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NEAR VERBATIM TRANSCRIPT

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Welcome. It is really a pleasure for me to be at this press briefing. This is one of the first that we will be launching.

During my “Meet and Greet the Press” one month ago, the informal gathering that we had, you told me that you needed much more interaction with UNMISS, so that you can understand what UNMISS does but also what the rest of the UN system does. So today I am launching such press briefing.

As I have said when we met, I have joined UNMISS four months ago. During these four months, I have traveled extensively throughout the country, I have now visited five states while I have had several meetings at the highest level with the civil society, IDPs, state authorities, women’s groups, women parliamentarians etc. It was very important for me to understand the context in this country.

As you may know, this is the third peacekeeping mission in which I am working. I was in Liberia, DRC (the Democratic Republic of Congo) and this is the third one, South Sudan. While I do not want to compare peacekeeping missions, I will say that each peacekeeping mission has its own challenges depending also on the mandate of the Mission.

When I accepted this post, it was towards the end of 2014. At that time, there was prospect that a peace agreement was going to be signed, and that we will actually have a Mission dealing with important issues, as highlighted in a peace agreement.

Now, we are halfway in 2015, the peace agreement is still pending and has not been signed. What we have witnessed is an escalation of the fighting in recent weeks which has actually resulted in an increase in the number of internally displaced persons, now at the level of 1.6 million.

But clearly, I would not say that the picture and the outlook are completely bleak because over the four months I have been here, I did travel a lot, and I have had several contacts at the highest level with Government ministers. What I have heard, most of the time from those that I have met, is: ‘we want peace now, we want peace to happen’.

So I think it is important that (*inaudible*) we use this “we want peace now”, so that this phrase becomes a reality. My recent visit to Yambio in Western Equatoria was very interesting. Most of the time, there is a tendency to always talk about fighting. During my meeting with the Governor in Yambio, we talked about some challenges related to security, but he was also telling me, that in Western Equatoria there are areas in which (*he*) is now trying to put much more effort to bring development, because he believes that development can also bring peace in the country. And that is the reason why he mentioned the issues of agriculture, education and infrastructure. He felt that good infrastructure can help the interaction between the population so people get to know each other better, which can actually ease the whole process.

With regard to UNMISS, the mandate of the Mission was renewed, and the Security Council has given a mandate which is limiting us to four areas: protection of civilians, human rights related issues, following the cessation of hostilities and [*facilitating the delivery of humanitarian assistance*]. These are the areas where we are now working. What is really important is that we remember that we are also engaging with the Government to ensure that we can actually implement our mandate in a constructive manner.

And we are implementing our mandate. Today, UNMISS is sheltering more than 160,000 IDPs in its Protection of Civilian (PoC) sites. Yes, there are challenges, but we are doing our utmost to deal with the situation. And that is the reason why we believe it is important to engage with the Government so that conditions can be created for IDPs to feel more secure and ready to go back to their homes.

These are my introductory remarks. I am ready to take your questions.

Questions & Answers

Question: Ayuen Atem, Citizen Newspaper – (...) You have not commented on the recent instruction given by the Government of Unity State regarding the UNMISS State Coordinator. What can you say about it?

DSRSG: Thank you for this question. First of all, I want to say that the decision has been revoked. The State Coordinator, Mary [*Cummins*], is now in Unity State. I really want to thank the Government at the national level with whom we have had long engagement to discuss the issue. We also had interaction with the Government at the local level and

discussed the same issue. It is very encouraging to see that such direct action and engagement both at the national and local levels have actually prevented something like that to happen.

So I can reassure you, the State Coordinator is fine, she is in her position in Unity and we wish her all the best as well as a good working relationship with the state authorities.

Q – Waake Simon, Voice of America – (...) You mentioned that the future is bleak and that IDPs numbers have gone over 160,000. However, what were the previous figures before violence escalated so we know the difference?

DSRSG: I didn't say that the situation is bleak. In fact, I said that the situation is not that bleak because there are also positive points we can see. Regarding the negotiations, there is a lot going on. You recall that a three-day conference on Finance and Development just took place in Addis Abeba – it was also attended by the UN Secretary General. During the conference, participants used the opportunity to have discussions not only with the IGAD Chairperson but also with the Mediator, to see what can be the next step to re-launch the peace process.

In the country also, you have certainly all followed the return of the former detainees. (*Inaudible*), and in his Independence Day address, the President said that the issue is now closed. These are important steps which need to be considered. That said, we are also all very concerned because it has taken such a long time, almost a year and a half of negotiations to come up with an IGAD proposal (*inaudible*). We are all also hoping that with the appointment of a new Special Envoy for the African Union things will be moving. And we are actually hearing that after Eid [*end of Ramadan celebration*] there will be an IGAD meeting.

With regard to the IDPs, over 160,000 of them are on our PoC sites. Just during the recent fighting in Unity and Malakal, there has been an increase of almost 45,000 IDPs, and people keep coming because the area is still not calm. Actually, in Bentiu alone, we believe that over 100,000 IDPs are residing in the PoC site, which also creates challenging issues not only regarding how to get all the services they need, but also security-wise because the PoC site is next to the UNMISS base. We are working closely with our humanitarian colleagues to see how we can actually manage this big number of IDPs (...) and we are considering deploying more [*UN*] police officers, and also the Force, really trying to strengthen, so we can be sure that we have all the means to actually protect the civilians which is really a significant part of our mandate.

Question: Lwak Nelson, Radio Miraya – You mentioned working with the Government to better implement the Mission's mandate. So, what are the challenges the Mission faces in implementing its mandate and what are the areas you are working on with the Government to ensure the Mission actually implements its mandate effectively?

DSRSG: - Thank you very much for this question. First of all we are in a sovereign country. To be able to effectively implement our mandate, it is important that we have the support of the Government. It is the first thing.

The second thing that is very important: yes we sometimes do have challenges to implement our mandate. For example we have problems with our patrolling to reach out beyond our PoC sites. Protection of civilians does not mean protecting only those who are on our PoC sites, it is also about reaching out outside of the PoC sites to the people who are affected. This has been sometimes prevented by restrictions put on our patrols. This is the reason why we have to work with the Government so that they understand. (*Inaudible*).

Also sometimes for our flights, we have to have flight safety assurances which need to be discussed. The Government might grant such assurances, but is also denying them, because they feel the security situation is such that we cannot fly or we have to fly at our own risks.

When we look at the issue of PoC sites, IDPs are there because of the security situation. So we have to tell the Government, “(...) yes, they need to be protected and this is a security issue. But let’s discuss to improve the situation, let’s work together to guarantee the IDPs that it is better outside, and that they can leave the PoC sites”. So, there are several areas where we have to engage with the Government because at the end of the day, we are in a sovereign country, and we have to cooperate with the Government. This is key. (...)

One of the areas where we also need to work on is to support the cessation of hostilities. We do support the IGAD’s Joint Verification Mechanism while negotiations are ongoing - although the Mission per se is not fully involved in the negotiations as there is a Special Envoy for South Sudan and Sudan who is doing that. But it is important that we are involved because at the end of the day if there is any kind of peace agreement, the implementation of that peace agreement will come to us. So it is important that we remain involved.

In fact, it is also to prepare the ground for such discussions that we are engaging with the Government (...). We might not always have the same views but we have to sit down, discuss and agree on things we can agree on, and work on things we disagree on. Such dialogue, political dialogue, is key for the implementation of our mandate.

Question: Ayuen Atem, Citizen Newspaper s – You said that in recent months the number of IDPs arriving in PoC sites has increased. Is this ongoing or has it subsided? And lastly, in previous months, humanitarian organizations have complained of inadequate access to displaced persons in need of aid. I would like to understand if this still remains a challenge? And just one more, you did mention of course there is hope considering the current developments, political developments in the country. But again, with this increasing arrival of IDPs in the PoC sites camps, what does it signal? Are we having hope that the humanitarian situation improves or how would you describe it?

DSRSG: I am not the right person to answer this question; I am not the humanitarian coordinator. But I can tell you one good news: my colleague, the Deputy SRSR Resident Coordinator, Humanitarian Coordinator, Eugene Owusu will be joining us next week.

Having said that, it is clear that the humanitarian situation is dire. And that numbers are increasing. The more fighting, the more displacement. That is clear, it goes together. So as I said, there has to be a stop in the fighting, and to have a stop in the fighting we have to have a peace accord.

And believe me, I come myself from a country that has its own issues. I come from Mali, you have all heard we have now signed an agreement, a political agreement. With this kind of conflict and fighting, the solution is not military. You cannot solve such conflict only militarily. You have to engage with people, have people to sit down, to agree. That is the reason why I always say, that this crisis here in South Sudan has to be solved by the South Sudanese themselves. The international community will support, and will provide any kind of personnel support that is eventually needed. The international community might sometimes put pressure because it is important to have peace, but the final, final solution lies within the South Sudanese themselves.

Follow up: do the IDPs continue to arrive?

DSRSG: They are still coming. I don't want to go into details because I am not the Humanitarian Coordinator. (*Inaudible*). But it is ongoing because there is ongoing fighting.

Question: Lwak Nelson, Radio Miraya – If it is important for UNMISS to get involved in the peace process, is the UN or UNMISS working to be part of the IGAD plus?

DSRSG: When I say we are not in the peace process, it does not mean that we are completely disconnected from it. We do not have a mandate per se to be fully part of it, but we are informed, we are engaged, with the Special Envoy and all others. For example, when President Konare, the Special Envoy of the African Union came to Juba, we had discussions with him (...) on what he can do as a Special Envoy to bring peace to this country.

It is also important that at least we are here when decisions are made on the kind of activities that may be undertaken later on. As a Mission we might need to be involved. Because, in some way we will be part of the implementation of a peace agreement, we need somehow to be part of the process so that we can say 'this is possible, this is not possible'. Even though, we don't decide on the mandate per se, this is the Security Council which decides at the end of the day.
