

THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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PRESS ENCOUNTER ON SOUTH SUDAN

New York, 11 July 2016

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I want to say a few words about the unfolding crisis in South Sudan.

The renewed fighting is outrageous. It is yet another grievous setback. It deepens the country's suffering. It makes a mockery of commitments to peace.

Many people have been killed in heavy fighting. There are growing fears that many more could die in another round of violence.

Let me start by expressing my deep condolences to the families and loved ones of all those who have been killed in the fighting that has consumed Juba over the past four days. I condemn the killing of two Chinese peacekeepers and one UN national staff.

I am appalled by these indiscriminate attacks on civilians and peacekeepers. The two UNMISS compounds in Juba have been caught in the cross-fire and sustained mortar and heavy artillery fire. At least two internally displaced persons have been killed in the UNMISS protection of civilians sites, and some 35 injured.

Thousands of civilians have fled to various locations in town, including the two UNMISS compounds.

Yet again, the leaders of South Sudan have failed their people. Rarely has a country squandered so much promise, so quickly.

What kind of leadership is it that resorts to deadly weapons and identity politics, time and again? Failed leadership.

My message to President Salva Kiir and First Vice-President Riek Machar is clear: do everything in your power to de-escalate the hostilities immediately. Order your respective forces to withdraw to their bases.

Let me underscore, again, to all those leading and perpetrating these hostilities that acts of violence perpetrated against civilians and United Nations and humanitarian personnel, assets and premises may constitute a war crime.

There must and will be accountability for the atrocities that have been committed in South Sudan since 2013. It is not just leaders who must face a reckoning, but all those in the chain of command, including chiefs of staff and other officials complicit in the violence.

The international community, through its wide-ranging security, legal and human rights mechanisms, will be carefully monitoring developments in the coming days precisely in order to be able to identify on whom the burden of accountability for war crimes should ultimately be placed.

While I understand that President Kiir reportedly issued an order to the SPLA last night to stop fighting, hostilities continue today and have spread to parts outside of Juba in Central Equatoria.

UNMISS is doing all it can to contain a very volatile situation. Our peacekeepers maintain a proactive posture, conducting patrols within and immediately outside the protection of civilians sites. It has reinforced perimeter security to enhance protection for IDPs and UN staff at its two compounds.

However, freedom of movement and access outside of the UN compounds remains a challenge. I demand all the belligerent parties to guarantee unfettered access and freedom of movement to United Nations and humanitarian personnel engaged in life-saving activities in aid of the South Sudanese people.

I welcome last night's statement by the Security Council. The gravity of the situation demands a rapid response. Today, I urge the Council to take action on three fronts:

First, impose an immediate arms embargo on South Sudan.

Second, enact additional targeted sanctions on leaders and commanders blocking the implementation of the Agreement.

Third, fortify the UN Mission in South Sudan, UNMISS. We desperately need attack helicopters and other material to fulfil our mandate to protect civilians.

I also urge all countries contributing to UNMISS to stand their ground. Any withdrawals would send precisely the wrong signal, in South Sudan and across the world.

I am consulting with my team and concerned organizations for me, myself, to participate in the African Union summit to consult with the Heads of State of IGAD (Intergovernmental Authority on Development) and the region on how to restore and better secure the peace process and report to the Security Council within a week. As you know, I am meeting with the Security Council tomorrow afternoon.

This is the time to massively reinforce UN action. When a Government cannot or will not protect its people, and when warring parties seem more intent on enriching and empowering themselves at the expense of their people, the international community has a responsibility to act.

I call on the Security Council and the entire membership of the United Nations to rise to this moment and protect the human rights of South Sudanese.

I thank you.

Q: Secretary-General, thanks very much indeed. Having described the failed leadership as you have, do you now believe it is time for President Kiir and Vice President Machar to step aside? And having called for the arms embargo, what is your message to countries like Russia and China that have opposed the

institution of an arms embargo in the past?

SG: The first part of the question is not for the United Nations Secretary-General to comment. It is for the people of South Sudan. President Salva Kiir and First Vice President Riek Machar were elected by their own people. But they have a huge moral and political responsibility to keep their country in order. They even cancelled their fifth anniversary of independence celebration. I still remember how people were excited and proud on 9 July 2011, when I myself participated in the historic independence ceremony. And in that year, we saw proudly the South Sudanese flag flying, having been admitted to the United Nations. During the last five years, they have not been able to manage and put their new independent country in order, against the will and support and wishes of the international community who strongly supported their independence.

Now, for the Security Council, as I just said, the Security Council for some time has been discussing the idea of imposing an arms embargo, but they have not been able to agree. I sincerely hope that, as I said again this morning, I am urging the Security to take immediate action to impose sanctions on South Sudan.

Q: [inaudible]

SG: Arms embargo sanctions. Arms embargo.

Q: Secretary-General, you have called for the Mission to be reinforced. Are you calling for a specific number of additional troops to be sent? Where will those troops come from, and what do you expect them to be able to do, given that it is our understanding that the troops on the ground have been restricted to their bases?

SG: We have around 12,000 peacekeepers, including police. The question is that our movement of troops, particularly in time of emergency and urgency and danger, has been restricted by the Government. That is why I am urging the South Sudanese Government to allow the normal operation of our peacekeepers – UNMISS - the United Nations Mission and all other diplomatic missions there. There are many roadblocks and safety checks which do not allow movement. The airport is also restricted. It is not operational now. That really makes it very difficult for us to operate, to provide humanitarian assistance and also to take care of wounded civilians and soldiers. Therefore, I am urging the South Sudanese Government to ease all these restrictions immediately so that the UN peacekeeping mission can freely move around. As for the specific number of reinforcements, or any other issues, I will have an opportunity of engaging with the Security Council members tomorrow afternoon. The South Sudan situation is a top priority on the agenda.

