

**SRSG Anita Kiki Gbeho's Briefing to UNMISS Troop and Police Contributing Countries
[Near Verbatim]**

*Madam Chair,
Representatives of Troop and Police Contributing Countries,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

Thank you for the opportunity to engage with you today, and for your continued commitment to UNMISS and to the people of South Sudan. I would like to begin by expressing, on behalf of the Mission and the wider UN system, our appreciation for the professionalism, resilience, and dedication of your troops and police serving in South Sudan.

Before proceeding, allow me to acknowledge, with respect, the recent passing of SRSG Nicholas Haysom. Many of you worked closely with him and heard directly from him in this forum. His steady leadership, clarity of purpose, and steadfast support for uniformed personnel shaped UNMISS at a critical time. We honour his legacy and unwavering commitment to peace as we continue the work he led.

My brief will focus on three main areas: first, the current operational and security environment and what it means on the ground for your contingents; second, the impact of the contingency plan, three months after its main implementation; and third, priorities and risks looking ahead, including the implications of a potential electoral process in December 2026.

The political and security environment in South Sudan has become increasingly complex. National-level political uncertainty, including the detention or exile of key SPLM/A-IO leaders, combined with fragmentation among armed actors and unresolved community grievances, has translated into operational volatility across several regions. Jonglei, Upper Nile, Unity, parts of Greater Bahr el Ghazal, and pockets of the Equatorias have each experienced renewed insecurity over the past quarter, and indeed since the last T/PCC briefing in 2025.

Excess and disproportionate use of force in several areas have destroyed homes and humanitarian infrastructure and forced thousands to flee. Since March last year, over 321,000 people have been newly uprooted, including 263,00 in northern Jonglei. Between July 2025 and February 2026 alone, we verified over 2,200 civilian casualties.

We now operate in an environment that is more demanding and less forgiving than a year ago. For contingents, this is not merely a matter of increased activity; it is a drastic shift in the nature of operations. Patrols are longer, response windows are tighter, and incidents increasingly unfold simultaneously in multiple locations. At the same time, political dynamics at the national and state levels shape access and cooperation, sometimes constructively, at other times unpredictably.

Within this context, UNMISS remains a critical stabilizing actor. Even with reduced resources, the Mission continues to deter violence, reassure communities, and create space for dialogue and humanitarian action. Much of this impact rests directly on the shoulders of your deployed personnel, whose presence continue to make a tangible difference for the stability of fragile areas.

I would now like to speak candidly about the contingency plan, which has had concrete consequences for the Mission, including for T/PCCs.

As you know, the mandated 15 per cent budget reduction translated into an estimated 25 to 30 per cent reduction in operational capacity. This meant the closure or redesignation of multiple locations, a 33 per cent reduction in troop strength - equivalent to 4,985 uniformed personnel, and the consolidation of aviation, engineering, and logistical enablers.

By January, the bulk of these measures were in place. Since then, UNMISS has been operating in a new steady state: defined by sharper prioritization and tighter margins. Adapting has meant geographic reprioritization, focusing uniformed assets on the highest-risk areas.

For contingents, this has meant real operational change. In many battalions, the proportion of personnel available for tasking below company level has declined, as command, logistics, base security, and life-support functions necessarily absorb a higher share of reduced unit strength. Mission-wide, patrol output has fallen by approximately 45 per cent, with some sectors experiencing sharper drops, particularly in long-duration and dynamic patrols.

Where the Mission extended presence, for example in Akobo and Abiemnhom, disciplined deployment of smaller, well-integrated force elements prevented escalation, protected civilians seeking refuge, and enabled humanitarian partners to re-establish access. In Abiemnhom alone, more than 1,500 civilians were protected during periods of acute tension, while humanitarian deliveries resumed following force reassurance patrols and police engagement with local authorities.

In Akobo, when SSPDF advances threatened more than 260,000 civilians, UNMISS made the deliberate choice to retain its base, even under financial pressure to close. The presence of your peacekeepers prevented a human catastrophe and reassured displaced families who had fled to the Ethiopian border.

The bottom line is that the decision to delay closure of those bases and enhanced good offices engagements mitigated against the worst possible outcome and saved lives.

With fewer bases, larger areas of responsibility, and reduced patrol density, UNMISS is

increasingly adapting and relies on combined deployments, not simply a best practice, but an operational necessity.

A practical example can be seen in areas vacated by base closures. In several such locations, long-duration patrols have been accompanied by civil affairs or human rights colleagues who conducted political engagement, mediation follow-up, and dialogue with local leaders. This allows the Mission to achieve in a single deployment what previously required continuous static presence: community reassurance, situational awareness, and preventive diplomacy.

Similarly, UNPOL rotations into redesigned bases are now often complemented by remote and mobile civilian support, enabling continued engagement with Protection of Civilians committees, women's networks, and local authorities even where permanent offices no longer exist. This integration has allowed UNMISS to partially offset reduced presence with greater coherence and precision.

Nearly 10 million people, i.e. two out of three South Sudanese, require humanitarian assistance today. Humanitarian access remains fragile, particularly in areas affected by insecurity, flooding, or conflict spillover. In this environment, TCC and PCC contributions are indispensable.

Your contingents provide force protection, convoy escorts, airstrip security, route clearance, and deterrent presence that humanitarian actors depend upon daily. From February 2025 to February 2026, UNMISS provided 59 force protections for humanitarian convoys, and safeguarded 1,750 UNHAS flights at nine airstrips. Even as overall UNMISS patrol numbers declined, uniformed components continued to support dozens of humanitarian escorts and security responses, often under greater risk and with fewer reserves.

The reductions have, however, made this balance more delicate. With fewer troops and police available, every humanitarian escort support competes directly with patrols intended for civilian protection. This is not a failure of commitment; it is a structural limitation that we manage daily through prioritization and close civil-military coordination.

Allow me to underscore here that UNMISS Force protection is not merely supportive, it is indispensable to the entire humanitarian architecture. Humanitarian partners have indicated that the reduced presence will further restrict access in Jonglei, Unity, Upper Nile, Eastern Equatoria, and along the White Nile and Sobat corridors, where access incidents are already increasing. The situation in Renk, which receiving more than 80 per cent of new arrivals from Sudan, illustrates this clearly: without regular UNMISS patrols and UNPOL engagement, humanitarian actors would struggle to operate safely. These are not abstract risks. They translate directly into whether life-saving aid reaches communities in time.

A brief word on relations with the host Government, which remain relevant to the operating environment.

The contingency plan and footprint reduction initially generated sensitivity with national authorities, particularly around base closures, force configuration, and movement procedures. In response, UNMISS established structured coordination mechanisms with the Government, including joint technical engagement platforms. These have helped resolve many practical issues such as flight clearances, escort coordination, and asset movements, though challenges with access and movement restrictions persist.

The Mission continues to engage politically to safeguard freedom of movement and respect for the Status of Forces Agreement. This engagement is ongoing and requires sustained support from Member States.

Looking ahead, the period leading to December 2026 warrants careful attention. There is a real possibility that the country may seek to proceed toward elections, whether fully prepared or not. For UNMISS, this would likely translate into increased operational demand while already operating at reduced capacity.

Historically, electoral periods in transitional situation generate localized violence, misinformation, and pressure on security actors. For contingents, this would mean enhanced requirements for mobility, rapid response, public order support, and protective presence, particularly in population centers and along key supply routes.

Our overall approach is to be deliberate and measured. UNMISS is not assuming worst-case scenarios, nor is it encouraging unnecessary alarm. Instead, we are focusing on early planning, integrated risk analysis, and clarity with T/PCCs about what can realistically be achieved within existing means, and where additional political or operational support may be required.

The Mission's priorities, directly linked to your contingents, are clear:

Protection of civilians remains the core task, but it must be delivered through mobility, integration, and risk-based prioritization.

Freedom of movement is central: continued engagement with the host government is essential to address administrative and physical restrictions that undermine mandate delivery.

Critical enablers matter: aviation, CASEVAC/MEDEVAC, mobility assets, and force protection capabilities are no longer "nice to have", they are decisive.

Flexibility from T/PCCs will be needed, including readiness to adapt to mobile deployment concepts, longer rotations away from static bases, and evolving risk profiles.

Clear communication and expectation management will remain essential as the Mission continues to adjust its posture and absorb the full effects of the contingency plan.

Excellencies,

UNMISS continues to “stay and deliver,” but the context in which your contingents are operating has profoundly changed. We are leaner, operating with less margin for error, but also adapting.

We do not underestimate the demands placed on contingents. Our priority is to ensure that mandates, resources, and expectations remain aligned, and that the safety, welfare, and professionalism of peacekeepers remain central to all planning.

I thank you once again for your partnership and look forward to our exchange.