



United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS)

Spokesperson & Media Relations Unit
Communications & Public Information Section

PRESS BRIEFING TRANSCRIPT

Remarks to the media by David Shearer,

Special Representative of the Secretary-General,

12 July 2017,

Juba, South Sudan

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

I would like to focus on three key issues, President Kiir's Independence Day speech and the situation in Torit as well as Pagak.

President's Independence Day speech

I was heartened by the candid tone of President Kiir's Independence Day speech on Sunday.

His assessment of the security, humanitarian and economic challenges facing this country was direct and accurate.

He clearly stated that "war is not an option." He added that the continuation of fighting "leads to the loss of innocent lives," as well as the destruction of property and the resulting under-development of this country.

I would like to reiterate UNMISS' position that there is no military solution to the ongoing conflict...only a political one.

On humanitarian issues, the President noted that although the famine which was declared in some parts of the country, is officially over, "thousands" of South

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Sudanese are still not getting enough to eat. He said they are “battling hunger and malnutrition.”

The latest figures from the UN’s humanitarian agency, OCHA, suggest that six million people, that’s 50% of the population, are expected to need food aid this month.

Our humanitarian partners have been responding.

The World Food Programme has completed a second phase of food distributions in Central Jonglei, assisting 303,000 people, including 71,000 children under the age of five.

WFP plans life-saving food and nutrition assistance in Central and Eastern Equatoria states, but only if it gets Government clearance.

The President reiterated in his speech that he has issued directives “to allow unhindered access for delivery of all humanitarian assistance to citizens in need across the country.”

We will take him on his word.

It is crucial that humanitarian agencies are able to access the most vulnerable people.

I was also encouraged to hear the President’s frankness about the dire economic situation the country is facing...one reason why Independence Day celebrations were postponed for a second year running.

He noted the weakness of the South Sudanese pound against the US dollar, but also that the recent “stability of the exchange rate is an encouraging indicator” that will soon translate into improvement in people’s daily lives.

The President and I agree that economic output must be increased, and in particular agricultural production.

For this to happen, the security situation in rural areas must improve dramatically so that people feel safe enough to return to the land and invest their time and money in planting crops.

This is one reason why UNMISS has stepped up its patrols deep into the field in order to help provide the confidence for people to go home.

Situation in Torit

I am particularly concerned by the current situation in Torit, where government and opposition forces have taken up battle positions on either side of an orphanage just outside the town.

It's unacceptable that 250 innocent children, and the people who care for them, find themselves in no-man's land between the warring parties.

UNMISS has asked for access to the orphanage, but locally, on the ground this has been denied on numerous occasions.

Yesterday, Tuesday, the SPLA central command in Juba gave UNMISS the go-ahead to send peacekeepers to the orphanage. I'm hopeful that will happen today.

I urge both sides to reflect on President Kiir's Independence Day message of peace, and withdraw from around the facility.

UNMISS has responded to this escalation in tensions in Torit by sending a contingent of Nepalese peacekeepers from Juba to protect civilians and the UN base.

The number of patrols we can undertake in the town will increase with the additional peacekeepers. In turn, that should provide more security and boost confidence.

My Deputy, Moustapha Soumaré, is travelling to Torit tomorrow and will report back to me.

Situation in Pagak

The situation in the Upper Nile region is also extremely worrying.

At least 25 aid workers have been forced to relocate from Pagak and the surrounding areas due to the growing insecurity in the region.

The IOM has told us that 5000 people from the area north of Pagak have been registered in the town before they pass into Ethiopia as refugees.

These South Sudanese citizens are fleeing an advance of government SPLA troops towards Pagak, which as you know, is a stronghold of the opposition.

There has been an active military engagement over the past week with heavy fighting around Mathiang north of Pagak on July 2nd.

Reports suggest that government forces are now approaching the town of Maiwut, 25 kilometres north-west of Pagak.

I'm gravely concerned by this ongoing situation.

And while it is not clear which side began the fighting, the military advance by the SPLA is not in the spirit of the unilateral ceasefire declared by the Government in May of this year.
