



PRESS RELEASE

**UNMISS PRESS CONFERENCE
REMARKS BY SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL AND
HEAD OF UNMISS, MR NICHOLAS HAYSOM
2 August 2023**

Good morning to all of you and welcome to the regular UNMISS Press Conference.

Let me also welcome everyone joining us live on Radio Miraya across the country.

The press conference is part of our commitment to provide regular updates to the media and to the people of South Sudan, on our assessment of the current situation of the country and what UNMISS is doing under our mandate.

Let me begin by acknowledging some positive developments over the last three months. The government-led Joint Taskforce for the implementation of Constitution-Making and Electoral Processes (CMP), along with AU and IGAD, and UN participation, is now up and running. There have been multi-party discussions on the budget for the elections, the National Elections Act is under consideration by parliament and the police have begun conversations around security during elections.

I'd want to commend the recent public remarks by the President during the 12th Independence Day celebrations and the Martyrs Day that acknowledged firstly that this is a critical phase in the consolidation of peace, he reinforced the message not to return to war, and he endorsed a path forward to the elections in 2024, on time and without further extensions of the roadmap.

Time is of the essence. Only 17 months remain on the roadmap timelines before the elections in December 2024. I repeat what I had said in an earlier press conference that 2023 is a 'make or break' year such that the decisions and actions that must be made now have to be made in order to pave the way for the holding of peaceful, inclusive, and credible elections next year.

The candid and honest observation of most analysts, observers and stakeholders is that as it stands today, South Sudan is not yet ready for elections, but that elections could be held on schedule if there is adequate political will, a practical political approach to the arrangements and commensurate resources are applied to achieving the benchmarks in the roadmap.

Let me emphasize that elections are not merely a one-day event, but a process that involves deliberate and thoughtful actions before, well before, during and after the electoral process. The process must have the full confidence of the South Sudanese people to make it a nation-building, not a divisive or violent activity.

It begins with laying the right foundation for the legal framework of elections through the multi-party deliberation in parliament. This means critical decisions about the type and format of elections, how many elections will be held; questions on the census, voter registration, on the inclusion of refugees and IDPs, as well as the establishment of relevant bodies and legal structures that can address elections related disputes must all be taken now.

The reconstitution of three essential bodies, I'd want to underline, the National Constitutional Review Commission (R-NCRC), the National Elections Commission, and Political Parties Council (PPC) must be prioritized.

These foundational tasks also encompass the drafting of a new constitution, where the parties must reach consensus on the constitutional provisions and have realistic expectations on what can be done in the remaining time and within existing resource constraints.

A stable security situation is non-negotiable. Ongoing questions on the transitional security arrangements must be addressed urgently, particularly the ranking of the middle echelons of the uniformed forces and the training and deployment of the Necessary Unified Forces. We hope that the promises that we have heard regarding these developments, that they are imminent, that they will shortly be resolved, and that the promises are kept.

Additionally, creating a conducive political and civic environment is required for all political parties, civil society groups, media, and all South Sudanese. All must have confidence in guarantees that they can exercise their liberties without fear, including to freely express their views and present different opinions, and engage in debate on the political and constitutional choices facing the nation.

Simply holding elections is not enough - the credibility, transparency and inclusivity of the process is what brings legitimacy. This includes that political parties must be able to register and campaign freely. And there must be a civil society that will serve as an extended arms for civic education and act as observer watchdogs of the process. It includes a media that can report on the process and give space to the variety of voices and opinions for voters to make informed choices.

In our consultations with civil society including youth, women, and persons with disabilities, all have agreed that marginalized groups should be included in the electoral process and guaranteed representation in the legislature: including the 35% for women, and a proposal for reserved seats for youth and people with disabilities.

For our part, UNMISS is currently supporting the transitional government in the Constitution-Making Process and the planning for elections. At the request of the government, UNMISS, the AU, and IGAD have presented a list of immediate priority decisions related to elections which need to be taken by the parties to the peace agreement. These key decisions are anticipated to be put forward to the political parties and Council of Ministers for consideration.

Let me talk now a little bit to the Sudan Crisis. Part of my job as the Head of the UN in South Sudan is to ensure that the interests of South Sudanese people are kept on the international agenda and the focus of international partners. In my briefing with the Security Council in New York and in my engagements with regional and international partners, I continue to remind all that we must keep a close watch on what is happening in Sudan, it would be a mistake to take our eyes off the ball in South Sudan.

The war in Sudan dominates regional and global attention, while South Sudan bears the brunt of at least some of the crises. Food prices have increased, reducing the ability of vulnerable households to access food to meet basic requirements, while reduced cross-border trade has led to localized scarcity of food commodities. With over, as of latest count, 201,000 entrants recorded at present, the overwhelming majority of whom are South Sudanese, the humanitarian community in South Sudan has called for urgent funding, including an immediate need of

US\$26.4 million to be able to provide transportation until the end of the year for the tens of thousands of people fleeing the Sudan conflict.

Without onward transportation available, there is the risk of more congestion in and around the border towns where humanitarian services are already overstretched. The congestion and increased competition over scarce resources could also exacerbate existing inter-communal tensions between the returnees and host communities and between some of the returnee communities, and this needs to be averted. UNMISS has intensified its patrols and reinforced its presence in Renk to mitigate and prevent any outbreak of violence.

We'd want to commend the Government of South Sudan for keeping its borders open and call on authorities to mobilize additional resources to support the returnees and refugees. The Mission also commends humanitarian actors for their continued engagement and reiterates the call for additional support from national, regional, and international partners to help bridge the funding gap.

The situation in Sudan serves as a wake-up call for all of us in South Sudan. It reinforces the imperative to move swiftly in strengthening the foundations for peace, stability, and inclusive governance.

We remain concerned about the situation in and around Malakal. It remains fragile, following the clashes at the Protection of Civilian (PoC) site in early June. Our forces tried to respond as quickly as they could in a densely populated camp of 45,000 IDPs in a conflict involving two sets of armed youth militias but which nonetheless saw the tragic loss of 17 lives.

We acknowledge the support of the humanitarian community and state authorities that was received by UNMISS in managing to restore law and order, in the aftermath the force extracted 51 persons trapped in the POC site and saw to life saving medical attention for a further 28 persons. We have deployed additional peacekeepers to strengthen security in and around the area, carried out, even as we speak, cordon and search operations in the POC sites for weapons, and within our means, we will do whatever it takes to protect civilians.

An internal after-action review of the events in the Malakal POC site is near completion. We are treating this as an opportunity to adapt to changing circumstances and consider how we can improve our ability to contain violence.

In this regard, I acknowledge the effective cooperation we've been having with the Governor of Upper Nile State, the South Sudan People's Defense Forces, the South Sudan National Police Service, and the National Security Service, in restoring calm and maintaining security.

The Mission continues to appeal to all communities to exercise maximum restraint. We urge the local and state authorities to address and mitigate any potential flashpoints.

Intercommunal violence continues to claim lives, as the country grapples with political and economic issues, as well as the effects of climatic shocks, including drought and floods. Recently, in the Greater Pibor Administrative Area, rumours of mobilization have led to an influx of people into Pibor, following an attack along Nanaam river. UNMISS has dispatched patrols to Likonguale and other places to monitor the situation and help avert further violence. And I'm happy to report that the immediate threat appears to have dissipated, at the least the immediate threat to Jonglei and the Pibor Administrative Area.

Cattle-related and general violence in the tri-states of Unity, Warrap and Lakes has resulted in the deaths of an alarming number of people. Friction due to the presence of cattle herders fleeing the conflict in Sudan, or between settler communities and migrant cattle keepers in parts of Western and Eastern Equatoria and Central Equatoria adds to the growing tensions, with potentially devastating negative consequences for lives and property of ordinary South Sudanese citizens.

We continue to condemn this violence and advocate for solutions. Last year we jointly organized the national livestock conference, which delivered some important recommendations for the sector, and I wish to call on the governors, the Transitional Government of National Unity and other stakeholders to take the recommendations forward so as to challenge the practice of cattle raiding and migration-related violence.

My friends, South Sudan needs to urgently complete the transitional period of the Revitalized Peace Agreement, so as to guarantee the foundation for peace and sustainable development in the hands of South Sudanese. My assessment from interactions with regional and international partners here and outside suggest the need within South Sudan to deepen the trust between communities to build common purpose and a shared vision of the future.

I believe there will be international willingness to support the peace process and the elections if there are demonstrable actions by the principal stakeholders in those elections and the creation of the right frameworks to allow for the receipt of such assistance. Key decisions about electoral, constitutional and security structures must be made urgently; and these decisions do not require special additional financial resources.

Success in this area will persuade donors and international partners that a peaceful and secure South Sudan is a viable place for investment and support.

I want to assure the people of South Sudan that the United Nations family remain committed to supporting them and to working with other regional and international partners towards peace, security, and prosperity in South Sudan.

Thank you for listening. I will now take a few questions.

Q & A

Q: *Is there any effort from your side towards tackling the situation in Sudan?*

SRSG: For a start, let me just say that we are particularly concerned about the situation in Sudan and we recognise that it has a spillover effect on South Sudan, making it more difficult here in South Sudan to tackle critical issues which this country is facing, including economic and humanitarian challenges. So, we would want to see peace in Sudan as soon as possible.

In the case of my mission, we do not have responsibility for Sudan, but I'm in regular contact with the UN structures that are engaged in Sudan and they are doing whatever they can to support the process of bringing the two generals together to negotiate the ceasefire - which I understand to be the preeminent initial first step required of those two - so that we can deliver humanitarian goods and secure the space for a longer term civilian-led engagement for a sustainable solution there.

As I said, we are acutely aware that one of the great dangers that South Sudan faces is that there will be an attack on the oil pipeline, which would have an almost immediate impact on the economy of South Sudan and South Sudan is really not in a position to withstand another

significant shock. So far, that hasn't happened, but it gives a real particular interest to South Sudan to do whatever it can to ensure peace.

Let me acknowledge the efforts of President Kiir to, himself, participate and support the peace initiatives which have emerged. Thank you.

Q: I would like to thank you very much for inviting us here. Would you kindly share with us some of the list of priorities you talked about. You said there is a list of priorities you presented which you think are important for elections.

Now to my question: If you ask the public opinion in South Sudan, it seems to suggest that it's not possible to conduct elections next year, December 2024. But there are also people who believe there is need for elections so that South Sudanese can have the chance to participate in the first democratic process by electing the leaders of their own. And the President said there is need to conduct elections so that the country can exit from what he calls the transitional government status. Do you share the feelings and the concerns of some South Sudanese who believe it is not the right time to conduct elections? According to them, if elections are conducted, it may not meet the standards of being free, fair, and credible. Do you share the concerns of some of these South Sudanese?

SRSG: So, let me take the question of public opinion. The public opinion polls that we've seen have suggested, rather surprisingly, an enthusiasm for the elections on the part of the South Sudanese public. Even those who are apprehensive that the elections may be accompanied by violence, would rather have elections than no elections. I haven't seen any opinion polls which assess whether ordinary people believe the country is ready, but I would imagine - common sense and my own observation to you earlier - is that the country has not yet established the infrastructure to hold elections. And the infrastructure has two dimensions: It has the administrative dimensions, in other words, the decisions, which I'll come back to in a moment, which establish the management of the elections and the transparency of the elections; and then secondly, a different kind of infrastructure, which is what we call the political and civil environment in which elections must take place. I don't think the elections will have the effect they should have if they are not transparent, if they are not free and they are not fair. Then, simply, they will provide a basis for more conflict. It's really important that we establish proper foundations for the elections.

That brings me to your question: Can it be done? And the answer is I can't call that question now. I can tell you that as matters stand, the country is not ready for elections. But can I say that it is not able to prepare for elections in a year and three months' time? The answer, and I think I gave this last time, is that the answer to that question lies in the hands of the stakeholders and the political players - not the international community, not observers. And so, we are really looking towards the demonstration of the political will and urgency that will be required to put all those arrangements in place.

Let me give you a snapshot of some of the decisions. Currently, the legislation envisages that there will be, I think, 8 elections on Election Day. If you take Payam and the other elections, elections for the quarters which are held separately, it means people will have 12 or 13 ballot papers. They will have to fill out each one to vote on Election Day. Now the political parties have to assess whether that is too complicated. I'm told that in developed countries, they would not be able to cope with that level of complexity. So, who can take that decision? Well,

we can't take it. As I said earlier, only the political players can decide how many elections will be held.

Will the elections be held under a proportional representation system or a first-past-the-post single member constituency system, or a mixture of both. And how will you provide for their quotas? Those are quite complex questions, but they have to be decided upon so that we can go ahead and prepare for the elections.

What about the census? Is there going to be a census or not? We can't decide that decision. The parties to the R-ARCSS have to decide whether they will have a census. I should remark that many countries in Africa or few countries in Africa have a census before the elections. Most countries find other ways of establishing their population data because a census is expensive and takes a long time.

What's also expensive and takes a long time is voter registration. Are you going to use voter registration to detect fraud? Well, if you're going to take voter registration, you've only got one chance to do it, given the logistical complexities of South Sudan. You've got to do it in the dry season. There's one dry season left. So, you've got to take the decisions necessary for a voter registration exercise to take place if you want to press ahead.

We have to know, is the constitution going to be completely revamped or is the important part going to be tackled because you know that the R-ARCSS requires the Election Act to be tested against the new constitution so that they can establish that the new Election Act is compatible with the new constitution. So that critically involves a question around the timelines for making a new constitution and giving it over to the Legislative Assembly.

These are all important questions. Are they going to be independent candidates in the elections? Major issue. It's a design question which the political parties have to decide. And we've made it clear that although we're willing to assist, we will provide expertise, we'll provide comparative examples including from practice in Africa - best practices in Africa - so that we can help the elections take place. But we cannot take the decisions on behalf of other people.

As I shared with you in my main speech, we've given a list of these critical questions over to the task force that's dealing with preparations, and we're hoping that the parties will get down to taking the decisions. They can't take the decisions in December. It's too late for those questions. We won't be able to fit everything in. So, we want to see a sense of urgency in the process.

Is there anything else I should add?

Some of the political parties are complaining that they can't register, and they can't register because there's no political parties' council within which would enable their registration. If they can't register, they can't campaign. But some parties are campaigning freely, so there is a question around establishing a level playing field for the elections and we would want the political parties also to engage on that important question. Let me take one more question.

Q: My question is in regard to a recent visit by the UNHCR Special Envoy for the whole of Africa, Mohamed Affey, who visited Upper Nile and went to the reception centres at Renk. He described the situation as unacceptable. Not forgetting the other conditions of those displaced within the country, leave alone, those coming from the north, from Sudan. So as a Mission leadership, what are you doing to ensure that the government and partners actually undertake practical measures beyond humanitarian action?

SRSB: Let me say we're doing everything within our means. Can we solve all the problems? Can we provide the \$26 million? No, we can't. Government, international funders are going to have to put up the money that is necessary to move people on from Renk, and if they don't move on from Renk then they'll be growing congestion at Renk and a deterioration of the conditions.

Let me be clear though, the conditions at Renk are not going to be as good as the conditions under which settled communities and IDPs live, because it's expected to be a transit centre for people to stay only a few days before they move on, so we're aware of the conditions in Renk and you're quite right, they're unacceptable. But that's the best we can do. This is an emergency. There's a war in Sudan, and people are coming through - 201,000 have come through. So, this country is, going to have to, together with the international community, do what it can.

Let me say, the funding environment in the international community is tough because there are other compelling issues which are attracting the attention of the international donors. Recently we had the visit of the three Rome based Principals, the food security organizations WFP, FAO, and we said "thank you" because we need to put South Sudan on the list. We're not on the list of crises at the moment, so unfortunately, and you can't believe it if you live here. But we need to solicit the support of all our colleagues in putting South Sudan on the list.

Q: *There's a report that Radio Miraya has registered with the media authority. Can you tell us what made Radio Miraya register with the media authority and under which law?*

And then the second question, you talk, you did mention about the rumours of mobilizations of the people, which will lead to displacement of people in Pibor. Can you shed more light on this? We like to know how many people have been displaced and who are those mobilizing, and they are mobilizing to do what?

SRSB: It seems there was a limited mobilization from people around the Nanaam area. I didn't know the actual site, but they drifted towards Pibor, and they've now drifted back to their places of origin.

On Radio Miraya, there's a press conference tomorrow at which the issue of Radio Miraya and... whether the long-standing dispute between UNMISS and the Government over Radio Miraya will be resolved. I'm not going to anticipate that press conference.

Q: *My first question is on the situation at the transit camps in Renk and other entrances into South Sudan by the returnees and the Sudanese refugees. Any idea so far currently, how many returnees and refugees are in those transit camps, say in Renk, and what are your fears? Like what kind of conditions, the returnees are experiencing in an event that the camps are not decongested?*

Finally, you spoke with concern on the situation in Sudan. Of course, if it continues even as it is now, it's affecting South Sudan. What appeals would you or do you have to the regional and international actors in the efforts of, you know, restoring peace and stability in Sudan? Thank you.

SRSB: Well, let me just give you the round up on the figures. As you may or may not know, they've been 201,000 people who've entered. Of those, 91% are South Sudanese. And the

rest are refugees and 3rd country nationals. 75% of those are women and children, and the vast majority of some 157,000 have come in through Renk, or generally the Upper Nile State. There are increasingly some refugees returning through from Darfur on the western side, but they still remain a small percentage. In fact, the figure is 70% of the arrivals enter through Renk's Wunthow border entry point. Of those, the vast majority have been moved on and I think the current population of Renk is somewhere around about 40,000. But that is subject to correction, and we'll get back to you on the exact population now in Renk.

What we are really worried about is that if for some reason, the real likelihood at one stage that we were going to run out of money to buy fuel, to have the barges go upstream, which meant that every day, because every day the daily intake of returnees is somewhere in the region of 3,000, it has dropped to 2000, but in peak moments it goes up to four, but let us take three or between 2,000 and 3,000. If we can't get people out of Renk, then every day we'll just add to the numbers. And we're apprehensive that with that kind of pressure, then even the health systems will start to break down... the WASH systems, the fresh water, the food, the health, the vaccinations. If we aren't able to keep up to a minimum standard on that, then we will create a health hazard.

Or not we, but the situation will experience a health hazard. But we're also worried, of course, about the security implications. You will know that we've had two flashpoints, both which were triggered by conflicts at water points. So, it starts as a conflict over water point for people who've been waiting a long time in the queue, and the next thing is it develops into a conflict which presents itself a tribal issue between Shilluk and Nuer, or between previous cases in Renk, between Dinka and Nuer. And that has a much more serious effect and a more lasting effect, on the region. So that's why we have been on a concerted campaign over the last week, including talking to you journalists about the need to draw attention that government itself must get involved. We've certainly been applying pressure on the international partners, but Government also has a responsibility to its citizens. And there are pockets of money, and it doesn't require that much to keep the barges moving.

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Contact: UNMISS Spokesperson, Linda Tom at toml@un.org or unmiss-spokesperson@un.org