

**Near verbatim of ASG Bintou Keita's opening statement at UN Tomping Base in  
Juba, South Sudan**

*19 April 2018*

I am concluding a four-day visit in South Sudan during which I had the opportunity to meet with senior Government officials including His Excellency, the First Vice President, Taban Deng Gai, and a delegation of Cabinet Ministers led by the Minister of Cabinet Affairs, Martin Elia Lomoro. I visited Wau where I met with local authorities, victims of the conflict and community leaders and Rumbek briefly. Yesterday I had the chance in a senior leadership dialogue on sexual and gender-based violence with the Minister for Gender and other senior government and civil society representatives. The purpose of my visit was to discuss with the government, civil society partners, and the United Nations family, the modalities of the implementation of UNMISS' new mandate, UN support to the South Sudan peace process and how we can reduce together the horrific tolls this conflict has had on civilians, notably women and girls. I am travelling tonight to Ethiopia where I will attend the Tana Forum on peace and security and also discuss UN support to the South Sudan peace process with leaders of the region and representatives of the Opposition. Let me first thank the government and people of South Sudan for their warm welcome and the constructive engagement that has guided our discussions. It was my first visit to South Sudan in my capacity as Assistant Secretary-General and I greatly appreciated South Sudan's friendship and hospitality. Beyond our disagreement and possible differences of views on certain issues, on the situation in the country, it is with the spirit of constructive engagement that needs to drive our partnership and will help us ultimately overcome these differences so that South Sudan civilians genuinely benefit from all the United Nations support they can get. As Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has stated on multiple occasions since his election, there is no military solution to the conflict. We need all South Sudanese stakeholders to engage genuinely and constructively in finding a political solution in this crisis. The High Level Revitalization Forum led by IGAD, and which will resume soon, offers an important opportunity which needs to be seized. It is also critical that all warring parties adhere scrupulously to the terms and the spirit of the December 2017 Cessation of Hostilities Agreement. The fighting between the Government and rebel forces which broke out in several parts of Greater Upper Nile and Bahr El Ghazal has to stop once and for all. But peace will not be won in Addis Ababa only. It has to be won in every state of the country where politically motivated intercommunal violence has become a great source of concern and has caused numerous fatalities in the past month. We all

need to make sure that the people-to-people peace initiatives, reconciliation efforts and the national dialogue process succeeds in reducing these tensions and brings the country towards a sustainable resolution of the conflict. The United Nations is committed to supporting these initiatives provided they are genuinely inclusive, transparent and offer complementarity platforms through the efforts of IGAD. If they are, we will not also hesitate to tell the Opposition leaders: “Think about the country beyond your individual interest. Give peace a chance. Give your children a chance. Every opportunity for peace, every chance to save lives, has to be seized”. I am particularly appalled by the violence this conflict has brought against women and girls in South Sudan. The atrocities committed and documented by multiple investigations are beyond the imaginable. I am encouraged though that the Government has started to look into the issue and is ready to invest into providing accountability for sexual and gender-based violence. This is definitely a step in the right direction and UNMISS together with the UN country team and other international partners will support it. But we also need to take the measure of the problem. South Sudan is facing an emergency related to sexual violence and what we need from the Government, the United Nations, and its partners, is an emergency response. I am therefore looking forward to the United Nations family engaging with the Government in the coming months to step up significantly our collective response so that we succeed to make a difference for South Sudanese women and girls as soon as possible.

## Q & A

***Juba Monitor:*** *In the last one month, there have been some allegations of sexual assault in Wau by the contingent of the UN peacekeeping forces in the area. The UN said they are investigating the matter. How far has the investigation gone?*

***SRSR David Shearer:*** As you know, the event happened in February and we had an independent investigation done by the Office of Internal Oversight, which is independent from the Mission. That investigation is being concluded now. We have not received the investigation yet. We understand as per the way this works is that it will be shared with the Government of Ghana because it is the Ghanaian forces that were involved. In the meantime, as soon as we heard of the incident, as you know, we withdrew the Ghanaian Contingent from Wau and they are here in the base in Tongping, confined to base, while the investigation is going on.

That’s all I can tell you at the moment. The investigation is not in our hands, as I said. It is an independent investigation. Once that has been concluded, it will be shared with the Government of Ghana and, I understand, the Government of South Sudan as well.

*Al-Jazeera Arabic:* My first question goes to Ms. Bintou Keita. I just want to put a simple question: what is the disagreement between you and the Government of South Sudan in terms of human rights abuse and also the deployment of the Regional Protection Forces?

The second question goes to Mr. David. We observed that UNISFA are deployed on a point between South Sudan and the Sudan which is related to the demilitarization area. Is it true or not that the UN has deployed its forces there?

**ASG Bintou Keita:** In relation to disagreement or what we call some “divergent views” on how to deal with some of the issues, through the interactions that I had on Monday with the Government officials, it has more to do on the processes that we are following. That is because we are following international norms and standards in terms of human rights monitoring and reporting as well as International Humanitarian Law and all of these, at times, will create some tensions and divergent views. Yet we have to continue through dialogue with the government officials. I think there is an understanding that at least we cannot break the dialogue. We have to continue because we are partners and it is only in the spirit of partnership and cooperation that we can do what is necessary for South Sudan.

**SRSB Shearer:** I do not have any news, I am sorry, on the UNISFA question. I understand their mandate and their operations have not changed as far as I know.

**ASG Keita:** For the time being, there is what we call a “technical rollover” up to the 23<sup>rd</sup> of April. In the meantime, there is a mandate discussion which will take place for the entire mission in the month of May, I think around the 24<sup>th</sup> of May. But, as the SRSB has said, the content of the mandate of the mission is not changing for now.

You also mentioned the Regional Protection Force. On that, we have in the current mandate of the Mission, the possibility to work on having the Regional Protection Force in Juba but also going beyond Juba with mandated flexibility in the context of the work that needs to be done outside of the Protection of Civilians sites.

**Associated Press:** I have a short to the point question: In your opinion, why has there been a failure to bring peace to this country so far?

**ASG Keita:** If we had the response, I think, we would not be sitting in this hall.

I guess there are so many factors and parameters that have to be taken into consideration. But primarily, I would say, the political will of all the parties would be what has to be looked at. And there is one process which we all know about

which is the High Level Revitalization Forum. Through the interactions I had through the days I have been here, it is really clear that this is the one game plan in the current circumstances that will need to be followed ...

*Associated Press: ... they have been postponed ...*

**ASG Keita:** It has been postponed but it does not mean that it is not going to happen and I want to be optimistic.

At the same time, I think it is important also to refer to the fact that while we are having this High Level Revitalization Forum, we also need to tackle the situation at the community level and at the local level. And work is being done through UNMISS, the agencies, funds and programmes, and other partners from the INGO community to try to also calm the situation at local level and to forge better peaceful coexistence and give a chance for the High Level Revitalization Forum to come with a settlement.

*Radio Community: My question goes to the United Nations Assistant Secretary-General. What are the specific areas in which the United Nations is supporting the peace process in South Sudan?*

*My second question is a follow-up to what my colleague has asked about the deployment of the Regional Protection Force. We know that not all the Regional Protection Forces have been deployed in Juba so far. Are they really doing what they are supposed to do as per their approved mandate?*

**SRSG Shearer:** Without going too much into detail, first of all, in terms of what are we doing on the peace process? We have participated actively in the High Level Revitalization Forum. We have a team in Addis whenever that forum is ongoing. While IGAD is quite rightly leading the process, the UN has supported it politically in a number of different ways to ensure it stays on track.

Secondly, it supports the movement, the logistics, the operations of CTSAMM which, as you know, is doing the ceasefire monitoring around the country. So it is our helicopters, our vehicles, our bases, etc. that CTSAMM relies on.

Secondly, that just doesn't happen as Bintou Keita just mentioned. Peace is not just at that level, it is also at the sub-national level. Over the last few months, we have had more casualties from communal violence than we have actually had from political violence. I was in Rumbek and in Torit this week. In Rumbek, we are supporting and assisting various groups coming together and developing strategies for peace. In Torit, we have been in communities and had community dialogues in three or four different places in the last three months that has led to on-the-ground agreements that has resulted in less violence. It is very difficult to prove the success of these initiatives because, if violence does not happen, it

does not happen. But a lot of that violence doesn't happen because of the work that we are doing.

The last point I will make is that we have also supported the National Dialogue. We hope that the National Dialogue remains transparent and independent, as Bintou just said before in her statement. We have provided logistical support to get the National Dialogue to the places they need to go to – in other words helicopters and planes, we have provided financial support directly to the National Dialogue, we have provided technical support to bring in the experience of national dialogues across the world.

In those ways - and I have just mentioned those and there are others – we have been supporting the peace process and it is a critical part of our mission. Our mission effectively has two parts: protect civilians and build durable peace. The more peace we have, the less we have to protect civilians; the less peace we have, the more our job of protecting civilians is to the front.

On the Regional Protection Force, at the moment there is 1,550 troops on the ground. We are anticipating the arrival of the remainder of the battalion from the Ethiopians. When they come in, the numbers will go up to about 2,300. That will give us a sizeable extra boost to our forces to do what Bintou just said which is not just focus on Juba but to acknowledge that there is conflict in other areas of the country that weren't part of the original mandate, and I am thinking here of the Equatorias, in particular, to push down into the Equatorias and boost our presence there.

As you know, as I have announced here at a press conference a while ago, we have now opened a base in Yei – so we have a base in Torit, Yei and Yambio and we will reinforce those positions and push our forces out into the field more than we have been doing and that will give us the scope to do that.

I am sorry it is a longer answer but it was a big question.

**MBC:** *We know that you are here in Juba. What are the new ideas you are bringing with you to push peacekeeping in South Sudan and what are the challenges facing your peacekeeping forces here in South Sudan, putting into consideration that the Government refuses Article VII of your mandate. Is this one of the challenges facing peacekeeping here?*

**ASG Keita:** I will try to respond to your question in different ways. First, when we look at the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) which is the framework which enables any peacekeeping operation to function in a given country, we have what I called some of the divergent views earlier on how to interpret the SOFA. And there are different elements which are looked into in terms of clearances, in

terms of visas, in terms of contingent-owned equipment, all these kinds of stuff – related to the personnel, related to the equipment. There are various ways that these are being looked at. Sometimes, the best way forward is to organise small technical working groups which, with the different components of the government officials, can work through and get to a conclusion that we can move forward. I have to say that basically from my understanding of what has happened here, there is a bit more of cooperation than there is in terms of obstructions or difficulties moving forward. For instance, on the contingent-owned equipment of the Regional Protection Forces, I understand that if it is not this week, then probably next week there will be a movement of the contingent-owned equipment for the Ethiopian Battalion. These are some of the hurdles that arise in terms of the processes.

Moving forward, there are also other elements that we are looking into, for example, terms of access. Sometimes access is seen as related to safety and security and, in that, most of the time, there is also dialogue that is being established through a monthly reporting of the “SOFA violations” which goes to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and is also sent to New York for the understanding of member states in the Security Council. So there are various ways in which this is being addressed.

What is new in terms of peacekeeping? There was, if you are interested and I would invite you to look into it. There was an open debate on the 28<sup>th</sup> of March in the Security Council in New York where the Secretary-General of the United Nations gave a vision of how peacekeeping is a shared responsibility between the Secretariat of the United Nations, the Member States in the United Nations Security Council, the Troop and Police Contributing Countries as well as the partners who are providing the funding – be it a state’s contribution or voluntary contribution - and the regional organizations as well as part of the shared responsibility. In the case of South Sudan, we see all these different layers coming together.

So the change is to ensure that where there are issues, we are not just showing the blame and using the mission as a scapegoat but we are all sharing responsibility in terms of what needs to happen in terms of the troops, what needs to happen in terms of the bureaucracy around the paperwork and these kinds of stuff, but also in terms of the budget that needs to happen and be provided to the mission to be operational. It is also about making sure we do not attract more attacks on the peacekeepers because in some places in the world, peacekeepers are coming under attack in the context of the work that they are doing. This is a case we are seeing in Mali, for instance, in the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and it is becoming a very

difficult endeavour to protect the civilians and at the same time, not having people coming back to their families in caskets and in huge numbers. Therefore, there is a commitment from the Secretary-General with all the partners that I have mentioned to try as much as possible to reduce the fatalities and to ensure that we also reduce the injuries because, at times, the injuries are also leading to disabilities and handicap and this is not something we want to see moving forward.

There are so many other new initiatives in the world of peacekeeping but, as I said, the most important is the shared responsibility that we are looking to take forward.

*Q: You have been in the country for four days and you visited areas, like Wau, and you probably must have visited the Protection of Civilians site. How would you describe the humanitarian situation on the ground?*

**ASG Keita:** To be honest, I have been in so many places over thirty years in war and post-conflict situations and I have seen a lot. And I have seen the situation in the PoC site in Wau, which is quite well organized by the standards that I know in terms of the situation, and the humanitarians are working quite well in the context of this particular PoC site. They are working in terms of trying to ensure that people will be able to go back to normal life as much as possible once safety and security is ensured.

The only two things that the women and the community leaders have mentioned in terms of something they would like to see more has to do with increased basic services, particularly in health and education. On education, what they are looking for is, for instance, a kindergarten within the PoC site so that the women can leave the babies and they can go ahead with their livelihood activities.

Otherwise, what I've seen is a condition that is not ideal, in terms of people who have been free before, to be in such a situation, but I think it is something that is to a standard that is acceptable.

*Eye Radio: I would like to know a rough estimate of numbers of cases of sexual related violence since 2013. What is it in the process of bringing the culprits to book or accountable?*

**ASG Keita:** I cannot give you statistics. I would love to refer you to the discussion that we had, was it yesterday, in the leadership dialogue around sexual and gender-based violence and conflict-related sexual violence.

The minister gave some statistics but I know that there is one takeaway from the conversation and that is that we need to get to the bottom of what numbers we are talking about. The general perception is that it is pervasive, it is huge, that if

you put any number, then it becomes a discussion about the number. I would like the discussion to be about, in the first place, that it is not acceptable and it is not something which can be tolerated because it is a pure violation of the right of the human being to be assaulted sexually, to not have access to services that will enable victims take care of the trauma that has been inflicted and then not being accepted within the communities because of stigma, which is double-jeopardy on something which is already traumatic.

As I said in my statement, my encouragement is that there is a willingness look into the situation and to make sure that the plea of everyone that it becomes an emergency and it is being dealt with at the scale that responds to the trauma that the victims and the survivors are facing.

*Q: You say there is a willingness from the Government when you speak to them about this, but what does that willingness look like because this has been going on for a long time and there hasn't been lots of evidential changes that can be seen?*

**ASG Keita:** Actually, in the dialogue, a number of people from South Sudan came forward and gave examples of a number of activities and interventions that are going on throughout the years. The problem is, and this is where I want to be careful, is that it is not that nothing is happening. Things are happening but they are not happening at the scale that is required. The Government is preparing an action plan which is going to respond to some of the interventions that need to be done at policy level, at coordination level, at prevention level and, in general, also raising awareness to break the silence around this particular situation. It is not just the elite but it also has to be within the community and the family level. The call at the end of the discussions at the Leadership Dialogue that I am taking and bringing forward to New York is that, there is a call that once a plan is there and everybody accepts that it is a collective responsibility, then resources will come and support a political will and people – men and women - and probably more men to come forward as champions in rejecting that this is something that is acceptable, alongside the women, will help change – not overnight because this has been going on for a long time – but to change steadily.

This is what we want to see.