



# United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS)

Media & Spokesperson Unit  
Communications & Public Information Office

## PRESS BRIEFING

**Press Briefing Wednesday 15 June 2016**

### **Near verbatim transcript**

Good morning ladies and gentlemen of the media, and welcome to the United Nations weekly press briefing broadcast live on UN radio Miraya from UN House, in Juba. A warm welcome to our radio listeners who have tuned in and the media from Torit.

#### **Visit of the Head of the UN Department of Peacekeeping operations (DPKO)**

The Under-Secretary-General (USG) Ladsous in charge of the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) has visited South Sudan from Friday until Monday. USG Ladsous came to assess the situation in view of the upcoming UN Security Council discussions. He traveled to Bentiu and Malakal and met with the President, the First Vice President and the Vice President

The USG called on South Sudanese authorities to take their responsibilities towards the people of South Sudan, and stressed that the ***“UN will support but cannot substitute national authorities”***. USG Ladsous concluded by indicating that with the Formation of the Transitional Government of National Unity ***“a new page had opened and the relationship of the United Nations with South Sudan are on a new footing”***.

Mr. Ladsous also separately met with the Chair of the Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission (JMEC) H.E. Festus Mogae.

#### **On Children**

Today I would like to say a few words about children and their rights, and this for two reasons. On Sunday 12 June, **the International Labour Organization (ILO) commemorated the World Day Against Child Labour**. Today, some **168 million children are forced into work** that affects their physical and mental health, such as underground activities, or with dangerous machinery and chemicals, or situations such as prostitution or **child soldiers**.

Unfortunately, many of these conditions are faced by far too many children in Africa, and tomorrow will mark the **Day of the African Child**. This year's theme reminds us of the importance of protecting vulnerable children in of conflict and is titled: **“Conflict and Crisis in Africa: Protecting all Children's Rights.”**

The United Nations Security Council has identified six grave violations of children's rights in times of armed conflict:

#### **1. The Recruitment and use of child soldiers**

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2. **The Killing and maiming of children**
3. **Sexual violence against children**
4. **Attacks against schools or hospitals**
5. **Abduction of children**
6. **Denial of humanitarian access**

Alarming, South Sudan has an estimated **16,000 child soldiers associated with armed groups and forces**. The participation of children **under 18 in armed conflict is generally prohibited**, and the recruitment and use of children **under 15 years is a war crime** under the international law.

In 2008, in line with international law, South Sudan approved the **South Sudan Child Act which clearly forbids the use of child soldiers**, and sets a minimum age of 18 for any conscription or voluntary recruitment into armed forces or groups.

In addition, both the **SPLA and the SPLA/iO** have formally committed to an **Action Plan with the UN that obliges both organizations to stop recruiting child soldiers**, and **identify and release** any child soldiers in their ranks. The release of child soldiers is also one of the **provisions of the peace agreement**, and is promoted through the universal **“Children not Soldiers”** campaign supported by the UN.

Release and reintegration of child soldiers will ensure children have the opportunity to **access education**. South Sudan has one of the **lowest rates of primary school enrolment with less than 35%**. South Sudan’s **literacy rate** is also one of the worse in the world with **only 27%** of the population able to read and write, and even worse if you disaggregate data with **40% men and only 15% women literate**. There cannot be long term sustainable development without literacy.

UNMISS and its partners also continue to work on the **vacation of all schools** occupied by armed forces and groups. In addition, the UNMISS child protection unit continues to train thousands of SPLA and SPLA/iO on child protection and child rights, including the right to access education.

As you can see, the **Day of the African Child is crucial** will draw attention to the challenges that we face in protecting and promoting the rights of children. To mark the day, **Radio Miraya will invite tomorrow school children** to go on air during its regular daily programs. There will be a special children-oriented program with songs, drama, cultural performances, and a school debate on the topic: **“Are Children’s Rights protected in South Sudan?”**

I am inviting all of you to tune in tomorrow – 101.1.

For more information on World Child Labour Day

<http://www.ilo.org/ipec/Campaignandadvocacy/wdacl/lang--en/index.htm>

### **International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict**

19 June has been designated as the **International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict** something that has been widely used against communities in South Sudan.

As per the UN Secretary-General statement **to the UN Security Council** on 2 June, and I am quoting him: “Sexual violence is widely recognized as a **deliberate strategy** used to shred the fabric of society; to **control and intimidate communities and to force people from their homes**. It is rightly seen as a threat to international peace and security, a serious violation of international humanitarian and human rights law, and a major impediment to post-conflict reconciliation and economic development. (...)We must continue **to speak up for women, girls, men and boys whose bodies for too long have been considered the spoils of war**”.

UNMISS will commemorate the day by organizing a celebration on 21 June at the Nyakuron Cultural Center. A full discussion on the topic is also scheduled on Radio Miraya this Friday and another segment will be broadcast on Wednesday 22 June. Please tune in – 101.1.

### **Other UNMISS activities**

The Catholic University, the University of Juba and UNMISS are organizing **a university debate on 18 June at 1:30 p.m. The theme will be “Is Peace everyone’s responsibility?”**, and the debate will take place at Nyakuron Cultural Center. The **event is open to public**, and I would urge media and students across Juba to attend and participate.

### **On the Protection of Civilians’ sites**

UNMISS is currently protecting a total of **158,799 (down 11,184 from last week’s figure of 169,983)** individuals in 6 PoC sites in South Sudan; figures are continuing to drop, especially in Bentiu where the trend is ongoing with already 25,000 civilians having left the UNMISS Protection of Civilians site. [bit.ly/1suYg4x](https://bit.ly/1suYg4x)

<i>REGION</i>	<i>LOCATION</i>	<i>Civilians seeking protection</i>
<i>Central Equatoria</i>	<i>UN House PoC I &amp; III</i>	27,959
<i>Unity</i>	<i>Bentiu</i>	95,126
<i>Upper Nile</i>	<i>Malakal</i>	32,791
	<i>Melut</i>	700
<i>Jonglei</i>	<i>Bor</i>	2,004
<i>Western Bahr El Ghazal</i>	<i>Wau</i>	219
<i>TOTAL</i>		<b>158,799</b>

### **Bentiu**

The civilian population count of 29 May shows 95,126 IDPs, down from 98,653, **3,500 less than the previous week, continuing a decline started late February**. As before, we have more civilians exiting than entering, twice as many. **87% are leaving to prepare farm land, and 85% are heading to nearby Rubkona and Guit counties.**

### **Malakal**

We have also observed a **drop in figures as well from 40,448 till 32,791**. This is the result of the new registration, the last having been conducted in March. The decrease is likely due to **civilians leaving for Sudan, Kodok and Wau Shilluk.**

## Juba

Yesterday, **UNMISS handed over** to communities and local authorities **a solar powered water pump** that will benefit communities living in three residential blocks in **Gurei area**. The areas have seen significant numbers of returnees and, **both returning and receiving communities need to be supported**. Installing a water facility is a way to assist both communities, hence mitigating potential tensions. It will also provide safe drinking water and prevent the spread of water borne diseases.

## UNPOL activities

You may recall that the Police Commissioner had mentioned to you that **UNPOL officers were trained to be able to further train South Sudanese police officers of the Joint Integrated Police (JIP) in a program called “train the trainers”**.

In coordination with UNMISS human rights division and the child protection unit UNPOL has launched the third session of a **“Train the Trainers” workshop on 13 June 2016**. The course attendees belong to the UNPOL team that will further support the training of JIP officers.

Nineteen specially selected qualified UNPOL trainers (including five females) are currently undergoing a five-day training focusing on human rights, sexual and gender based violence, child protection and community policing. With the JIP will be comprised of representatives of both sides to the conflict, the **training will also put special emphasis on confidence and trust building**.

**In 2 previous sessions April and May this year, UNPOL has trained 40 UNPOL officers.**

## Force

Yesterday a ceremony took place to mark the **arrival of a new Force Commander** at the helm of UNMISS Force. **Lieutenant General Ondieki from Kenya** brings a wealth of experience to the Mission from both his career with the Kenyan Forces and his UN experience when serving as a Sector Commander for the United Nations Mission in Sudan (UNMIS) from 2010 to 2011.

Lieutenant General Ondieki succeeds **Lieutenant General Yohannes Gebremeskel Tesfamariam** from Ethiopia who has concluded his tour. Before, being Force Commander in South Sudan, Lieutenant General Tesfamariam was the Force Commander and the head of the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA).

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## **QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS**

*Gale Julius from Bakhita Radio: I would like to know about what UNMISS is doing to the IDPs who are living in the camps, is there any help that is being given or a follow up on whether they get settled, what help are you giving to the people who are returning?*

*Ariane Quentier (AQ):* First of all let us be clear. People who will return will do so voluntarily, and they will be in need of 2 things:

**One is safety** so that they can feel it is the time to rebuild their lives, to plant their seeds and not to be scared of running from their homes. That is where UNMISS plays a significant role. We have been

**increasing the numbers of patrols also on foot around Bentiu**, both in the vicinity of the PoC site but also we have foot patrols going on the side roads through bush to Rubkona. We also have **short and long duration patrols**. What we call a long duration patrols is when there is an overnight. Patrols give us the ability not only to show **our presence which has a deterrent or stabilizing effect**, but also to **assess the situation**. We have also set up in Bentiu what we call a **forward operating base**. We have established a presence in town so people feel more reassured when they go from the PoC site to Bentiu town; they can see for themselves, and again their choice has to be a voluntary one based on right information. They need to go and see.

In addition to that in the area of Leer **we have opened a temporary operating base**, from which **we can project our troops**, we can have them going out of the base, we can go up the roads used by some of the returning communities dwelling in surrounding destroyed villages. They use the roads and feel safe enough to come and collect humanitarian assistance in Leer, and go all the way back to their villages.

**The second aspect of returning is about the delivery of basic humanitarian services** because as we have been saying this war has been a scorched earth war, where there has been a lot of destruction including communal life. **Humanitarian services providers must feel safe and have access** to assist affected communities in places where people will be confident enough to come and get assistance.

It is the combination of **enhanced humanitarian response and enhanced safety measures**. **If these 2 two conditions are fulfilled, people will feel that there is enough safety and there will be enough provision of basic services to return to their homes**. I will use an expression that I have used a lot when I was talking about the protection of civilians' sites. The same way people have voted with their feet when they felt that the best protection they will ever get is with UNMISS in the PoC sites, they are now voting with their feet, **over 25 thousand people thinking that the best option is to return home** and try to resume life, and **be at home, which is where everyone wants to be in the first place**.

*Chute Anyao Michael, from the Nation Mirror Newspaper: You mentioned 16,000 children still serving in the army, but early this year there was a statement from the former spokesperson of the SPLA Philip Aguer that the SPLA have released all children who were serving in the SPLA, Can you verify where the children are?*

AQ: I have verified yesterday because we have the day of the African child, and my figures as verified yesterday is that there is an estimate of 16,000 children under military forces be it SPLA or SPLA/IO. So I don't have the breakdown and am not saying that it is half/half but there are still 16,000 children.

*Parach Mach, Anadolu Agency: does the United Nations have any number of children that have been demobilized since the start of the conflict? Secondly, how many girls, or boys or women have been sexually abused during the two years of the conflict?*

AQ: On the number of children who have been released I have to say that I haven't got the figures so if you give me a call this afternoon, I will look into the number of children who have been released in the last three years. It's not big numbers but the cobra faction had also, that's a different issue, had released children in Pibor last year and it was like two thousand children but for SPLA, SPLA/IO I will get back to you if you don't mind, I haven't got the figures.

[addendum: from March till June 2015, the Cobra faction released 1,796 children including 4 girls]

On the breakdown of how many were abused, as you know, be it UNMISS human rights division or other human rights watchdogs, one of the problems we have had so far in being able to give numbers is the **problem of access to the victims**. We know from testimonies that a lot of terrible

things have happened to a lot of people. These include raping, maiming, killing, torturing - men, women and children equally. Unfortunately because of the lack of access, we still to this day do not even have the figure of the number of people who have been killed in this conflict. We only know they are tens of thousands. We know that the violence has been absolutely terrible, it is one of the worst violence observed in conflict, but do we have figures? No.

Let me add, that is the reason why **documentation of human rights** violations is so important; it will allow to demand accountability to all those who have committed crimes and pay justice to those who have been abused by these criminals. **Accountability will allow justice and sustainable peace.**

*Parach Mach, Anadolu Agency: How do we address the problem of sexual violence, without knowing the exact number of people who are sexually abused in the society?*

AQ: I will give you an example, the way it's been addressed in DR of Congo for instance where sexual violence has been ongoing for the last 20 years. When you talk with people who have worked in Congo, they explain that twenty years ago, **no one would talk about sexual violence because it was a taboo**. So not only did we know that a lot was happening but it was very hard to get testimony. And that is where we are right now in South Sudan with people who have been sexually abused. Again women, children and men - everyone may suffer sexual violence in conflict. However, it is very difficult to approach communities when sexual violence is taboo. So one of the things we need to do is **raise awareness among communities**, and tell them: **"there is no taboo, you are a victim, you need to talk, you need to speak louder; you are not the perpetrator and it is your right to come and report what happened to you"** But that takes time - it took 20-years in DR Congo, before anyone wanted to talk about these things.

So I think this is one of the things to do, it is work with the communities, with those who have been victimized, but also the communities to which those who have been victimized belong to and tell this is no a taboo, this is a consequence of war. It is one of the dreadful consequences of war and it is one of the most dreadful consequences of war because it has an impact on the entire community. Ostracizing those who went **through sexual violence will have an impact on the whole community**.

The other thing is to engage, as UNMISS does, with armed groups, military forces – regular or irregular and try to train them as we have been doing on sexual violence in conflict and make them understand that this is not in line with international humanitarian law. This is a major violation of human rights and it is unacceptable. **People's bodies should not become the spoils of war**. We have worked very closely with the SPLA/SPLA iO during the **"Children not Soldiers" campaign** and that's the way we got them to endorse the UN Action plan not to mobilize children.

*Opio Jackson Juba Monitor Newspaper: UNMISS has reported a significant reduction in the number of civilians seeking protection on its sites, but in Juba this number has not reduced, I spoke to one of the displaced persons at the UN PoC site who said that leaving the site is difficult. He confirmed that an NGO called ACTED is interrogating IDPs seeking to leave the base. Why are they subjected to interrogation? Does it mean that it is not safe for the IDPs in Juba to return home?*

AQ: Civilians are in PoC sites because they need protection. There are **regulations in the PoC sites because it is a very sensitive** area. The rule is that you have to be back if am not mistaken at 6 o'clock or 8 o'clock in the evening, because **there is a curfew**. This is an UNMISS compound and we don't want people to roam back and forth at dark. Remember: these people need protection and a PoC site is not a hotel. We are trying to talk with community leaders to explain that if they have to be protected they can't just go out at night, and come back anytime.

We also need to protect all those inside. We also have rules as to who is entering and who is not, and how they enter. We also search them, but not subjecting them to abusive interrogation. As long as you are going to be on the UNMISS PoC sites, we have rules to ensure the protection of the people. Those rules imply that there are hours when you can go out, there are hours when you can't go out. It's called a curfew, there were curfews in Juba town before, this is nothing specific to UNMISS.

Another point, I have been able to tell you that 87% of the people living were going to plant their crop, 85% of them were going to Guit and Rubkona counties because we asked them; and these are not intrusive questions. If we are going to be there to give them seeds, we need to know where they are going to go in the first place. If they don't tell us they are going to Rubkona, we will not be able to bring seeds to Rubkona. If they tell us where they go, we can support in our response. We are not subjecting them to criminal or abusive investigations, we are trying to figure out why people want to leave, because as you asked before, what do we do for them? How and where are we going to support if we don't ask? We need to talk to the people and that's why I am able to tell you that last week there were twice as many people that left the compound because we have been counting them to be able to anticipate and provide a proper response to the needs of these people.

*Parach Mach, Anadolu agency: If you walk around customs or Konyo-Konyo you get the majority of youths selling smart phones and involved in criminal activities, they seem to be staying in UN House. What is the UN Doing to keep the youths in the PoC sites busy and not redundant?*

**AQ:** Unfortunately the UN is very aware of what is going on. We have our section in charge of the PoC sites there every day, we have UNPOL in charge of law and order in the PoC sites and there is a number of NGOs there. Yes we know what is going on and as we have always said, **PoC sites are no sustainable solution**. We are very aware that people go out as there is no activity and no business - although mind you if you have been in the PoC site, there is ongoing business but not institutionalized business. It is PoC site, a place where people have run to because of the war and it is a base which was not meant to host thousands of people, 158,000 today. So yes they have no professional activities - there are a lot of people in Juba in this case, but now we cannot provide them jobs in the PoC sites. It is simply not possible. **We have been providing water, sanitation, food, shelter, we have been providing what we could, but no - we cannot provide jobs.**

*Gale Julius from Bakhita Radio: At the end of his visit to South Sudan, Herve Ladsous, said that after the formation of the Transitional Government of National unity, the United Nations will put emphasis on civilians' protection and reconciliation efforts. I would like to know as UNMISS, what have you started in these two areas in South Sudan?*

**AQ:** We have a number of initiatives that we have been able to develop since the formation of the Transitional Government of National Unity, with the support of our civil affairs teams engaging very hard with communities to work on reconciliation between and governance within communities. We are doing that in our PoC sites and also where we do it when on long duration patrols in various areas. We have been organizing peace conferences, we have community exchanges. We are also trying **within the PoC sites** – and I am thinking mostly of Malakal where there are different communities - to have dialogue and prevent what happened in February.

In a place like Bor, our civil affairs division is in touch with the communities and the political authorities and Governor Philip Aguer, to try to see how peace and reconciliation can be promoted. May I remind you of the **Catholic service which took place in the Bor cathedral on the 29th of May**, this was an initiative to promote peace. In fact, the same day the governor made a speech where he called for the youths to look at reconciliation to rebuild the country. So we have been behind a lot of this soft reconciliation projects conducted by UNMISS civil affairs division, by engaging with the national, local, political authorities.

The other thing we are doing is try to ensure safe and secure environments for people to be able to come back and also for tensions to be diffused through our presence. It might take time, but that's the sort of things we are doing.

*Chuty Anyao Michael, from the Nation Mirror Newspaper: In case the conflict breaks out again, will you force these people out of the sites?*

AQ: This is a very hypothetical question and **I am going to reply with our principles: we will not force anyone out of the PoC sites**, as per international standards. **Returns to place of origin, relocations or even going out of the PoC site has to be voluntarily and made on an informed choice.** But let's be realistic, people will know when they are able return to their homes because there is nothing like home. It will take time, the country has been vastly destroyed in certain areas, it is not going to be easy, and we are putting in place safety measures and provision of humanitarian services to try to put together the conditions that will allow the people to make these decisions. But they will eventually, there is nothing like home, but you have to be able to rebuild home. Once the conditions are there, there is nothing like home, they will come back spontaneously, but it will take time.

Thanks so much for coming.

[End of the Briefing]