

**Near Verbatim Transcript**  
**Press Conference by Mr Nicholas Haysom**  
**Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of UNMISS**  
**Juba – 24 May 2023**

Good morning. I would like to welcome you to this UNMISS Press Conference. This is part of our commitment to regularly share with you our assessment of the challenges facing the country as well as what UNMISS is doing to help the South Sudanese people. And greetings to everyone joining us live on Radio Miraya.

I met recently with President Salva Kiir to discuss developments in South Sudan and the implications of the Sudan crisis for us in South Sudan.

We agreed that the longer the Sudanese conflict continues, there will be significant security, economic and humanitarian consequences for South Sudan. We are already seeing an increase in the food prices in the region and a scaling up of the humanitarian needs, with the influx of returnees and refugees which has now exceeded 70,000. Apart from two incidents we have collectively (UNCT, UNMISS and Government) managed to avoid significant blockages in the onward passage of what is mostly South Sudanese returnees.

The attention of the region is now on Sudan. I commended the President for using his longstanding relations with the parties to support the various ceasefire interventions, and his own readiness to offer himself as a mediator between the two parties. I also commended South Sudan's open-door policy to refugees and returnees. However, I encouraged the President to also continue making progress toward implementation the Roadmap. This is not the time to take our eyes off the ball. What we can learn from Sudan is how quickly matters can unravel if neglected.

At the beginning of the year, I outlined the challenges and priorities facing South Sudan. The scale and importance of what remains to be done does not leave room for inaction. We still see 2023 as a 'make or break' year for this nation if it is to fully implement the Peace Agreement, which is to suggest that matters cannot be deferred to 2024.

The constitution making process, electoral legislation, standing up the necessary institutions and structures, as well as the environment to support robust political competition require tangible steps. The constitution making process is in our estimation 10 months behind schedule, elections planning is 8 months behind schedule, and several aspects of the transitional security arrangements are simply hanging.

The creation of a conducive political and civic space for these processes is also important because there must be avenues for constructive dialogue between citizens and support for their participation in these processes that will shape the future of South Sudan.

Last week, UNMISS facilitated a series of engagements that brought together political party representatives, civil society, women, youth, and faith-based leaders. Participants predominantly

expressed concerns about the delays in implementing the Roadmap and discussed ways to support implementation.

The Political Parties Forum allowed participants to discuss the responsibilities and challenges for political parties in democratic transitions generally, and this one in particular.

It is essential for such forums to critically reflect on the opportunity to convert elections into a nation building event, as well as evaluate the risks that poorly organized elections can pose in triggering a relapse into violent conflict.

We intend, in response, to organize such political forums at the state level to generate a shared responsibility to advance the peace process. Right after this press conference, I will be meeting with Civil Society Organizations to build on these conversations.

We do however welcome the establishment of the joint taskforce for the implementation of the constitution making process and electoral project, which will have government and international representatives, as a way of speeding up the implementation of those event.

We have emphasized that nation will have to grapple with multiple challenges, including the effects of the Sudanese situation, without losing sight of the critical need to address its own internal security challenges.

Unfortunately, human rights bodies have recorded violations in various parts of the country. The first quarter report showed a 12 per cent increase in violent incidents affecting civilians compared to the same reporting period last year. Sadly, there have been minimal steps taken by relevant authorities to hold the perpetrators to account. I was profoundly alarmed that our human rights team has recorded at least 22 civilians killed in Warrap through extrajudicial executions.

Climate shocks continue to compound the existing humanitarian and economic crisis that is affecting three-quarters of the population – a crisis that is worsening year-on-year. We are concerned that economic stressors may lead to increased criminality and predatory attacks on humanitarian workers and theft of their food and non-food aid. This aid is critical for the survival of communities in the lean or rainy season, which has just begun.

In Jonglei particularly, regular attacks on humanitarian convoys continued. It is our collective responsibility to ensure aid is delivered and I intend to pursue this issue with state and national level authorities, while committing to do whatever UNMISS can do to secure safe delivery of aid.

Along the border with Sudan, we are witnessing an influx of returnees and refugees. In Renk, reports indicate that competition for access to the hosting areas had taken on an ethnic dimension. At the same time, the Malakal Protection of Civilian site is dangerously congested. The potential for bottlenecks to spill over into violence is real, and it is accordingly critical for the war in Sudan to be brought to an end.

On a positive note, let me share that following our call for unhindered humanitarian access along the Nile River corridor, a Joint Technical Working Group, comprising the transitional government representatives, UNMISS and humanitarian representatives, met last month. The transitional government is committed to removing unauthorized checkpoints on the river, aiming at bringing it down from 52 to 6 posts.

Since we last met, the UNMISS mandate has been reissued by the Security Council and it requires us to do all that we can to protect civilians in particular. We are already protecting civilians in IDP camps and we are committed to establishing temporary operating bases close to hotspots to provide safety for displaced populations. We are also front-loading our military protection presence with intensive dialogue and engagement at the national and state levels to build peace from the bottom up.

Peacekeepers continue to proactively intervene to mitigate conflict prompted by the seasonal migration of cattle across Sudan during the past dry season. And I should mention that we have our eyes on the problems that may be caused by seasonal migrant cattle herders to stay in South Sudan and not to move back to Sudan on account of the conflict, and the need to renegotiate the agreements between those cattle herders and host communities.

In anticipation of the rains, we are engaged in the construction and maintenance of dykes, especially in towns like Bentiu, where there has been extensive flooding.

UNMISS peacekeepers are also providing protective escorts to large humanitarian convoys trying to preposition food before the rainy season. In April 2023, UNMISS peacekeepers ensured that hundreds of tons of humanitarian supplies have reached their destinations safely across greater Jonglei; one of South Sudan's most food-insecure states and where aid workers have been frequently attacked. As you are aware, South Sudan remains the most dangerous place for aid workers (on account of the number of aid workers that have been killed).

The absence of strong formal judicial mechanisms in various locations exacerbates the lack of accountability and increases of impunity for those who break the law. We continue to support government efforts to deploy ad hoc courts, including mobile courts, in areas where conventional courts have limited presence, and to strengthen military court martials.

The deployment of these courts has enabled justice to be administered to some of the victims of human rights violations and abuses. And just this week, the SSPDF's Yei General Court Martial officially opened at the Yei Garrison.

We want, as UNMISS, to be part of the solution to the challenges facing South Sudan.

I want to share a recent public perception survey, that we commissioned, but had conducted by an independent third-party company, to help us gauge the views, expectations, and concerns of the average South Sudanese citizens. The polls were conducted in all ten states, and the results

indicate that people strongly believe in, firstly, the elections, and secondly, in UN support for those elections.

The survey also shows that people who are apprehensive of the elections nonetheless want it to happen. We in the UN family stand ready to support, South Sudanese as requested.

According to the same survey, the majority of South Sudanese people appreciate the work and presence of UNMISS, and they want to see greater UN presence to provide protection where they live. Interestingly, they revealed that they are more concerned about immediate threats such as hunger and disease, than they are about insecurity.

Before I open the floor for your questions, let me highlight that critical relief to vulnerable people is needed at a time when we are seeing increasing global and regional competition for scarce funding. That is why we see the successful completion of the transitional period of the Revitalized Peace Agreement as critical for putting South Sudan on the pathway to peace and sustainable development, and in persuading donors that South Sudan is a viable proposition.

We cannot do this work alone. This is why in UNMISS we put a premium on enhancing our strategic relationships — with the African Union, IGAD, EU, the Troika, the broader international community, as well as South Sudanese communities and stakeholders. This is to promote greater coherence amongst international partners in our efforts, but also to support greater ownership by South Sudanese of the outcomes of this transition.

Thank you for listening.

#### **Q and A:**

*Q: Thank you for inviting us, SRSG, as always. Thank you also to my colleagues.*

*The most important question I would like to ask is on Warrap. You mentioned that twenty-two civilians were killed in Warrap through extrajudicial killing. I just need a clarification on when was this carried out and who was behind the killing of these people, and what measures have been taken to address this issue?*

*My last question is on the issue of Renk. You said that access in Renk is taking ethnic dimensions. Would you, sir, clarify. Would you say the returnees are getting food and other services only if they are identified based on their ethnicity?*

**SRSG:** I am not sure if I got the full part of the second question, but you can help me if I am short.

On the extrajudicial killings, this is information which I received in the course of the recently issued Quarterly Report of the Human Rights Division. And I have asked them to look into it. Today I am using the opportunity to flag the issue as it has been flagged by my colleague, Musa Gasama, in the release of that quarterly report. And I've asked for further information on it.

Regarding the question on Renk, you would be aware that there was conflict sparked by an incident over access to water, but it immediately took on the form of a conflict between Nuer and Dinka in the transit area. I only flag it because it shows that it will put pressure in areas where

there are bottlenecks which will frequently assume a kind of ethnic dimension. It means that we have to be very careful in the way in which we assist people and, in particular, I understand that there is real competition for access for onward movement either by barge or air from Renk and from other areas either to Malakal or to Juba or elsewhere in South Sudan. Quite frankly, both the incidents that I have mentioned took place some time ago and there has not been a repeat and we are hoping that we are managing this together. I want to single out in particular the work of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in facilitating the onward passage of returnees.

*Q: Earlier this week, the South Sudan Foreign Minister said that South Sudan today is not the same as South Sudan in 2013 and 2016 and wants the UN to remove the arms embargo. What can you say to that? The South Sudan government has constantly said the arms embargo is blocking the implementation of security arrangements. What can you say to that?*

**SRSB:** The arms embargo is imposed by the Security Council, which effectively means the Member States. It is not a decision taken by the mission, and it is annually renewed. It has various conditions which would see the arms embargo being lifted almost directly and those conditions are meeting the objectives of the peace agreement which the government has committed to undertake. So, if it meets its commitments, the arms embargo would be lifted. It also provides for a waiver which would allow the government to sidestep the arms embargo, provided it is for a purpose set out in the peace agreement. So, there are avenues which are available. We are aware that the Security Council has been considering this issue as part of its annual calendar, but we are unaware of what the latest decision will be, and it may well be that they will lift the arms embargo or they may not, but they'll do it based on a report submitted to them by a committee established by the Security Council to examine whether South Sudan has met its peace goals.

*Q: You talked about the Sudan crisis. We know that South Sudan depends much on Sudan to transport the fuel. Of recent, we have read some reports and some analysis that if the conflict there takes longer, it could unravel the peace implementation on this side. I wanted you to weigh in because these are experts who have weighed in that if the conflict, and it is likely to take longer and going by what we are seeing taking place there, do you think besides the influx of refugees there may be effects on the economy?*

*Lastly, going by what you have said, we also feel you have strong points on the issues of implementing the key issues that would warrant South Sudan to hold a credible free and fair election. Some of us also have doubts because key legislation, the Election Act, so those key things are not yet there and we do not know whether they will do because you cannot hurry to implement them and the timeline, because December is approaching 2024. I am of the view that probably these elections should be postponed further because if they are held under the current conditions, if we are to go forward, because we do not know when they will conclude the key legislations, what is your opinion on that?*

**SRSB:** Let me take the last question first, which was bluntly, should the elections be postponed and do the conditions exist for holding those elections.

The answer is: I think from our perspective, that as matters stand now those conditions do not exist. They do not exist because the structures are not established for a transparent, free, and fair election. And you want a transparent, free, and fair election so that you will not have violence before the elections during the elections, after the elections when the results are contested. But

that is not the same question as the question, ‘Will they be ready in a year and a half’s time?’ The Security Council has specifically requested an inquiry into whether the country will be ready for elections, and it has asked those in the UNMISS mission who are supporting the elections to render that support on a phased basis which is to say that if the conditions are met to hold those elections, to continue to render support. So, I think, like many, the question is easy to answer if you are looking at the question as to whether the conditions exist now, but a much more difficult question as to whether the country can create the environment in which the elections can still be held. That is an issue which I think we will be looking at much more closely at the end of the year. There are a number of steps which we are hoping the Government will take relatively soon, not just the Government, but also the other stakeholders as well. All of them have a responsibility to create the conditions for the election. But we will look particularly at the passage of the National Electoral Bill, whether the electoral bodies can be stood up; we would like to see the Political Parties Council stood up; we need to see progress on the Constitution Making Bill because that is a requirement, according to the peace agreement. And it also gives South Sudanese an opportunity to define what the prize will look like at the end of an election and how the country intends to be governed after the election and whether that will be in a way which will resolve the tensions which we have seen manifest in serious violence in the past.

There is still some way to go. We are certainly committed to helping South Sudan meet the conditions that are required. We are aware that one of the most difficult conditions is the issue of political and civic space. You cannot really have a viable free, fair, and credible election or a free, fair, and viable constitution-making process if people cannot talk to each other, if there is no freedom of expression, and if there is not a sort of robust dialogue between South Sudanese themselves as to what they want their country to look like. We are also encouraging all the role players to address the issue of creating a free environment in which this election can take place.

South Sudan, will it unravel as a result of what is happening in Sudan? Not necessarily. I think what we have seen is that South Sudan has demonstrated a capacity to deal at least with the problem at the scale it is at the moment. The issue is what happens if the war continues, and the negative consequences continue. In fact, if they scale up, then I think it could be a serious problem. We are particularly concerned, of course, that if the pipeline may be disrupted, that would have an immediate impact on the capacity of the country and its citizens to simply get by, because 90% of the services and salaries will come from the oil money. So, in that regard, we would certainly want to argue loudly, strongly, repeatedly, that the war has to come to an end. And that the war has an impact not just on Sudan, but it has an impact on its nine neighbours.

*Q: My question pertains to cross-border security. Recently the government predicted risk danger based on the cross-border security over the influx of returnees and refugees from Sudan. The spokesperson said that the war in Sudan may most likely affect the peace agreement, especially the implementation of the security arrangement, as some of the refugees may be in position to come with ammunition that will threaten the process. As far as cross-border security is concerned, what is the turn of UNMISS to ensure that such insecurity is mitigated?*

*Secondly, you spoke about South Sudan has been considered one of the countries that is not safe for aid workers. Can you try to give a clarification?*

**SRSB:** On the last question, I am just repeating a statement that has been made countless times. Which is that more aid workers die in South Sudan than in any other country in the world. Which means to say it is a dangerous place to be an aid worker. As you know, aid workers are mostly national staff, South Sudanese, who are involved in the business of delivering food aid and

sometimes non-food aid to communities and have become increasingly the target of bandits - I don't know how else to describe them - who loot the trucks and attack the property and, on occasion, kill the drivers or the aid workers involved. We want to just highlight that this is aid for South Sudanese. This is not something that the international community is keeping for itself. If the people do not have access to prepositioned food before the rainy season, it could have a dramatic impact on their capacity to survive the rainy season. We all need to take an interest in securing the conditions under which aid can pass unhindered to the communities that depend on it.

On your first question, our current evidence is nothing to suggest that armed groups are moving across the border as far as I know. As far as UNMISS is concerned, UNMISS is just one apparatus designed to control the area and tackle threats that may emerge in the border areas. There is also the SSPDF, and I am sure that they have close scrutiny of the border areas. But we have seen no evidence as yet that the returnees pose a threat. And we have seen no evidence that the participants in the conflict in Sudan have relocated to South Sudan. Of course, we do not know what is going to happen in the future, the conflict could be resolved; it could deteriorate.

*Q: You have talked about human rights violation. I would like to know what can UNMISS do better this time round to end the violations in South Sudan?*

**SRSG:** We placed great emphasis on building South Sudanese institutions of accountability. We think it is very difficult to discourage people from human rights violations if there are no courts, police, and functioning prisons. We are really committed to trying to build the South Sudanese institutions which will see accountability and some justice for those who suffer from these human rights abuses, who are the victims. Our own work has been to build the capacity of the police on the one hand, to support the provision of mobile courts, so that in areas where they don't have courts - and there are many parts of South Sudan where there are no courts, prisons or police - and we think it's very important to support South Sudanese in establishing what we call a 'justice chain' so that people will have some recourse to institutions other than self-help. We realize that the absence of these institutions is what fuels people's desire to take the law into their own hands ... whether it is extrajudicial killings, whether it is communities committing revenge attacks for the cattle or members of their community that have been killed. The answer definitely lies in being able to create strong rule of law institutions in South Sudan. Primarily, it is something that will take a long time, but we must build that platform right now so that South Sudanese can take that project forward over the next generation or two of South Sudanese.

*Q: My question is based on what you said about Malakal Protection of Civilians (POC) site being highly congested. Could you tell us what are the causes of that? And what are the immediate needs of those people currently living at Malakal POC? Furthermore, will this reverse UNMISS' earlier decisions to withdraw from POCs across South Sudan.*

*Another question is on extrajudicial killings. My colleague asked earlier when the quarterly report was launched.*

**SRSG:** The one I am talking about is the quarterly report for January to March, which only comes out in May, as I understand. It is about to come out.

In regard to the Malakal POC site and its congestion, the congestion arises out of the displacement of people, particularly in December, January, but also before that. There are now joint efforts with the country team and with the Government to look at alternative areas for displaced people to go to. What we do not want is to create a POC site that is a health hazard, a

health hazard to those who live in it. And that is what happens when the POC sites become overly congested. There is a need, and primarily a responsibility, on the part of Government to create places where people can live to as an alternative to the congested Malakal site.

There is not going to be any changing of decision on the part of UNMISS. The conversion of POC sites to IDP areas has been successful throughout the country and there have been no incidents. Incidents that were predicted did not take place. People have largely adjusted. Only in Malakal, because of the much more fragile political situation in the area, we would have been reluctant to withdraw our security protection.

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