



United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS)

Media & Spokesperson Unit
Communications & Public Information Section

Near verbatim transcript

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Eugene Owusu

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UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator in South Sudan**

UNMISS Spokesperson (*Introduction of Mr. Owusu*)

DSRSG -Eugene Owusu- Distinguished friends from the media, Ladies and Gentlemen, thank you so much for the time taken to join us at the press briefing. Most importantly, thank you for your outstanding contribution and support to our humanitarian and development work here in South Sudan.

Ongoing fighting in some parts of this country continues to compound an already dire humanitarian situation. According to the Humanitarian Response Plan which we released at the beginning of the year, 7.5 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance. New clashes since the beginning of 2017 have sadly uprooted tens of thousands of people from their homes. Civilians continue to be killed and are subjected to horrendous violations including sexual violence.

An estimated 3.5 million people have now been displaced, including 1.9 million people who are internally displaced, and 1.6 million who have fled as refugees to neighbouring countries.

Recent numbers that we have indicate that close to one million people have fled to Uganda. Women, girls and children have taken the largest toll from this crisis. Women, sadly, are at an extremely high risk of being sexually assaulted or raped. A recent survey revealed that cases of sexual assault and gender based violence increased by 64% in 2016 compared to the previous year. Against a backdrop of prevailing impunity, a major fear for women and children in this country is, sadly, the fear of being raped.

Over the past week, as a direct result of the upsurge of violence in Wau, some 17,000 people have taken refuge at the Protection of Civilians (PoC) site in Wau town, bringing the total number of civilians seeking protection in that site to some 42,000 people. In Central Equatoria, since the beginning of 2017,

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conflict has caused massive displacements from Kajo-Keiji and elsewhere in the region. In Upper Nile, clashes on the West Bank in late January and February forced some 30,000 people to flee Wau Shilluk and the surrounding areas while thousands of civilians in Unity continue to live in swamps and remote islands due to the fear of attacks.

Food insecurity and malnutrition is a serious challenge and have reached unprecedented levels in this country. On 20th February this year, localised famine was declared in two counties; in Leer and in Mayendit. Some hundreds of thousands of people are facing starvation and a million more are on the brink of famine across the country.

As regards to the operating environment, humanitarian workers are increasingly operating in a difficult and dangerous environment and humanitarian workers are paying the ultimate sacrifice with their lives. Over the weekend, the humanitarian community had to relocate 60 humanitarian workers in parts of Jonglei following serious violence and the escalation on insecurity there. At least 82 aid workers have been killed since December 2013, including recent killings of six aid workers in an ambush attack on the road between Juba and Pibor. A week ago, we lost three contractors working for one of the humanitarian agencies in Wau.





Aid workers are often harassed across the country and humanitarian compounds and supplies have been looted and vandalised, most recently in Jonglei, in Kajo-Keiji, Yei, Wau Shilluk and in Mayendit – all these happened between February and March.

We discussed these issues with our government counterparts at the recently held humanitarian high level of [inaudible] committee meeting about a fortnight ago. Last week, these issues were again raised with the authorities by the visiting UN and NGO emergency directors who came from various headquarters and capitals.

In carrying out our work as humanitarians to provide much needed assistance to populations and communities in need, humanitarians face repeated challenges to reach people in dire need as a result of insecurity and access denials. The biggest part of access challenges that we have to deal with is not at the national level but rather at the sub-national level. We have codified these incidents; the incidents that have to do with access denials and we are in the process of sharing them with the national government for their action.

Working with government, the UN and international partners are dedicated to responding to the current famine. So far, humanitarian partners have already delivered lifesaving assistance and protection to at least 1.6 million people in 2017, including assistance provided to some 400,000 people in locations affected by famine in Leer and Mayendit and locations of higher risk of famine including Koch and Paninjar. This has been possible due to the collective prioritisation of response efforts, as it is simply not possible to meet all needs everywhere and flexible response modalities including a combination of static presence and mobile response teams have been employed.

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Our response has focused on scaling up food assistance, nutrition and health provisions, WASH, and enhancing livelihood opportunities for those unfortunate citizens in those parts of the country.

Humanitarians are responding to large-scale displacements in and around Kodok and Aburok in Fashoda County, Upper Nile. Much more needs to be done to pull from the brink the hundreds of thousands who are severely insecure and on the verge of famine.

I wish to conclude my brief remarks with seven key messages:

First, the guns have to fall silent and the cessation of hostilities must hold. While humanitarians will continue to do all that is possible to alleviate suffering, the fact remains that unless the guns don't fall silent, the humanitarian situation will continue to deteriorate. The people of South Sudan have suffered for far too long.

My second message is that while humanitarian workers in this country remain ready to scale up efforts, all parties to the conflict must ensure that the operating environment is conducive to the delivery of aid by ensuring free, safe and unhindered access to all areas of this country in order to avert the spread of famine.

In this regard, the humanitarian community welcomes commitments made by his Excellency the President and the Minister of Humanitarian Affairs to remove obstacles including minimising transactions cost to humanitarian workers.





Third; funding is urgently needed particularly to scale up the famine response to deliver vital supplies during the dry season. We must take urgent action now to avert further catastrophe in the months ahead. Since the famine was announced, several donors have generously announced contributions to our efforts, however much more is urgently needed to enable timely humanitarian action.

Fourth; the humanitarian challenges that we are dealing with are the consequences of the failure of politics to reconcile differences and to address grievances. We must fix the politics, all parties must step up efforts towards the political solution to help lessen the humanitarian case-load.

Fifth; ultimately, the long-term answer to the humanitarian situation is recovery, stabilisation and development. There must be a corresponding increase in investments in livelihoods. Investing in livelihoods in itself is lifesaving but peace and relative security at community levels are needed to provide an opportunity to scale up interventions and recovery and stabilisations initiatives which many communities in this country presently deserve so much.

Sixth; the UN country team and its interim cooperation framework remains committed to scaling up its programming beyond humanitarian assistance to activities such as resilience building, helping to revitalise local economies, supporting the provision of basic social services to the most vulnerable in

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society, supporting peace and governance initiatives, and also extending support to some of the most vulnerable in society – which are women and the youth.

Seventh; the devastating effects of sexual violence experienced by the women and girls of South Sudan as a result of this conflict. Violence against women is against our core values as human beings. The horrors that young girls and women go through in the form of rape as a result of this conflict are repulsive. It must stop and the most severe actions must be taken against those perpetrators. The people of South Sudan have suffered enough. An end to violence is the only way forward for the people of South Sudan to enjoy sustained peace and to be able to live in dignity, for communities to be able to recover, for all of us to work together on the path of development. What we need to fight is poverty and under-development; this should be the priority of every citizen of this country.

Thank you.

I am now ready for any questions that you may have.

Question and Answer




DPA News Agency- You mentioned that 60 aid workers have been withdrawn from Jonglei state areas where the conflict has intensified. How will helpless people survive without aid workers?

DRSSG Owusu -As Humanitarian Coordinator, and the humanitarian community as a whole, we have a duty of care to aid workers. And that duty of care, for me is sacrosanct, the safety and security of aid workers is absolutely important for us. An aid worker can only deliver if he is alive. A dead aid worker cannot deliver services to communities. The minimum security conditions on the ground must prevail to enable aid workers to be present in locations to deliver much needed services to the unfortunate people in parts of this country who need assistance. This brings me to the imperative of all of us, particularly of the parties to the conflict, the imperative of really safe-guarding the safety and security of humanitarian workers. Attacks against humanitarian workers are repulsive and are unacceptable, and we will only operate in areas where the minimum security conditions are available.

Eye Radio- Why are we not seeing the speedy deployment of the Regional Protection Force (RPF) in South Sudan despite the worsening security situation in the country?

DRSSG Owusu -The conversations around the RPF have been very difficult but also very constructive with the government of South Sudan. We certainly cannot impose an RPF in this country, the RPF installation process has to be negotiated with the government, and that process has been ongoing for a while. I can confirm right now that the RPF command headquarters is already in place in Juba, an RPF commander has been appointed, UNMISS is currently preparing for the incoming RPF vanguard unit which are hopefully expected to be in the country within the next couple of weeks. There has been some difficult political conversations around this and personally I'm very happy that most of the

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obstacles have been removed to enable the RPF in this country. The RPF is important for UNMISS because it will augment its capacity to be able to protect civilians who need the assistance of UNMISS.

CCTV- I have a question on, the Japanese are withdrawing, and we know the UN is saying they need more troops to be in the country. What is the UN doing as they are withdrawing from the Country?

DRSSG Owusu -I think we need to understand why the UN is in the Country. The UN is in this country because of the issues around peace and security, but I should also emphasise that securing the wellbeing of South Sudanese is the responsibility of the government of South Sudan. The UN certainly is here to support, and we do so within the context of the mandate that we have even to work with by the Security Council. That mandate equips us with resources that we need to work to execute our mandate . But I would like to emphasise that the solution ultimately is not the UN, the solution ultimately is that assuring that the guns remain silent, the solution ultimately is finding a political solution to what indeed is political crisis. Personally, I wish that the guns remain silent, we find a political solution so that the UN will find its way to work its way; that is what I believe all of us desire.

Juba Monitor- since the declaration of famine in some parts of this country, how much funding has been received and how much is needed?





DRSSG Owusu -well as you know the UN earlier and the humanitarian community have launched humanitarian response plan and the total level of our resources required to deliver assistance and protection to 7.5 million people in need in this country is later that 1.6 billion US dollars. To date we are able to mobilize under 30% of the total requirement that is needed, but bear in mind that the famine was declared after the humanitarian response plan was launched. So clearly there is a need for augmentation of resources .I am pleased to mention that since the declaration of famine a number of donor countries have announced indeed to support our efforts . This is all done within the context of the global humanitarian response plan. So I cannot tell you specific content of resources that are targeted towards famine, but we also need to bear on mind that we should be careful not to have hyper focus on famine, because the famine currently affects a hundred thousand people, so we have a million people who are on the brink, so a lot of our energies should be in investing on assisting poor people who are on the brink, to pull back people who are on the brink, to pull back people who are in the precipices. That is what we are focusing on, so in addition to the farming, we are also scaling up our assistance to the large number of people who are in need in this country.

Bakita Radio -Apparently, the International community is claiming that the political parties, including the ruling party, the SPLM have failed to effectively protect its people so what is the move that the UN is going to enforce the government to protect its people?

DRSSG Owusu -Let me underscore an important point that I mentioned earlier on; which is that the government of South Sudan has the primary responsibility to protect the people of this country, the government of South Sudan has the primary responsibility for the wellbeing and welfare of all the citizens. The UN and partners are here to support the government in this regard. And certainly as

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UNMISS, we will continue with the mandate to protect civilians, but also remember we are dealing with the major protection crisis, and I will go back to what I said earlier on, the ultimate solution is the cessation of hostilities, the solution short term might be providing protection to those who are in need. But bear in mind UNMISS has a force 12 thousand troops, there are 11 million South Sudanese estimated. UNMISS cannot put a soldier behind every South Sudanese, so there are limits on what UNMISS should do even in the context of its mandate. And this is why all of us are continuing to emphasize the imperative to make sure that cessation of hostilities take root and that is why it is important that the guns should remain silent, that is why it is important that there is true political dialogue, that is why it is important that we find a political solution to what indeed is a political crisis. The protection of civilians is really just compensating for the problem, the solution to the problem lies frankly in finding a political solution to the unfortunate crisis that we have found ourselves in.





VOA-I would just like to understand the challenges that are affecting the humanitarian aid operation in South Sudan. Do you see them increasing and there is this issue of killing, statistics indicates at least 80 humanitarians workers have been killed. As according to UNMISS understanding, are these killings targeted?

DRSSG Owusu -Well there are proletariat of challenges that humanitarians have today in in this country. I think the first challenge is indeed the safety and security of humanitarians' workers as you rightly said. Since the beginning of this crisis, we have lost at least 82 of our colleagues, I believe if I remember the figures properly I think the whole of last year we lost about 24 humanitarian workers, yet today we have lost 14 humanitarian workers. This clearly represents deterioration... is a manifestation of deterioration certainly in the operating environment.

The other challenge that we do have and we have talked about it on numerous occasions has to do with some of the access challenge that we have. And is very important the we compact the access challenges so that we fully understand what they are, some of those challenges barely have to do with the geography of this country, I mean there are times of the year when most parts of this country are impassable, and some of the challenges, the access challenges also have to do with beaurocratic constrains that we do face, some of the challenges come in the form of physical restrain and some of that sometimes have to do with insecurity in parts of the county.

I think the positive message always is that we have been discussing the access challenges extensively with government it is now very clear and I really want to use this opportunity to comment our counter parts in government also His Excellency the President himself for the directive presidential decree that he issued for humanitarians should be granted safe and unhindered access to all parts of the country as we carry out humanitarian work. We have also been discussing this with the Minister of Humanitarian Affairs, is become very clear that most of the blockage is not at national level, a lot of the blockage is at sub-national level and it comes in the form of arbitrary actions by individuals at sub-national level

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What we are asking for is the latter and spirit of that directive issued by the president to be respected indeed by all because what we do find is that more often down road, there is a bit of a gap between the intention that directive issued by the president and the actions that take place at the ground level.

But we are engaging around this, we do have some sympathetic ears in the government, I think I would say, yes, the situation is quite, serious it is difficult in some instances it is very bad and then but at least the conversation is ongoing with our partners in government

Dawn Daily Newspaper: Now this 82 aid workers, who exactly killed them?





DRSSG Owusu -well I don't have any evidence of the perpetrators, I personally and certainly don't have any evidence of those perpetrators, but I think it has happened under different circumstance, clearly under different circumstance. I must say what matters to me most as the humanitarian coordinator is the fact that large numbers of people are sadly losing their lives and this has to stop. The warring parties have an obligation to humanitarian just as we have an obligation to the affected population in this country, I am using the medium to make a personal appeal to all the warring parties in this regards, the killing, the harassment of humanitarian workers are reprehensible and there are an acceptable and it has to stop.

Xinhua News Agency – I would like to quote the UN Advisor on prevention of genocide on what he said when he came last year, he said the killings are actually nearing genocide and even the British Secretary for international development held a press conference in Kampala, it is Patel I think, she also said the same thing that what is happening in South Sudan is a tribal genocide. So do you agree with them on what's happening in this country? Is there anything nearing that?

DRSSG Owusu – Obviously I cannot comment on the statement made by Minister Prity Patel and that is a comment you have to follow up with the Minister, and certainly the British government. Yes you are right in saying that the UN Special Advisor on Genocide Adama Deng was her I believe sometime in November last year and during his visit he warned about the signs and hallmarks of possible genocide. That is in the public domain, you guys met with him. I mean certainly as the UN naturally, we are worried about this warning; we are worried about the risk of genocide , but I think what is important at this point in time is all sides , everybody must be proactive and condemn ethnic related injustice and also actions that incite hateful speech . This issue is high on the agenda of the UN, I do know that UNMISS is monitoring hate speech and the government is also now talking against hate speech. And I think this is a very welcome development indeed

Eye Radio – MSF last week said that UN is not providing safety and protection to people outside the POC sites ,it is only protecting those within the POC sites , what would be your response regarding this ?





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DRSSG Owusu- There are a number of things that we need to reflect on. Obviously that is the view of the MSF official. You know this is a huge country. I believe the geographic size of this country is probably the size of France. This is a huge country with 11 million people with significant infrastructure deficits unfortunately. Let us remember that. Secondly there are 1.9 million people presently internally displaced which is a huge number. Of these we have 220 thousand people (inaudible) within the protection of civilian sites. And then we have 12 thousand peace keepers certainly in this country. Work out the math and see whether practically it is possible to provide absolute protection to every civilian in this country. I think we need to calibrate ambitions as to what the mission can achieve and what the mission cannot achieve when it comes to protection of civilians. But I will go back to the point I made earlier that the protection of civilians in South Sudan is the primary responsibility of the government. The UN and partners are in this country to support the government certainly in that respect. So as the UN we will continue to maximally provide protection within the constraints that we face in terms of the resources that we do have. But again ultimately the solution is not protection of civilians. Short term yes that's necessary , but ultimately it's about bringing this conflict to an end , so that the unfortunate people of this country who have suffered far too long can live a life of peace , they can live a life of prosperity and dignity . Let me say here that living a life of dignity is the God given right of every individual and we must respect that God given right and provide all the people in this country that opportunity to live that life.

Spokesperson – Mr. Owusu thank you very much for joining us today and thank you listeners of Radio Miraya.

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