



United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS)

Media & Spokesperson Unit
Communications & Public Information Office

PRESS BRIEFING

Near verbatim transcript

UN UNDER-SECRETARY-GENERAL HERVE LADSOUS

HEAD OF THE DEPARTMENT OF PEACE KEEPING OPERATIONS

Good afternoon to all of you and sorry for making you wait; we are just out of the Presidential Palace.

I would like to share with you a few impressions.

First, why I came at this particular point to South Sudan. This was simply a reflection that the coming into operation of the **Transitional Government of National Unity in South Sudan equates the opening of a new page in the situation of the country.** So I wanted to evaluate the situation and listen to South Sudanese actors. This morning I had meetings with the Vice President, with the First Vice president and with the President himself.

I also wanted to see for myself the situation on the ground, and yesterday and the day before we went to Bentiu and then to Malakal to see the situation there and evaluate in particular of the Protection of Civilians sites and the Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs).

As I said, a new page is opening now for South Sudan with this government of transition that has announced a number of measures that are of course very important regarding what is going to happen now. As we all know there are **very large number of priorities for the country**, how to address the situation in terms of **stability and security**. That of course is a very high priority item. Second, the **situation of the IDPs** and their return (*inaudible*). Third, the situation from the **institutional point of view**, including the issue of the states in the country and of course last, but not least, the very critical **issue of the economy and of the humanitarian situation**, with food insecurity being an immense problem.

On all of these issues, it was very important to listen to our South Sudanese interlocutors with one very important message, it is that **the responsibilities are theirs, but that the UN are here to help. We are not there to substitute, the decisions have to be made by the South Sudanese themselves**, but we are in support. And the fact that the **Security Council remains very focused on South Sudan** after all these years in which we have invested - **invested a very large amount of political capital but also resources**, resources in terms of staff and sometimes unfortunately in terms of human lives. We want all these to be put to the best use, and of course UNMISS under the leadership of SRSG

For media enquiries, please contact
Spokesperson: Ariane Quentier – quentier@un.org +211912177770

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Ellen Loej, who has been showing very strong leadership, to make things happen. We want to see the country moving ahead, addressing all those critical problems, and move as quickly as possible to the rapid implementation of decisions that were already taken, so **people get a sense that the peace agreement is providing them with peace dividends**, that it [*will bring*] a change in their prospects and their livelihood, and first and foremost in their personal security.

Just one example of the way things are shaping. **In Bentiu, it is very interesting to see that in the last three to four months some 25,000 IDPs have decided to return** to their place of origin. The same **to a certain extent in Bor**. In **Malakal the situation locally is still a very complex** one, a fragile one, so people are still hesitant as what they may want to do, but it is my very sincere hope that with the improvement of the security situation, people will indeed start to move back to where they belong, and resume their normal activities. Again, with our support, but first and foremost the support and the **help of the Government of South Sudan whose responsibility** it is to deal with this in the first place. I would also mention, of course that we remain very attentive to human rights and similar issues, but we are taking a positive view. Again, **a new page has opened and the relationship of the United Nations with South Sudan similarly is now on a new footing**. Thank you.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Jason Patinkin, VoA Freelance: You said a new page has been opened in the relationship between UNMISS and the authorities in South Sudan. Can you go ahead and explain as to what were your discussions, particularly with the President and First vice President? What was the message you had for them and what was their response to you that indicates that there is a new page here in South Sudan? The second question goes to Malakal where are two ongoing investigations, maybe finished, not really sure what the status is. Can you say of the status of those investigations, and if you know who is involved and responsible, for these attacks?

USG Herve Ladsous (USG HL): On your first question I think you know it is no secret.... Over the last couple of years since the drama unfolded on 15 December 2013, we have been facing a lot of problems on the ground, it had to do with the harassment of some of our staff, and it had to do with freedom of movement in particular for humanitarian actors on the ground, difficulties to import equipment... I certainly got the sense that on the side of the government, the president himself, these issues have been addressed with a view of solving them and I take a positive reading of that.

On the second point yes the secretary has launched both an inquiry and an investigation on the 17-18 February crisis in Malakal. The two reports are essentially finalized and will be handed over the UN Secretary-General I presume in the next few days. I am not yet at liberty to comment on them because they are not out yet but this will be made public very shortly now

Daniel Majak, Nation Mirror Newspaper: As you said you are optimistic that a new page has been opened... So, so far, have the parties held to the ceasefire agreement?

USG HL: Well you are in better place than I to know that there are ceasefire violations in several parts of the country, that **tensions remain high in the region of Malakal** that is not easy. We also

know that there are **number of spoilers from SPLA and SPLA-iO** who have their own plans and whose objectives no doubts in more than one case is to try to throw a spanner in the works. So I think this has to be addressed in every possible way.

One very important element for us is of course **the work the Ceasefire Transitional Security Arrangements and Monitoring Mechanism (CTSAMM)**. We as UNMISS are and will continue to do our utmost to **support CTSAMM** whose job it is to report on the violations of the ceasefire. More generally, we intend to remain as proactive as possible when we have a specific situation, and **both our military and police components will do all they can to support what is the core of our mandate, the protection of civilians**. Everything shall be done to isolate [*civilians*] from the violence but also to build trust and confidence. It does not happen overnight given the amount of fight and issues accumulated over time but it is a **process and the end result has to be national reconciliation**. This is something foremost on our agenda

Hiba Morgan, Aljazeera: You have mentioned that Malakal is complicated and tensions are high, should Malakal fall under attack, where will the Dinka population in town go because obviously UNMISS will not be a safe place for the?

USG HL: First let's hope that it doesn't happen but the tension factor is there, it is true especially on both sides of the Nile River. You may know that now we have an operating base inside Malakal which give us better visibility and we have of course plans to deal with any situation that may arise.

Clearly there is no purpose in setting up a new PoC facility as such, but we will be ready to take measures at least to give protection to people who would need it. (*inaudible*)

Nema Juma, Juba Monitor: You have discussed about the economic issue, how far have you gone?

USG HL: We all know that the economy of South Sudan in a very bad state. We know that state revenues have fallen down drastically because of the fall in production, the fall in international prices. Also the fiscal prospects for the government are dire when demands are higher than ever. Demands for taking care of essential services for the people, dealing with how to pay salaries ... This is handled first and foremost by the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund who have interacted with the government.

For the UN of course, there is the immediate humanitarian aspect, how to deal with a famine that could affect several million people - famine or something short of that, but certainly great food insecurity in the country. Also how to embark of what we call peace building and reconstruction of the country. The economy has to be in our minds constantly, both the need to address immediate issues and to look also longer terms. I think is very important that the stabilization of the country proceeds quickly so that law and order, and security can exist again and be conducive to foreign investments.

When you look at South Sudan one is struck by the fact that this country has what not every country has. It has fertile land in a large scale, it has huge amounts of water and sunshine, and the agricultural, and the agro-pastoral potential is huge. And then there is oil, so I think in the long term there are reasons for optimism. But the first thing is to create again stability in this country to be conducive for the resumption of more normal economic activities.

One has to address also the infrastructures; the state of the roads is incredibly bad. We as the UN are doing what we can to repair some roads, some local infrastructures, bridges. It is critical, would it only be to allow humanitarian access to those who are in need. So there are lots of things that need to be done, need to be addressed. You know the same, Rome did not get build in a day; it took time, it will take time, but it has to be planned - that is what the people of South Sudan would expect.