



United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS)

Media & Spokesperson Unit
Communications & Public Information Office

PRESS BRIEFING

Press Briefing Wednesday 22 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 also to our radio listeners who have tuned in and the media from Torit.

Sunday, 19 June has marked the first-ever observance of the newly established International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict. Our guest today will be Mrs. Naweza Muderhwa who is Women Protection Advisor with UNMISS and will tell us more about the commemoration of the International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict..

But before..

Protection of Civilians sites Update

As of 16 June 2016, the estimated number of civilians seeking safety in six Protection of Civilians (PoC) sites located on UNMISS bases is **158,727** including 95,126 in Bentiu, 32,719 in Malakal, 27,959 in Juba UN House, 2,004 in Bor, 700 in Melut and 219 in Wau. **Although numbers of returnees had regularly gone down since March, they have hardly changed over the latest reporting period.**

REGION	LOCATION	Number of civilians seeking protection
Central Equatoria	UN House PoC I & III	27,959
Unity	Bentiu	95,126
Upper Nile	Malakal	32,719
	Melut	700
Jonglei	Bor	2,004
Western Bahr El Ghazal	Wau	219
TOTAL		158,727

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Bor

On 15 June, UNMISS handed over a “Fish Market” on the river Nile to local communities. By supporting local communities with such projects, UNMISS aims at improving relations and fostering reconciliation between communities, often host and displaced communities, by offering a project benefiting to both. In the case of Bor, **there were 16 residents from the PoC site in attendance.** They were representing the displaced community in Bor PoC site – a very encouraging move. In addition, in a climate of food insecurity, lack of access to markets, and increased reliance on humanitarian assistance, a fish market will allow communities to trade fish for other commodities, and improve food security.

As a reminder, in such spirit and in the previous weeks, UNMISS has handed over a borehole in Gudelei, or a solar water pump last week in Gurei.

In Bentiu and Juba PoC sites, as every year with the rainy season, residents of PoC sites are experiencing a spike in malaria cases. Partners are scaling up response including mosquito nets especially in Bentiu.

Other UNMISS activities

Last Saturday, UNMISS supported an academic debate between the Catholic University and the University of Juba. **“Is peace everyone’s responsibility?”** was the theme of the public discussion, which took place at the Nyakuron Cultural Center. The objective of such debate is to increase the sense of ownership and participation regarding the implementation of the peace process, create a safe space to promote the exchange of different ideas and encourage everyone, especially youngsters, to listen, respect and unite in diversity.

Nearly **700 spectators** – university students as well as attendees from universities, religious institutions and UNMISS – participated in the event. In the core of the debate, moderated by John Ugolo, Head of UNMISS Juba Field Office laid an **argument over the various entities’ responsibilities.**

I will now give the floor to Mrs. Naweza Muderhwa who is the Women Protection Advisor with UNMISS. She tell us more about the International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict.

Good morning ladies and gentlemen of the media. I would like to start by thanking you for inviting me to the press briefing broadcast live on UN radio Miraya from UN House in Juba.

On 19 June 2015, the UN General Assembly adopted resolution A/RES/69/293 proclaiming 19 June of each year as the International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict. The General Assembly also invited all Member and observer States, all organizations and bodies of the United Nations system and other international and regional organizations, as well as civil society, including non-governmental organizations and individuals, to observe the International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict.

In this respect, **UNMISS in collaboration with partners observed the day on the 21 June 2016** at Nyakuron Cultural Center. In attendance were a representative from the Office of the President, a representative from the Ministry of Gender, Child and Social Welfare and the **Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Eugene Owusu.**

The aim of the commemoration was to:

- raise awareness of the need to put an end to conflict-related sexual violence

- To honor the victims and survivors of sexual violence in South Sudan and to pay tribute to all those who have courageously devoted their lives to and lost their lives in standing up for the eradication of these crimes

As the secretary-general stated in his message and I quote him: **“NO nation is immune and sexual violence is a threat to international peace and security”**, unquote. His statement rings truth to the Republic of South Sudan and is a reality that continues to affect families and many communities. This year’s theme is **“Sexual Violence is a Crime, Speak Up”**. This message was highlighted through powerful performances that educated the audience on different types of sexual violence, the short and long term effects. Performances with the support of songs and a drama play encouraged survivors to **speak UP not only so they can receive medical and psycho-social services but also hold perpetrators accountable**. And that Justice and sustainable peace will not last without accountability.

These messages were reiterated by DSRSG, Mr. Eugene Owusu. He emphasized on the progress that has been made about addressing Sexual Violence in South Sudan notably:

- The **signing of the Joint Communiqué in 2014 by the Government of South Sudan and former Opposition**. The Communiqués commit both parties, with the support of the United Nations, to make and implement political and practical commitments to prevent and end the use of rape and Sexual violence in conflict.
- The development of **Action plans** which will enhance the capacity of national authorities to investigate sexual violence crimes and lead to accountability mechanisms to ensure that perpetrators of sexual violence are appropriately punished. And the establishment of joint technical working group to implement the actions plans.
- His Excellency, President Salva Kiir, appointment of **a high-level focal point – the Honorable Minister in the Office of the President, Mayiik Deng – to lead this effort**.
- In April and May this year, the Transitional Government convened **three workshops on conflict related sexual violence** to train the joint technical working group members on the legal and normative frameworks of sexual violence in conflict, and validate their implementation plans.

There is still work left to do:

- Starting with **harmonizing** the implementation plans developed under the former Government and Opposition.
- **Police and armed forces need to be trained** to understand their obligations regarding preventing sexual and gender-based violence.
- **Accountability mechanisms** and institutions need to be established.
- **Special protection units** need the capacity and tools to respond to and investigate incidents of sexual violence.

The United Nations family in South Sudan will continue to support the Transitional Government and people of South Sudan to eliminate sexual violence in conflict.

Thank you

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Denis Elamu, Xinhua News Agency: *For Ms. Naweza Muderhwa what is the scope of sexual violence in the country, and what is being done by the United Nations?*

Naweza Muderhwa (NM): I would like to stress that the most important is to increase awareness about the sexual violence that continues to take place in South Sudan, although we are in a moment of peace and there is no more conflict - but sexual violence continues to happen. What we really

need to focus on is to **ensure that the survivors get the assistance they need and that more awareness is brought to those who are not aware that sexual violence is a crime.**

As far as addressing this issue, now that a transitional government has been established, the implementation of the **Joint Communiqué signed in 2014 needs to be harmonized.** In this respect, we have conducted **several workshops in April and May as well as consultation meetings** with stakeholders from various organizations, with the next step being to review what has been suggested and ensure that the plan for the Joint Communiqué to address sexual violence is implemented.

Ariane Quentier (AQ): if I may add to what Naweza has said what is very important is to address sexual violence, but also while addressing it **ensuring that all who have been victimized - women, men, children, elder persons - speak up and speak about it.** Sexual violence is a taboo, same as when talking about prostitution.

While addressing this taboo, we need **to raise awareness among communities, so women, men and children - everyone who has been abused – can speak and report without being rejected by their own communities.** That is a first crucial step, because we will not be able to address the issue of sexual violence in conflict until the people who have been victimized themselves speak up; as Naweza said “ **Sexual Violence is a Crime, Speak Up**” that is the theme of the commemoration of this day.

This is only a first stage. With the experience of Congo where rape has been far too widely used, it took about twenty years for people to feel comfortable if I may use this word, to talk about the abuses they have been victims of. So there is a lot of work, from all people of South Sudan, and again it could happen to men, women and children. It is not only rape of women. It is also rape of elders, rape of men. So everyone needs to be able and want to speak up, and needs to be supported by its own people and community to do so.

Question (inaudible): *Are there statistics available today?*

NM: I will give you statistics according to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) which estimates that some **32,000 women, girls, men and young boys have been victims** of sexual violence. It is really important to ensure that they get the assistance they need.

Kidega Livingstone- Juba Monitor: *You gave us statistics of the victims (...) why do you think this is happening in South Sudan?”*

NM: It only happens because rape and sexual violence are used as **a weapon of war** used to destabilize communities and completely destroy families.

Oketa Santo, Dawn Newspaper: *You did mention an estimate for the perpetrators of the victims, what about accountability of these perpetrators, was any of them convicted?*

AQ: As I said many times in this forum, **accountability is crucial**, and it part one of the reasons we are **documenting human rights violations and abuses**, and so are other organizations, it is because without documentation we will not have accountability, **without accountability we will not have justice, and without justice, we will not have a lasting peace.**

For the time being, the peace agreement is being implemented including for perpetrators to be brought to justice. The African Union recommended a hybrid court, and there is a **general need of justice in this country.** There might be different visions of justice, but perpetrators must be brought to justice. It is crucial that this is done for the sake of a lasting and sustainable peace.

Chuty Anyar-The Nation Newspaper: We understand that the rate of sexual violation has increased during the 2013 war. In which area exactly was most of the sexual violence to be found? There are two parties involved, SPLA and SPLA IO, according to your data, which group has committed the biggest number of violations?

AQ: First of all, let me reiterate that we are working on **estimates** and issues where we have been **lacking access**. That said, the areas where the sexual violence in conflict has taken place are areas where there was conflict, such as **Jonglei but of course the areas of Upper Nile, and Unity**. It does not mean it only happened there; there are other areas which have been affected by recent conflicts. But the big area where the conflict has been is the northern part of South Sudan, Unity and Upper Nile regions.

"Who did what?" is something we are documenting, again the issue of access has been a tremendous one. We are working on witness testimonies and second hand witnesses. It is very hard right now and I would not dare to point my finger at one party or another. What we know for a fact is that **all parties, SPLA and SPLA IO, but also all other military groups, militias and people who have taken up guns** and call themselves soldiers have been involved in sexual violence.

Kidega Livingstone, Juba Monitor: You are encouraging women to speak out if they are victims, but how are you protecting them against the risk of doing that?

AQ: Two things, first of all, remember, it is not only about women, unfortunately there were cases of rape of children, there are cases of rape of elders, there were cases of rape and sexual violence against men. It is everyone's problem; let us not say it is only women who are being subjected to sexual violence.

So how to protect them? Let me remind you and it is important for everyone to understand: **we are in a sovereign country where it is a responsibility of the national authorities and the law enforcement agencies to protect civilians. South Sudan is a sovereign country where we can support the authorities, but we cannot substitute them.**

We are documenting what is happening as best as we can again with a view of accountability - that is to bring perpetrators to justice after violence has occurred. What do we do for the violence not to occur as the war is ongoing? We are trying to raise **awareness among military and armed forces** that this is a crime - it is not prohibited - it is a crime, and that there will be prosecution and there will be accountability.

We also try to raise **awareness among communities** and I gave you example with Congo, by raising awareness with communities we have seen a number of people speaking up, and it appears there is less sexual violence than there has been, but it is all about raising awareness and doing trainings, as Naweza explained.

Anina Amitai, Association of Media Women: Ms. Naweza, you spoke about a Joint Technical Group how often they meet, and what is the status of the harmonization of the communique?

NM: The **Joint Technical Group** is composed of different UN agencies, government institutions the basic responsibility of which it is to overlook the implementation of the plan resulting in the Joint Communique addressing sexual violence. Last May, with the support of the Joint Technical Group, we conducted trainings. We also have had consultative meetings to make suggestions on the implementation of the communique.

AQ: The elimination of sexual violence in conflict and in South Sudan is a fairly new notion as underlined by Naweza. The Joint Communique was signed in 2014 which is only two years ago in the middle of conflict, so you should give time and allow time to make things happen. They are starting

to happen I think it is a very positive sign a lot need to be done, and we need to press the South Sudanese authorities and see how they are going to implement it.

Anina Amitai -Association of Media Women: Who is in leadership in the Joint Technical Group, the government or UNMISS?

The Joint Technical Group is composed of UN agencies and also the government which is involved, through the members from ministry of Gender, Child and Social Welfare, the coordinator of humanitarian affairs, and members of the civil society who are very important in such Joint Technical Group.

Kidega Livingstone Juba Monitor: *This goes to Ariane; you said since February 20% of the civilians in the PoC site has left. Do you plan increase the rate of return? How will you ensure their security?*

AQ: I believe the ultimate goal for everyone, the displaced inside the country, the refugees abroad, the national authorities and the UN is of course for the people to **return to their homes, based on as voluntary and informed choice. So far we have gone from over 200,000 to slightly under 160,000, which is a 20% decrease in the PoC sites.**

We attribute it to a number of factors; the **signature of the peace agreement, and the relative lull in the conflict, the planting season and the fact that we have increased the patrolling and our visibility and presence outside the protection of the civilians site.** As an immediate result we have seen a trend which ultimately resulted in **40,000 civilians who lived in our protection of civilians' sites, especially in Bentiu, to have left.**

You may also recall that in **Bentiu town we have opened what we call a forward operating base in and a temporary operating base in Leer.** We have been working together with humanitarian services' providers in the area of Bentiu to be able to **respond to request of communities for humanitarian presence.** So for people and humanitarian providers to feel **a sense of security,** we have been ensuring that our forces be more visible through patrolling including the bush road in the area to Rubkona where women pick up wood. We have conducted long duration patrols where we stay for two nights to establish a **more visible presence.** What we see in Bentiu for instance is that most of the people who have left the Bentiu protection of civilians' sites have left to go either to **Rubkona or to Guit** where there is presence of humanitarian services providers as well as UNMISS through force visibility

Kidega Livingstone Juba Monitor: *The UN has concluded investigations into the Malakal attack, I mean the PoC site, can you comment on that matter?*

AQ: As you may recall, following the incident of 17 and 18 February that took place in Malakal, there were **two investigations that were launched by the United Nations.** One is the **Board of Inquiry** which has been called by the department of peace keeping operations. It is meant to look at UNMISS response to the incident when it took place in Malakal. In addition, the UN Secretary-General appointed a **Special Investigation Team** to look more broadly into the circumstances that eventually led to the Malakal incident. You are absolutely right to say that by now these investigations are concluded. However, they are not yet public and I am not at liberty to comment.

The Under-Secretary-General in charge of Peace Keeping Operations Mr. Hervé Ladsous and the Under-Secretary-General in charge of field support Mr. Atul Khare will be commenting and briefing the members of Security Council issue later today.

We are looking forward to seeing the recommendations and having them implemented of course, but these investigations will have to be first presented in New York Headquarters today to the Security Council.

Anina Amatai.-Association of Media Women: *What is the Commission of Human Rights which has just been appointed for South Sudan? Can you highlight their work?*

AQ: The Commission has been appointed by the **Human Rights Council**, and of course we work together with them - the issue of violation of human rights in South Sudan is a broad topic which does not only include sexual violence against women but it includes many issues such as freedom of the media. and we welcome them, it will allow by documenting crimes and ensuring accountability as there is no lasting peace without justice and accountability.

End of the briefing