

Near Verbatim Transcript of
Media Briefing by the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, Jean-Pierre Lacroix; the African Union Commissioner for Peace and Security, Ambassador Smail Chergui; the co-chair of the Network of African Women in Conflict Prevention and Mediation, Dr Specioza Wandira Kazibwe; and the Executive Director of UN Women, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka

Juba Conference Room
UNMISS Tomping Base, Juba – 09 October 2018

Opening Remarks:

Jean-Pierre Lacroix : Good afternoon. I am going to keep it very brief because I think we have 30 minutes and colleagues will also make a few remarks and we want to give some time for questions and answers. So, first thing is as you can see this is a joint visit and even a double joint visit. This is an AU-UN visit and it is a visit by colleagues in the Women, Peace and Security dimension and in peace and security and, as you can say, really this is one and the same issue. So, the purpose was to express our joint solidarity to the people of South Sudan. We went to Bentiu yesterday and visited the POC, the Protection of Civilians camp. We engaged with the women. We heard their stories and, of course, we met with colleagues and, also here in Juba, colleagues from the UN to whom I would like to pay tribute for the great work that they are doing here in this country. Our message was also that we have a glimmer of hope in South Sudan with the revitalized Agreement and, although there is a long way to go to achieve peace in South Sudan, it is encouraging, and our message was that we are ready to help, and we are ready to help as a team – African Union/United Nations. We engaged with members of the Government here, the authorities of South Sudan, to hear their views about the way forward and we were encouraged to hear that there are measures that are envisaged to take it further. Of course, the implementation of the peace agreement is primarily a responsibility for South Sudanese, and I think the partners of South Sudan are keen to see a few things materialize on the ground, particularly the cessation of hostilities which would be, of course, so important – a full cessation of hostilities because we acknowledge that there is a decrease in the fighting but that would be so important, particularly for the women and, indeed, for all the civilian population. So, we are of course looking forward to further improvement in the security situation and other such positive signals that would certainly generate more confidence and mobilization from the international community. So ladies and gentlemen, this is really all I would like to say by way of being short and reverting to my colleagues but again a message of solidarity with the South Sudanese people, a message of readiness to help in the implementation of the revitalized Peace Agreement and, of course, a message of tribute to all our UN colleagues and other AU colleagues who are working so hard to help South Sudanese people.

The African Union Commissioner for Peace and Security, Ambassador Smail Chergui:

Thank you. Good afternoon. I think I will not have a lot to add to what my colleague Jean-Pierre Lacroix has just said. As you know, the signing of an agreement is really the starting point of the hard work. So I think after the Agreement was signed in Addis, and I was the one who signed it in the name of the African Union, we thought that we should come together here as UN and AU, both those dealing with peace and security but also our colleagues dealing with issues of women so that we hear from the Government but also civil society, women's organisations what can be done immediately to support this very positive

development. And we have been, as Jean-Pierre Lacroix just said, we went to Bentiu and I think the immediate sentiment that we have is that everybody now is not only attached to the Peace Agreement, but is also demanding its immediate implementation, its faithful implementation. So, I think we just underlined that in implementing this Agreement let's benefit from the lessons of the past, as you know we have been through difficult times, but also let's make sure that this implementation will really integrate everybody, inclusive, especially women and youth. Those are the ones who suffer a lot in any crisis and more here in South Sudan. So, I think we will be continuing this interaction with the Government and all of the stakeholders, together with IGAD, who is the broker of the Agreement, and hopefully we can contribute to allow South Sudan to come back to normalcy and deal with its main enemy which is underdevelopment and those social economic problems that people are facing on a daily basis. Thank you.

Executive Director of UN Women, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka:

Just to add and agree with my two brothers. The women also told us about their expectations from the revitalized Peace Agreement. They wanted to be included in the security sector reforms which would include greater participation and contribution by women in securing the country, which would diminish some of the unflattering activities of the forces as happens in many countries where women are significantly represented in the security forces. They also wanted to encourage the Government to interact with them directly so that they can also have an opportunity to exchange directly with Government about their expectations and get additional assurance about the future which they are very excited about. There is definitely support for the agreement. They want it to succeed but they are providing safeguards by wanting to be in close contact with their leaders. They also want to make sure they take advantage of the 35% participation provision and they would put it on themselves to find the best candidates to fill in those positions. They also are very keen to make sure that any reparations that are paid do not forget and minimise them and their pain -that it helps to reconstruct their lives. They highlighted the importance of infrastructure and the importance of literacy and education which is an area that has suffered. And they want to go back to being economically productive citizens and not be stuck in the camps. So just to highlight those issues.

Q & A

Q: VoA: Just one question to Jean-Pierre, in your statement you did mention that you guys would like to see the full implementation of the cessation of hostilities and improvement of security situation across the country. You have been to some of the worst affected parts of the country where the conflict is, how do you find the impact of the implementation of the cessation of hostilities agreement? Are there some feelings you get that the parties are holding to, you're talking about improvement of security, can you try to tell us what you people find? Are you guys not convinced now that things are fine in South Sudan?

A: USG Lacroix: Thank you. Maybe we can take a few questions.

Q: Radio Community: My question is on women's representation in the transitional government which is to be formed. Currently the government pre-transitional teams are being formed, there is only one woman representing. Does that reflect what is in the peace agreement?

Q: Eye Radio: Recently the advisor on gender was relieved from office by the President without any explanation and no replacement. So, what do you think about this because we are talking about women's representation?

Q: Radio Miraya: My question goes to Mr Lacroix, you did mention that you have met some of the senior government officials, and they have assured you on measures taken to fully implement the peace agreement. Can you share some of the assurances they have given you to make sure the agreement will be fully implemented and, also, you mentioned that you, the UN, are willing to help, what kind of help are you going to extend towards the full implementation of this agreement?

A: USG Lacroix: Perhaps I could say that those questions are really addressed to all of us. But on the cessation of hostilities, what we hope for is further progress. I think there is a recognition that the level of fighting, if you compare with last year, if you will, over a certain period of time, decreased and, at the same time, the reality is that we still see some hotspots of violence and so we acknowledge this progress and, at the same time, we recognize there can be challenges in immediately achieving a total cessation of hostilities. There may be a number of factors related to that but, at the same time, this has to be emphasized because the population has suffered tremendously in this country - the women, the youth, the men, everyone and the more we can achieve progress in the cessation of violence and, the sooner really the better, so this is really our plea. And maybe to turn to the measures to implement the agreement, as Commissioner Smail Chergui was saying, implementing a peace agreement is a process of course and, by definition, requires time and also further work on elements and details but we are encouraged to see that the national pre-transitional committee which is really tasked to work on the way forward and to discuss and prepare the details is about to meet, we were told, before the end of the month, and that there are also measures that are being considered regarding other factors such as the release of the prisoners which is an important signal of course and an important element of trust between the parties. So, we understand that things are moving. Of course, we look forward to further progress.

In terms of how the UN can help – well, first of all, we do work on a day-to-day basis here through UNMISS and the agencies, funds and programmes to support the population and also to help in bringing forward peace in many different ways and, again, I wanted to pay tribute to UNMISS and SRSSG David Shearer and his team for their outstanding work. But, you know, what more can we do? The role of international partners is in support so you know we will be engaging with them. We expressed our readiness, but, at the same time, being in support means the parties themselves they take the lead in advancing the peace process and on that basis and on the basis of further details that will be defined by the parties, we will be in a better position to assess the role for all of us.

A: UN Women Executive Director Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka: Just to add on the issue of one woman as it stands now in the transitional work, we are concerned about that. We have encouraged women to organize themselves because they are going to be overtaken by events. They have to start now to claim their stakes and to be active and I think we were meeting with them all day today and, part of that discussion today, was about getting them organized and being more proactive, being more present and taking full advantage of the opportunities that are there. On the issue of the replacement of the gender advisor, we have together with the women supported that she should be replaced by a woman and the women are preparing a statement to the President in that regard and we think this is a good move.

A: Ambassador Chergui: In addition to what my sister said on this issue, we think that what has been in the agreement, the level of participation of the women, is the minimum.

So, 35% for us is a given. So, what comes up, I think, it is the effort of our sisters here in this country to enforce themselves. We are sure we have a lot of talent here.

So, on the question of the implementation of the agreement and what can be done, I think journalists are our allies. And we think that when something is going in the right direction, let's say it and its evident since our visit of yesterday that the level of violence and killings has really decreased intensely. Maybe, here and there, we can still notice such events, but one has to figure out that after the signing of the Agreement, you may have some people who are willing to go back to their homes, so its more also issues of criminals. So, let's hope that this is the case, but anyway, the Government has to bear responsibility for that, hopefully with the other partners in the Agreement. So, we as partners in the UN and AU, are ready to help South Sudan in the security sector reform but we are encouraged by the measures already taken by the Government, the day after the signing of the Agreement, the announcements that have been made here, but more importantly the fact that the two CDFs have already met in Khartoum to start mapping out the [*indistinct*] of one army. This country cannot afford to have two armies. It is too expensive. So, I think the challenges are ahead of us but let's just take note today that everybody wants to implement the Agreement faithfully and we will hold accountable anyone going the other route.

Q: Dawn Newspaper: In recent days, the US has classified the national army and the ruling party as terrorist organizations. As the AU and the UN, do you think it is the right move to push the parties?

Q: We understand that from here you will be leaving to brief the AU peace and security council tomorrow, would you like to share with us what are you going to brief the AU peace and security council on, especially after having been in South Sudan for the past few days?

A: USG Lacroix: I think what we will be saying to the peace and security council of the AU, together with our colleagues, and also to the Security Council is not very different from what we are saying here. The simple message is that the revitalized Agreement is an encouraging step, the onus, of course, is mostly on the parties to implement. We should be ready to help in whichever way we can and there will be further engagement between the AU and UN and certainly IGAD, although I do not presume to speak on their behalf, and the South Sudanese parties to see how the joint partnership in working towards the implementation can be best taken forward.

A: Ambassador Chergui: And in this endeavor, we will tell them that we are counting on our friends in journalism also to follow up and direct us if anything is not going in the right direction. But, as I told you, we are going back with a rather positive message a message of encouragement for the level of political will and determination that we have noted both here, but also at the local level in Bentiu, but also encouraged by the fact that, when we spoke to women and civil society organizations, they are determined also to play their share and make sure that what happened in the past will not happen again.

Thank you very much for your time.

###

Communications & Public Information Section
Spokesperson and Media Relations Unit

Francesca Mold mold2@un.org

www.unmiss.unmissions.org

