

Resilience in the

Face of Adversity



Johnson

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The people of South Sudan have taught us a powerful lesson: never surrender to pessimism. Their resilience, which brought independence to this country, has also helped it overcome the daunting challenges of going through eighteen long months virtually without government revenues. I doubt

that any other nation would have avoided a meltdown from that situation. Now, with the resumption of oil production and relations with the Sudan back on a positive path, the time has come to make decisive strides to consolidate peace and stability throughout the country, focus on state building and nation building, and deliver on the peace dividends that the South Su-

dane people have waited for so long. Following the inspiring example of the people that it serves, the United Nations Mission in South Sudan, UNMISS, has remained resilient in the face of adversity. We lost a total of sixteen of our bravest colleagues in two senseless tragedies: the downing of an UNMISS helicopter on 21 December and an ambush on a UN convoy on 9 April. Among the dead were four Russian crew members, five Indian soldiers—who died while fighting to protect their colleagues—and two South Sudanese civilians. My prayers go out to them and their loved ones. We were encouraged by the outpouring of sympathy from all over South Sudan and from around the world, and the commitment of the Government of South Sudan to investigate and hold the perpetrators to account.

Both tragedies happened in Jonglei, a state most afflicted by insecurity and where protection of civilians is at the heart of UNMISS' operations. This is also a state where resilience is fundamental. Last year, UNMISS received threats by suspected David Yau Yau armed elements against one of our bases in Pibor County. Far from backing down, our response was to increase our military presence in the county. We stood firm in our commitment to support the Government's efforts to protect civilians.

With the same determination, we have continued to devote a large part of our military and civilian resources to support the efforts of national and state governments, the Presidential peace committee and all Jonglei communities, the police (SSNPS) and the SPLA, to establish lasting peace and stability in the state.

UNMISS has conducted well over a thousand military patrols, long- and short-duration, across Jonglei State, since last August to reach out to and protect all communities. Since the horrific attack in Wangar in South West Akobo in early February, we have increased our military presence to six companies, equally present in the areas of all three main communities (Bor Dinka, Lou Nuer and Murle). We are not the peacekeepers of one community; we are the peacekeepers of all of them. In response to their needs in the current circumstances, we have contingency plans to strengthen our deployment even further, committing up to two thirds of the total UNMISS force to Jonglei if need be. If UNMISS has not been there to protect a community from an attack, it is due to two reasons: either we have not received early warning early enough, or logistical and weather challenges have delayed our timely response.

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In a country as vast as South Sudan, where rains and mud hinder movement by road for most of the year and dependency on air assets is close to total in many remote locations, protecting the population from attacks is a most challenging undertaking. Our deployments often face repeated delays. UNMISS still operates with about a half of its engineering capacity and half of its military utility helicopters—we had none for more than a year!

But even if we were to deploy up to our last pair of boots and all our assets to Jonglei or to any other state, we could never replace the Government, the police (SSNPS) or the SPLA in that part of the country. The primary responsibility to protect the population rests with the Government of the Republic of South Sudan. Like all UN peacekeeping missions, UNMISS can only support the country's institutions to help them fulfill their responsibilities as a sovereign State. We put at their service the resources that UN member states so generously give us to achieve the goal that they and the Government of South Sudan have set for us: to help consolidate peace and security, to help extend and consolidate the authority of the Republic throughout the entire territory of South Sudan, and to help establish the conditions for development.

This is a very ambitious — yet attainable — goal that entails building capacity of South Sudan's institutions to protect civilians, to protect the rights that the people of South Sudan fought for so many decades, including freedom of speech and the right to elect a democratic government that is accountable to the people, and to create opportunities for the youth and deliver essential services for the people. In many ways, this is the promise that late Dr. John Garang de Mabior made when the 2004 Nairobi Declaration was signed:

...solve inter communal conflicts, as well as the root causes of conflicts and instability. Physical protection is essential but will not, by itself, bring long term peace and stability. A central element in the long term protection of civilians efforts of the Government and of UNMISS is to seek political solutions to inter-communal conflict: to support peace initiatives aimed at bringing durable solutions to disputes over scarce natural resources: land, grazing, water. UNMISS support to peace initiatives in Jonglei, in the tri-state area of Warrap, Lakes and Unity, in the Equatoria and elsewhere, has been considerable, but discreet, as national and state authorities and the communities involved must take the lead and assume full ownership of these processes.

The second area where steady progress is taking place is the transformation of the South Sudan National Police Service to build a professional and effective police service. The Government and the South Sudanese National Police Service, with the support of UNMISS and other partners, have completed the registration of 46,000 police officers. Names have been recorded on an electronic database and ghost officers will be weeded out, establishing new standards of professionalism and transparency. At the same time, UN Police are training police at all levels, both on the job, as well as its institutions, improving the conduct and capacity of the SSNPS and helping transform the whole police service.

A third area where progress is moving forward is the rule of law. The Government, with the support of UNMISS and other UN partners, has addressed more than a thousand cases of prolonged and arbitrary detention. Mobile courts are also being established by the Government with our support, to address prolonged and arbitrary detention, and to improve access to justice.

Progress in these and other areas of UNMISS mandate, such as support for security sector reform and DDR (Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration), has not been without challenges. But UNMISS has not surrendered to pessimism, nor even when the challenges seem immense, and attacks question the security and safety of our personnel and operations. Much bigger strides are needed in the coming months to consolidate the still fragile institutions of South Sudan. UNMISS will remain resilient to adversity to help the Government make headway in pursuing further political reforms, to undertake broad consultations on making of a permanent Constitution, to improve the human rights situation throughout the country, and to conduct a population census and democratic elections.

There is no single recipe to achieve these milestones; but there are two ingredients that must be present in any of them: transparency and accountability — of the Government, the public administration, the police, the SPLA, the communities, grassroots organizations, the oil companies, the media and, of course, the international organizations and the UN Mission in South Sudan. This includes the personnel of UNMISS and other UN partners. We are bound by the highest standards of ethical conduct and discipline. All UN organizations have internal and external mechanisms of audit and control that are mandatory and are activated automatically when reasonable suspicion of wrongdoing exist. Personal accountability and responsibility should guide all of us — the Government and all its institutions, and international partners — to prove the nay-sayers wrong and to help South Sudan succeed in fulfilling its promise of a better life for all.