Ajak, manager of WHO's Expanded Programme for Immunization in Upper Nile.

"Our target for the last three exercises this year was to immunize 376,857 children under five years of age," Mr. Ajak said. "For February we reached 100 per cent, March 101 per cent and November 102 per cent. We also expect this one to exceed the target."

Addressing the public during the launch, Minister for Health Stephen Lor Nyiak said a dry season campaign would begin in mid-January 2012 in all of the state's 13 counties. "The aim is to create awareness of the children's disease and HIV/AIDS. We are determined to eradicate these diseases amongst our communities."

WHO head in the state Dr. Fazal Ather said no cases of polio had been reported in South Sudan since 2009.

"This means that the polio virus has been kicked out from not only Upper Nile State but South Sudan as a whole," said Dr. Ather.

UNICEF state team leader David Igulu said they had been supporting the MoH with routine and national immunization campaigns against the disease.

"We have supported the government in the provision of vaccines, solar powered fridges for proper storage and safety of vaccines in remote areas, training of staff and social mobilization -- for example, using Radio Miraya and other mediums of reaching out to the people to create awareness of the disease," said Mr. Igulu.





Republic of South Sudan's first Christmas

Traders in South Sudan's capital Juba have been stocking up to prepare for upcoming Christmas celebrations.

Shoppers of all ages have been flocking to Konyo Konyo Market seeking gifts and holiday food.

Having gained independence on 9 July, South Sudan will be celebrating its first Christmas this year as a new nation.

Photos credit: UNMISS/Isaac Gideon.



Prison workers learn to handle violence

How to deal with unruly or violent prisoners was the focus of an eight-day training course for Central Equatoria State prison staff that ended on 16 December with a graduation ceremony in the capital Juba.

Held by the National Prison Service of South Sudan, the Critical Incident Management (CIM) course was taught to 42 staff for the first time by its own instructors, mentored by UNMISS Corrections Advisors.

Addressing the gathering at Prison Service Headquarters, Central Equatoria State Director of Prisons Gen. Andriano Long emphasized the need for prison officers to act professionally and humanely with prisoners in their charge.

"It is the duty of all prison staff to treat prisoners well and in line with international standards," Gen. Long said. "Things are going to change (in South Sudan) and we need to be ready to deal with international criminals and difficult prisoners of our own."

Also present at the graduation were Director General of Prisons Gen. Abel Makoi Wol, Director of Juba Prison Gen. Manyan, and UNMISS Corrections Advisors Steve Cox and Chad Guinther.

During the course, Lt Col. Juma Athieu Bol, Director of Prison Security, led the five prison service instructors in training staff (10 women and 32 men) selected from Juba Prison and Prison Service Headquarters. The instructors and coordinators will return to their respective states to train 50 prison officers each in the use of riot protective personal gear with UNMISS assistance. Donors have supplied 750 sets of the equipment, with a request that UNMISS CAS train staff before the gear is issued.

"It is hoped that the teams will not be called on to use this training, but inevitably in prisons there are some who do not wish to cooperate, want to escape or cause disruptions to the prison regime," said UNMISS Corrections Officer Cox.

Instructors replicated real incidents in the course, with some students acting as violent or non-compliant prisoners and others



Prison officers participating in exercise during training in Juba.

Photo credit: UNMISS/Isaac Gideon.

throwing missiles and attacking them with makeshift weapons.

Some were non-violent but refused to comply with orders, while others wanted to surrender. The teams had to correctly deal with each category of prisoner, either using force when necessary or allowing prisoners to be arrested without it.

"The staff are now well trained and equipped to deal with these incidents, using the minimum force and adhering to international standards," Mr. Cox added.

UNMISS Corrections Advisors have spent two years training 20 instructors and 10 state coordinators in techniques and skills for managing difficult, refractory and violent prisoners. The mission's Corrections Advisory Section, part of its Rule of Law, Security Institutions Support Office, is mandated to assist South Sudan's prison service in capacity building of its staff.

Population agency hands over midwife materials

Continuing to assist midwife students in South Sudan, the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) handed over computers, textbooks, and anatomical posters to the African Medical and Research Foundation (AMREF) in a ceremony on 21 December in the capital Juba.

Handed over at the UNFPA office, the materials will support students AMREF has been teaching at the National Health Training Institute in Maridi, Western Equatoria State.

"These materials hopefully will be useful for the diploma midwifery students who are starting their studies next year," said UNFPA head in Juba Deji Popoola.

He added that his agency had been supporting AMREF and the institute in Maridi since 2006, with funding from the Australian government.

Since then, 75 community midwives sponsored by the UNFPA had successfully graduated from the institute and an additional 17 were expected to graduate next year, Mr. Popoola said.

During 2011, UNFPA had supported AMREF with an improved skills laboratory and library equipment, he said. "Today we are pleased to hand over needed office equipment ... with the objective to further strengthen the financial unit at AMREF."

Alemayehu Seifu, Country Director for AMREF in South Sudan, said his organization had previously received equipment like printers, computers and reference as well as diagnostic materials in various fields, including family planning and HIV, from the UN agency.

"This is not the first time we are receiving support from UNFPA," Mr. Seifu said.



AMREF Country Director Alemayehu Seifu (left) and UNFPA Head Deji Popoola. Photo credit: UNMISS/Taban Kenyi.

