

Briefing by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General

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- **Chair**
- **Excellencies**
- **Friends and colleagues**

I want to begin by wishing everyone a happy new year. We all hope that 2020 will be the year in which sustainable peace is consolidated in South Sudan.

Next month we will again hit the deadline for the start of the transitional government. We've been here twice before. Twice it's been delayed.

Trust and confidence

The additional time for political negotiation has, at least, provided a chance for parties to further develop trust and confidence. Many meetings have taken place and Dr Riek Machar has become a more common presence in Juba.

Many tasks are incomplete. But everything is possible with political will. Some positive progress has been made, including the release of political prisoners and the provision of some funding for implementation of the peace agreement.

Security forces are moving to training sites although significant resourcing and logistical issues still need to be overcome. Sixteen training sites are open, holding around 28,000 people, around one-quarter are from the government side.

Some laud the progress made as considerable, others cite real problems and deem it a failure because of delays.

The truth lies somewhere in between. Next week, UNMISS will transport members of the Security Supervision Mechanism to various sites to see progress on the ground for themselves.

The issue of states has been followed up by the IGAD Envoys and South African Deputy President David Mabuza. There has been a focus on the number of states, but there is a need to also focus on contested boundary areas which can be trigger points for violence and ensure these are also addressed.

But, as we all know, the most convincing demonstration that the 100-day period has been successful is the formation of an inclusive transitional government and the continuing commitment to implement.

This is the point where parties can move from being simply warring factions to political participants in a government; where collective decisions are made for which each party can be held accountable.

Moving to this new government requires faith that each side will live up to its obligations and promises.

The opposition fears that, under a new transitional government, progress on peace implementation will slow and that issues I mentioned will not be followed through.

It also worries that a unified government will be in name only: that new vice presidents will be given an office but possess little power or ability to make decisions.

And, it fears that the international community will lose interest and tolerate or ignore delays and violations of the agreement.

These are legitimate concerns, ones which reflect the reality that faith between parties remains low and will only work if there's trust and confidence.

A unified government is just the beginning, not the end. It kicks off a three-year period culminating in elections, where leaders will be chosen democratically.

The conditions to be met by the new government are set out in the peace agreement – a number of decisions still need to be made.

Pre-conditions

First, decisions need to be made about the Presidency, including the five Vice-Presidents, the structure of Cabinet Clusters, and how that body will function.

That requires the selection of the vice presidents which is yet to happen.

The Presidency must engage in collaborative decision-making. It must operate collectively to reach understanding and agreement, not by diktat.

After all, the vice-presidents are being asked to share governance and defend any collective decisions made to the entire South Sudanese population – and to their own supporters.

Second, radical reform of public financial management systems is needed to ensure transparency and accountability.

The Ministry of Finance has not released reports of government expenditure since the first quarter of 2017/18.

Yet the transitional government should begin knowing the state of the country's books and the financial resources available, as in any democratic country.

Third, the international community has an important role. The formation of a transitional government is not the end of its job. Maintaining momentum and meeting benchmarks is key to avoiding frustration and a possible return to violence.

A lesson learnt from 2016 is the need for robust oversight by a high-level international body which will intervene to ensure progress is made on outstanding issues.

Ceasefire

The ceasefire has had the greatest impact on the peace process so far. Its maintenance is critical.

It has enabled at least 645,000 displaced people to return home. This includes many from UN Protection of Civilians sites.

As peace is consolidated, most particularly by the formation of a Transitional Government, the rationale for POC sites disappears. Finding land for people to settle permanently will become crucial and be the responsibility of the new government – with, of course, support from the UN and its partners.

Already our peacekeepers have begun increasing patrolling to build confidence in places of return. In past weeks peacekeepers were rapidly deployed to diminish violence in Maper and to establish two other temporary camps in Gumuruk and Koch.

Improved security has brought other positive changes, including changing people's outlook and confidence.

The confidence provided by the ceasefire enables people to look forward and start rebuilding their lives.

In support of these hopes, our assistance needs to change accordingly, moving away from short term emergency aid to multi-year programmes that enable greater self-reliance and restore core government functions.

The potential for conflict is never far away though. Continued NAS operations in Central Equatoria have impacted civilians. There is also a worrying escalation of political violence in Maiwut forcing 8,000 civilians to take refuge in Ethiopia and displacing another 11,000 internally.

And a number of agencies are reporting forced recruitment in different parts of the country, most recently around Rubkona. It is an issue we are monitoring closely and will soon report on.

Peacekeeping requests

There have been recent requests for UN peacekeepers to be more active in patrolling towns during the roll-out of the newly trained unified forces.

Where the UN has the capability to increase its presence to support demilitarization and build confidence, we can do this. But, any change in our deployment should come as a request agreed by all the parties.

And of course, maintaining security and law enforcement will always remain the core responsibility of the government. The UN cannot and will not usurp that role.

Future approach

The transitional agreement will bring together parties to the conflict into one unified government.

Naturally, before joining it, each side wants to maximize its own position.

The government's position is more complicated –whether to adopt the identity of a party to the conflict and a signatory to the peace agreement, or whether to act as a government, ruling on behalf of all South Sudanese, supporters and opposition alike.

The first path remaining rigidly in support of its position is straightforward. The latter takes courage – to compromise in order to bring in opposing sides in the bigger interest of the country and peace.

Therefore, we urge all the parties to seize the opportunity to do what is right, to reflect on their own interests and reach out to embrace the positions of others.

This will give the citizens of South Sudan trust and confidence that the parties, through a new unified government, will finally deliver the peace and prosperity they deserve.