

**Security Council Visit to South Sudan
Press Briefing - September 4 2016
Ambassador Samantha Power and Ambassador Fodé Seck**

Transcript

Ambassador Power: The Security Council came to South Sudan to show solidarity to people of South Sudan, to learn more about how the civilians in this country are living – and we learned a tremendous amount. We visited protection of civilians sites here in Juba and we traveled earlier today to Wau, where people are living in extremely deprived conditions, where people feel great fear leaving civilian protection sites; or, in the case of the Catholic church that we visited, leaving a Catholic church that fourth months ago had no civilians living on it and now has 10,000 civilians living on its premises. So we've learned a lot about the conditions on the ground.

We are the Security Council, we are the Council that just passed Resolution 2304. We came to urge implementation of that resolution, and to also push for accountability to try to end the culture of impunity that exists in too many parts of the country. We met with countless survivors of sexual violence, people who've had their homes destroyed, people whose siblings, spouses, children, had been killed before their eyes – again, very, very dangerous conditions for the people of the UN's newest, youngest state.

As you heard from the Communique that the Minister for Cabinet Affairs read at the Presidential Palace, we were able to come to agreement with the Transitional Government for National Unity on a number of key issues. You have, I'm sure, copies of the statement, so I won't go into it, but I'm happy to take questions with regard to its elements. I think the agreements we have come to – the government granting for the first time consent to the deployment of the RPF, which was outlined in 2304, the government's agreement to work with UNMISS on some of the impediments that have existed and have interfered with UNMISS living up to its potential – notwithstanding the great efforts of Ellen Loj. The provisions about humanitarian access, and the need for humanitarian access immediately. In Wau there are 40,000 people southwest of the town that have not had any access or any food deliveries for months, and there are grave concerns that they're facing famine-like conditions. And the provision in which the government says that it is willing to cooperate and work with the Hybrid Court that the AU is setting up and is awaiting word from the AU in terms of next steps. All of these, I think, are very noteworthy features of the Communique, and they are elements that we came in pursuit of. So I think that the challenge now is to ensure that a piece of paper becomes operationalized: that the RPF deploys; that the consultations over modalities – which had been happening already, but now need to pick up pace and steam – that those bear fruit; that the AU comes and presents its proposals on the Hybrid Court and that that gets operationalized, given the number of atrocities that are being carried out; that the peace agreement is implemented, notwithstanding the rocky road it has been on; and that the SRSG and the Force Commander see – and the humanitarians who put their lives at risk to try to support the people of South Sudan – see concrete progress when it comes to lifting the obstruction on UNMISS movement and lifting the restrictions on humanitarian access.

So the proof is in the pudding. We have a very, very useful Communique, now we have to turn it into steps that make life better for people in great need. Fodé – No? Okay.

UNMISS Spokesperson: Thank you, Ambassador Power. Ladies and gentlemen if I can please just ask you to keep your questions brief, in the interest of time. And also, just please identify yourself and your organization. So we'll open the floor now for questions. The gentleman over there to the left –

Question: My name is Atiyorn Malick with Xinhua News Agency. My question is, compared to the other UN missions for protection of civilians – like Somalia and Darfur – for failure to protect civilians. What other alternative are you assuming to protect and give hope? The others – what – in the meeting with the president here and the Transitional Government do you have any guarantees that the government can control their troops, that they may – some tensions have happened between the troops and South Sudan, and maybe they can control it from the government or even from other side of (inaudible). They might even feel to control their own troops when there is Riek Machar here – is there any way for him to come back to his position? Thank you.

UNMISS Spokesperson: Okay, if we can also take another question here to the left?

Question: Thank you, my name is Nichola Mandil I work for Eye Radio. Quick question: are you satisfied with the level of cooperation from the government? Can you say the government necessarily cooperated with the Security Council on the deployment of forces? And the other thing is the modalities. The Minister earlier talked about modalities without explaining what are those modalities. Have they explained what are those modalities? And one thing the people of South Sudan would like to know is when will the deployment start, or when will the deployment take place? Thank you.

Answer: Ambassador Power: Okay, I will take a crack at these questions. If I understood the first question – how do we put in context UNMISS, as compared to other UN missions, and what hope do civilians have of really getting protection. I have visited many UN missions around the world in my 25 years in working in close proximity to atrocities and to UN peacekeeping. I have never seen a mission that is as obstructed as UNMISS in its movement. And that is why I think the possibility now of seeing a change in the modus operandi between the government and the bureaucracy on the one hand, and the UN on the other, could be very important. Ultimately, UNMISS is here as a kind of reserve force. It is the responsibility of the Government of South Sudan to maintain protection for their citizens, and certainly to ensure that government forces are not involved in attacks against South Sudanese citizens.

So I want to draw everyone's attention to the government's responsibilities of its own. And while, of course, we are the UN Security Council, we are here to talk about UNMISS, to try to get the RPF deployed as swiftly and capably as possible, all of the international focus on UNMISS should not divert from the core responsibility of the government – not least because UNMISS, even at maximum force strength, is going to be 16,000 troops, spread out across a

huge country, many of whom are not even troops that do patrols – you know they do engineering, they do medical, they do information gathering some of them. So you're not looking at a force that can be the kind of force that provides the security that only governments can. It can help and it can support, and as we've seen on our trip, it is a lifeline for many civilians who don't feel safe anymore in their homes and are afraid they're going to be attacked – whether by a militia or by IO or by the SPLA. So UNMISS has a very important role to play, but UNMISS is not a panacea. The implementation of the political agreement and reconciliation at the local level, the end of ethnic polarization, the reduction in tribal tensions – all of that is where the stability that civilians are really looking for needs to come from.

Is there any guarantee that the government or the IO can control the troops under their command, was the second question. We spent a lot of time discussing with President Kiir and the ministers the issue of accountability. And there are definitely weaknesses in the capacity of the Government of South Sudan when it comes to the rule of law, when it comes to checks and balances, when it comes to independent investigations. And one of the things that UNMISS has sought to do over the years is work with the government to try to ensure that it has better capacity to hold individuals responsible who commit terrible crimes.

So when you ask the question is every crime committed a crime ordered by the government or ordered by the leader of the opposition, I think the answer is no. There's a huge amount of criminality going on and it is extremely important, though, that the government step up in a very transparent, in a very visible way. And for those crimes that it knows about and is presented evidence on – of which there are many – that it moves out and carries out investigations and prosecutions, and that it holds people accountable. It may be that it will take time – it is going to take time – for South Sudan to have a thick justice system where justice is done in all cases. But it need not take time for illustrative cases to be brought forward; for the people to start to see soldiers, from any party, being held accountable for their crimes. And so we discussed that at great length.

And then on the questions related to the deployment of the RPF: modalities is not a new term. This is every UN force that deploys around the world, one has to figure out who comprises the force, how is it configured among – as I was saying earlier – police, infantry, engineering, medical. As you noted, what is the timeline for deployment? There have been multiple discussions already, both led by the Special Representative; the Force Commander has been in dialogue; the government had a series of questions about the resolution – about 2304. It says it's going to protect installations in Juba, which installations? So I think this dialogue predated the Security Council's visit, but we have been given assurances – that need to be tested – that these discussions are going to be intensified and accelerated by virtue of the commitments that we have made on this trip.

So to your question about precisely when the deployment starts, I don't have an answer on that. And it would be unwise to try to forecast that, but we do need by September 30th to see material progress around the deployment of the RPF. The fact that the government, for the first time, announced its consent is important. The discussions that Special Representative Loj has in the immediate aftermath of this visit are going to be essential.

UNMISS Spokesperson: More questions? Gentleman over here to the right and another one here on the left.

Question: Thank you, I'm (inaudible). My question is – I have two question but one is being asked by my colleague. The one question is that we know that the forces that will deploy soon – the 4,000 forces, they are coming with new mandate. Can you clarify that the new mandate that protect our civilians, when they will come? Because the first mandate, we think that it's not protecting civilians, but if there is a new mandate that protects civilians we want to know. Could you clarify for us? Thank you.

Question: Hi, I'm Justin Lynch from the *Associated Press*. Thank you for coming on the visit. It seems like the outcome was technical – addressing technical problems – and the underlying political problems that caused these issues were not really touched on, it seems. I'm wondering if you think the outcomes will change the events on the ground in the future? And the second one: did you get what you wanted when you talked with President Kiir? Thanks.

Ambassador Power: So on the mandate, I want to underscore that UNMISS, as it exists here in South Sudan, has a robust protection of civilians' mandate. It has the ability to use all necessary means in order to protect civilians. And in our meetings with troop contributors last night, the Security Council urged those troop contributors and UN officials here to be very ambitious in enforcing that mandate – it's a very robust mandate already.

However, UNMISS has been so restricted in its movement and so impeded in the ways I mentioned earlier that I think it is fair to say – I think the Special Representative would be the first to say – it has had great difficulty carrying out its mandate. And this is why in Resolution 2304 we did two things as a Council: we authorized the RPF – which everybody's rightly focused on, and I'll come back to the mandate of that – but we also said the restrictions on UNMISS have to come off. It can't be the case that in order to do a patrol you have to ask days in advance and get written permission, and that even when you have it, sometimes or often you're stopped at a checkpoint and told you can't move forward. So the significance of the agreements that the government made involved not only the (inaudible) to the RPF, but if it can actually be put into practice, potentially making the force that is already here, with this robust mandate, more effective.

Now, again, I want to come back to the point I made before: it's a force of 12,000 scattered across a very large country with significant spikes in violence and deprivation. So it is not going to be a panacea, but we saw on our trip how grateful hundreds of thousands of civilians are – 200,000 to be precise – who are sheltering at UN bases. And we saw even at the displaced persons site, at the Catholic church that we visited today in Wau, how much they valued having the UN around on the streets in Wau town in order to deter attacks against civilians who came in and out of the Catholic church.

So we want the UNMISS that exists now to be a much more effective version of itself and to offer more protection, and thus more hope for the people of South Sudan. But the underlying ethnic, tribal, political issues have to be dealt with in order for people to have the security they seek. Now in terms of the RPF, I think, as you're aware, the mandate is pretty explicit. Because

we have seen so many restrictions on movement into and out of Juba in the wake of the recent crisis, there is a desire to ensure that this force works in order to secure the means of ingress and egress. Because we saw hospitals attacked, the World Food Programme warehouse – that had food in it that was going to feed hundreds of thousands of people – raided and looted and burned. There's a provision mandating this force also to protect installations that will be identified by the Special Representative. And again, that's an example of a modality – that one has to identify what are the right installations to be secured. And then similarly, there's a desire to ensure that the airport remains open at all times. In the recent crisis, it closed down for a number of days and that made it impossible to get humanitarian aid into Juba. So whatever memorandums of understanding or modalities are negotiated with the government are going to have to ensure that in a crisis, that humanitarian lifeline is maintained.

So all those tasks, in addition to engaging any actor that is credibly found to be preparing attacks – now this requires us to be – the UN to be – out and about learning about what might be on the verge of happening. But we did hear from some peacekeepers that they felt that the mandate was constricting because they had to wait to sort of see a civilian being attacked before they could respond. So we made clear that, actually in the current UNMISS mandate that has existed, they can be proactive in the mandate that they already had. So the troops that are here should be being proactive in that way. But we made very explicit that the RPF can promptly engage any actor found to be preparing an attack, or engaging in attacks, against POC sites, against UN premises, against UN personnel, against aid workers, or above all, the most vulnerable of the population – against South Sudanese civilians.

So we're going to need to see progress both in deploying the RPF and in ensuring that the mandate that already has existed for the troops that are already here is implemented more effectively because of the frustration that you've described – which we also heard. That if you're not in a POC site and you're out, you're vulnerable.

And to the Justin Lynch question – I think it's a very fair question. Fundamentally, a peacekeeping force is about keeping people as safe as it can, given where it is. RPF, when it deploys, will give UNMISS hopefully broader scope, there'll be more forces on the ground, they'll have robust tasks if we complement the RPF with the change to the way UNMISS operates. I think that's going to have material effects. And I should stress the Security Council came to achieve what we have secured in terms of the agreements that we could get as a Security Council. We came to get consent to the RPF and that is a consent that has been given – the details have to be worked through, that's normal in any peacekeeping deployment. We came to try to give support to the aid workers and peacekeepers who are trying to feed civilians and protect civilians and what we've done is just agreed to a process to try to make ensure that those bureaucratic impediments get lifted. As I said at the very beginning, action is all that matters. But it's a process we haven't had up until this point and it's a commitment to lift those restrictions that we have not seen made by the president of the country before in this way.

So I wouldn't minimize what these commitments could mean, if they could be secured and implemented. But I also wouldn't minimize the underlying ethnic, tribal, political conflicts that are plaguing this country and that a peacekeeping mission alone cannot solve. And that's where the commitment at the very top of the communique to implement the agreement on the resolution

to the conflict in South Sudan, in particular the reform agenda, now that the legislative assembly is in place – its teasing that out and figuring out those modalities and getting that implemented. I mean, that's a major piece of business. It's reconciliation and hearing the cries of members of different ethnic groups who feel like they're being targeted by other ethnic groups. I mean that polarization is very hard to undo when it has been unleashed. We heard very strong commitments from President Kiir about a desire to govern for all South Sudanese, and a rejection of ethnic or tribal tropes and ethnic and tribal division. But putting that into practice and actually uniting the people of South Sudan, that's not something a Senegalese and an American ambassador – along with the rest of the Council – are going to be able to do for the people of South Sudan. Fundamentally, it's going to be the tribes themselves and the political leadership of this country that are going to have to come together at long last.

UNMISS Spokesperson: Thank you. I think we have time for just a few more questions. So just before I take that, to our *Radio Miraya* listeners who have tuned in, you are listening to a live broadcast of a press conference from UNMISS headquarters in Juba by Security Council members led by the Permanent Representatives of the United States of America and Senegal. Some more questions?

Question: Thank you for the opportunity. My name is (inaudible) reporting for Al Arabiya TV News. You have visited some areas of IDPs. Yesterday was POC 1 and 3 and today you have visited Wau. So what is the message that you have gotten from the representatives of the IDPs in the areas you have visited yesterday and today. The second question is you may travel tomorrow to Addis Ababa. There was fighting between the government of Ethiopia and the community of Oromo. And there was high tension in Bahir Dar. Are you going to take any action against what is going on in Ethiopia? There was fighting in Ethiopia between the government and Oromo community and there is high tension within Bahir Dar since last month and I guess within this month. You are the Security Council. Are you going to take any action against what is going on in Ethiopia? Thank you.

Question: My name is Charles Lomodong for *AFP*. My question is certain agreements fail eventually or you may lose momentum if the government disagrees with certain modalities and you eventually see that this is losing momentum or there's lack of cooperation. What will be the next step? You will go back to New York? You will report to the Security Council? What's to happen next if this eventually fails?

Question: Thank you, my name is Sheila Ponnice, a reporter from *Equator Broadcasting Corporation*. I want to find out from you, being a woman – yesterday you visited both the POCs and also in Wau today. What is the most memorable thing that you will go back with?

Ambassador Power: Thank you. I think I will combine the first question and the excellent last question because it's about the humanity of this crisis. What is the message from IDPs and what is the most memorable feature of the trip? For me, it was meeting two young girls today in Wau, each of whom had been raped. One was 12 and one was 13. The 13-year-old had been on her way to school from the POC site. Even though she had lost her home, her father had been killed and she ended up in a POC site, she wanted to keep going to school. And she and her neighbors who were helping to take care of her, knew that the road was dangerous – knew that there were

soldiers on the road and there had been reports of rapes. But the little girl just really wanted to go to school. And so all of us who had a chance to talk to her could see that she lives with the shame of what was done to her. Her whole community is aware of what was done to her. That's devastating for her and the people who are left in her family. And there is a real question about whether she will go back to school after something like that – after she becomes known in that way in a society that is of course very traditional. So she is getting help from the UN, from the humanitarian community. She certainly received from us, as did her friend who was raped on the same road, the most earnest embrace, support for her courage, her determination to be educated, to try to contribute to her community. That's why she wanted to go to that school.

And it is incumbent on us in the international community, to never give up on the cause of peace in South Sudan. To do everything we can by pressuring the government and all armed actors who could do such monstrous things to little girls who just want to go to school – or to anybody – but also to put in place a UN peacekeeping presence that is able to be more mobile, and to be more out and about, just to increase the likelihood that something like that can be stopped. Again, unless the rapists are stopped and are held accountable and punished visibly, these kinds of crimes are going to continue. The culture of impunity allows people who would carry out such acts believe that they can do it with no consequences.

And the message from IDPs is “help.” It's “please protect us.” It is “please make sure we get more rations next month.” And it is above all, “we want to go home.” We have encountered in some circles a little bit of suspicion around the POC sites and a concern about who may be on the POC sites and I think those are legitimate concerns. But the vast majority of people in POC sites are families who have lost everything or who are terrified. But even in their terror, all they want to do is go home. And as soon as there is a bare minimum of security and they have a chance to go and plant on their land again, and not be dependent on handouts from the international community, which no one wants to be dependent on, they will go home. So that's, I think for Fodé and I and the rest of the Council, that's what we take, is that message of if you give us – if there is a bare minimum of peace here, we will run with it. That was the most moving and I think that was the overarching message.

If on the losing momentum question, because I think Fodé, my African brother, is going to take – oh you want to take the modalities one?

Ambassador Seck: No, on the message from the POCs – well one of your colleagues was interviewing me. I think it was *Al Jazeera*. I couldn't speak. You addressed your question to a woman. You couldn't address it to me because I was responding to *Al Jazeera* that next month – no on the 10th of this month – one of my daughters will be marrying, so when we saw these two little girls being raped because they were going to school, something was broken down inside myself. We met – life within the POCs – yesterday we met three different groups – youth, women and what do they call leaders. The message was the same. “We want to go home.” It's true there is no place like home – be the home a hut or a cottage – there is no place like home. They just want to go home and return to their normal lives – farmers farming, cattle breeders breed and young people go to school.

I come from Senegal. Having the chance to go to school. If I remember my own situation, how I got to school. Denying somebody the chance to go to school is the most criminal act to my

understanding. So the message is for this government to do its utmost to create the conditions for all IDPs to return back home.

There is a story of an UNMISS staff who has five children – was targeted – so she managed to take her family into Uganda. She is alone in the POC. She can't return to her home. She is missing kissing her children every night. So I hope the message has been heard loud and clear by everybody – even by the rapists – uncontrolled elements. But I think to respond to your question, the main objective of this visit has been to reach (inaudible) communique.

On Addis Ababa, each visit of the Security Council is planned. It is negotiated. The terms of reference are fiercely negotiated. Each step has to be agreed among the 15 members. So in Addis Ababa, we are going to meet AU, Peace and Security and IGAD, all of them having a stake in the creation and the deployment of the Regional Protection Force. Also, the POC of the AU and the Security Council have a history of consulting whenever the occasion arises. We will consult. I think maybe this situation is the province of Ethiopia. It could be raised but it is not on the agenda. Thank you.

Ambassador Power: And I'll address that question in brief along with the other one. Just to speak on behalf of the United States, because as Fodé indicated, this is not something the UN Security Council has a consensus on. So I can only speak in my national capacity, not as co-lead of this trip. We think the situation and the violence in Ethiopia is extremely serious. We have called on the Ethiopian government to allow people to protest peacefully, to allow freedom of assembly, free expression. And we have raised grave concerns about the excessive use of force against protestors. We have also called for a transparent and independent investigation, and accountability with regard to the loss of life.

On the very fair question about, “ok, so you have a communique. What if life returns to business as usual after the Security Council leaves town.” That's certainly a possibility on the basis of the deterioration here and on the basis of some of the challenges that the UN have faced here over a period of time. But I think for the purposes of actually achieving something concrete, beyond the words on a piece of paper, it's important to view this as an opportunity. An opportunity, as the communique notes, to have a fresh spirit of cooperation to take advantage of President Kiir's personal commitments in a number of areas. And to offer our full support for the UNMISS team here who has been through so much. Like the people of South Sudan, many of the people who have facilitated our visit here are people who had bullets flying over their heads and were hiding under their beds or in their bathtubs, so there's a real sense of solidarity, I think, between many of the UN staff here and the people that they are here to protect.

And as the Security Council, what we can promise is that we will stay on this. We are not coming to South Sudan to check a box and go back to New York and leave UNMISS here to its own devices. We take these commitments very seriously and we have been explicit in the resolution about the decisions that we will make regarding an arms embargo and sanctions if the restrictions on UNMISS are not lifted and if the RPF is not able to deploy. But as I said on my very first night here, we would prefer in the extreme not to get to those decisions. We would prefer that the commitments that have been made that, if operationalized, could be significant, that those be held. And I think we have set in motion several processes that the UN team is very enthusiastic about trying to take advantage of and the Security Council can convene any day. We

can return. We can pick up the phone. So we will offer our full support for the brave and selfless UN people who are here standing with the people of South Sudan full time. Thank you.

UNMISS Spokesperson: Thank you to the Security Council members and the two co-lead, Ambassador Power and Ambassador Seck. I know you've had a long and very busy day and thank you also to the media for your patience today. This concludes the press conference. Good night.

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