

UNMISS SRSG PRESS CONFERENCE

Near- verbatim transcript

11 May 2017

SRSG Shearer - First can I just highlight the commemoration or the celebration of World Press Freedom Day last week and just praise the efforts of the many journalist that operate here in South Sudan and beyond for their work in covering the issues that we are confronting. It often takes quite courage to do that and I know that people do face some risk. We have for example George Livio, a former employee of Radio Miraya, who has been in detention for three years now. But I just wanted to highlight that and acknowledge your good work and the very very important work that you do in giving the news to people around the country and around the world .

Since I talked to you last which is more than four weeks ago now, I am sad to say on the security situation, that there has been an increase in the amount of fighting throughout the country, largely an increase in the area of Upper Nile and in Jonglei. In response to the fighting in Upper Nile in particular the fighting around Wau Shulluk and Kodok there has been a large movement of people to the small village of Aburoc in Upper Nile. We estimate that around 30-35 perhaps 40 thousand people are there at the moment, and we were concerned last week about their situation. As a result of that and particularly the lack of water, good clean water for people there, and as a result of that we have positioned and flown in a peacekeeping force into the area and that peacekeeping force will be there temporarily to provide some support for humanitarian workers to be able to move in as well and in particular for the ability of water trucks and water to be able to be brought into the area to help and assist those people who are there. We are worried that without that assistance there could be an outbreak of diarrhoea and possibly cholera, we had one case of cholera already. And so the situation for us is that peacekeepers are there very much to support the humanitarian efforts to bring short term relief to the people there until the rainy season comes, we are looking at about four weeks in total presence in the village of Aburoc.

Secondly we are concerned about the deteriorating security situation in the Bor –Pibor area between Dinka Bor youth and Murle youth. We've been engaging with communities there over the past few weeks and as we speak we are supporting peace efforts by the government and the First Vice President to talk to both communities and providing and put at the disposal of those people; helicopter assistance to be able to move between the two communities and decrease tension in the area. We are worried that, that might spark a more wide spread fighting between those two communities. We are anxious that, that does not happen and hence the reason we are providing some support to the peace efforts on the ground.

Just south of that area I just wanted to acknowledge, and express my very deep condolences to those families of the 40 people who were killed on the Bor- Juba road. This is the second attack in that area in the past few weeks. UNMISS has been supporting the medical facilities in Bor with X-ray facilities, and we've also transported the bodies of the Ugandans who were killed there back down to Juba along with one or two people who were wounded and

they were transported to hospital facilities down here in Juba . But the deterioration of security on that road is of concern to us, particularly the large number of people who are being killed.

Just on that issue I just want to mention that in Leer in the former Unity State, we had last week an attack on our compound where there are Ghanaian peacekeepers. From what we understand there was shooting at our base for a period of one hour last Thursday night , we have an investigation team in Leer at the moment looking at who and what was the reason behind the attack. They have not yet completed their investigation, we are not making any comment about who or what might have been responsible. When that investigation concludes, we might have a better idea. But in general I just wanted to say that UNMISS is here to support and assist people right across the country, and Leer as you know is an area which has been declared a famine area. The reason we have peacekeepers there is to provide some support and encouragement to humanitarians activities to continue, and particularly the introduction of food into that area. As a result of this attack I know the numbers of humanitarian workers in the area has gone down, has declined, and that will have an impact on the amount of humanitarian assistance that can be provided to the area. So I just wanted to say, that the attacks has a direct consequence on humanitarian activities and humanitarian assistance that can be provided to people who desperately need it. It is an extraordinarily selfish thing to do in the circumstances, when we are looking at particularly the women and children who need it. I just wanted to point out that the although the attack was an hour long the Ghanaian peacekeepers in the true spirit of peacekeeping retaliated defending not only themselves and the humanitarians that were working with them but also the 1300 internally displaced people who have sought shelter alongside our peacekeeping base. So I was greatly pleased and I personally thanked the Ghanaian forces for their support.

Lastly I just want to talk about humanitarian situation, and in particular thank and acknowledge the courageous work that many humanitarians are doing both national South Sudanese partners and international partners both NGOs and UN. As I say without those people working, doing the job that they do, hundreds and thousands of people in South Sudan would not be alive today, and I think we owe them a real debt of gratitude. They are able to access overwhelmingly all of the country, but obviously we have ongoing issues up in some places with trying to get to some communities, we are continuing negotiations both with the government and opposition forces to make sure that we are able to access communities and that will be ongoing, we won't be letting up on that, and neither will UNMISS. We are working very closely with the humanitarian community to make sure that we can provide whatever support and security they need in order to be able to provide assistance.

So just with those few words I will finish there and I am very happy to take questions from the floor.

Question and Answer Session

DPA News Agency- You have acknowledged that along Juba -Bor road some Ugandans were killed or injured, can you confirm the number?

SRSB Shearer – We can't confirm absolutely exactly but the number that we are working on is around forty dead and seventeen injured that had been taken to Bor hospital. That figure increased recently when a patrol came across fewer bodies that we were not aware of. So we think it's a minimum of forty, there might be more that come to light afterwards but it's still a significant number and a tragedy for the families concerned.

Question – My question is regarding Aburoc, there was concerns expressed by the UN Humanitarian coordinator concerning the presence of Aguelek forces near the IDPs in Aburoc. What have you done to improve the security situation and how are the humanitarian efforts going on?

SRSB Shearer - The head of Field office for UNMISS yesterday went to Aburoc and spoke with the governor and other officials. She requested that any armed elements move out of the area ; we are there only to support and assist the civilian community particularly women and children who are vulnerable to those issues that I talked about diarrhoea and cholera, if the situation gets out of hand . So that was our request and we will be following up with that.

On the second part of your question around humanitarian response , my understanding is around about fifty humanitarian workers are there in the region right now in the area that have started to step up their provision of health services and the World Food Program will undertake a food drop into the area over the next one or two days . The humanitarians on the ground will assist in ensuring that food drop is distributed to the right people, goes to the people who need it. So we are reasonably pleased, satisfied with the arrangements on the ground at the moment but it's an ongoing mission

This Day Newspaper – We heard from the media that there was an attack to the UN base in Leer; can you confirm how many were killed in the Leer attack?

SRSB Shearer – On the attacks on Leer there was no deaths and there was no wounded on that attack, very pleased to say and we have not in any way pointed a finger at any group. As I said we are in Leer at the moment with an investigations team, who will be talking to everybody we will be able to and ensure that we will do a full investigation. At that point we may have more details, more clarification but up to now we don't have any clear idea of who was responsible. However we have a statement I issued last week condemned any attacks because as I said before the reason for the presence of UNMISS being there is to help and support the humanitarian and the humanitarian effort into an area which has been declared a famine area, so it's important that we maintain our presence and we will, and secondly we are able to continue to support the humanitarian effort.

VOA – You did mention about continuing fighting in some part of South Sudan, would be interested to know which parts exactly if can you try to elaborate and mention some of these parts . The second question is with this increase in fighting recently as you did say , where do you see South Sudan in the peace making process , are you concerned with these spikes of fighting ?

SRSB Shearer – Yes we are concerned about the increase in fighting. What we are hoping is that with the onset of the rainy season in the coming weeks that might slow the fighting down and give a greater impetus and a greater focus on peace efforts. Certainly I know that the region today, there will be some discussions, side discussions that will be happening with regional leaders in London as part of the Somalia conference that's going on in London. We are engaging as much as we can with all actors to try and bring about a settlement; we were encouraged a few weeks ago when President Kiir announced a cease fire. Unfortunately there on the ground it has not materialized. We hope that that will be able to be put into place in the coming weeks. We have consistently called for a stop to the fighting, to the conflict. We do not believe that that is the way forward for South Sudan; it's going to ultimately depend on a political settlement.

VOA: In this issue of fighting, are the forces continuing to fight, if so which parts?

SRSB: It is particularly in Upper Nile, as I said in Renk, Kodok towards Kaka, there have been concerns around and ongoing fighting around Waat. And then obviously what I was talking about; there have been tensions and skirmishes that have been between the Bor Dinka youth and the Murle youth in Jonglei as well. Those are the two most particular areas that we are worried about. And what we would want to do as soon as possible to move back to peace agreement that would depend, as I said on a ceasefire. We do need a ceasefire in order to be able to get a political settlement underway rather than a continuation of military activities. Military activities ultimately will not bring about a peaceful resolution to South Sudan's problems. We do need to have a reconciliation and peaceful settlement.

Xinhua: You talked about the fighting between the Dinka Bor youth and Murle, I would like to know, you said the situation is deteriorating, I mean can you give more details probably how it has been so bad in terms of like any death, displacement and which particular areas is the fighting taking place; and also I would like to ask you any new developments on the protection force because it is widely known that they will try to help to de-escalate the fighting.

SRSB: Well, the fighting, I am sure everybody in this room knows the tension between the Bor Dinka and Murle youth has been ongoing and this is not a new thing that is happening. Recently what we are worried about is the escalation of mobilization of youth from both sides. From what we can understand there are heavily armed and therefore any crises could result into large number of casualties. I think it is really important that we try now, before there has been skirmishes, there has been cattle raiding I understand from both sides, also the abduction of children certainly from the Dinka side, but also I am hearing from the Murle side that Dinka have been reciprocated. So we are at a point of high tension between the two sides. Our goal is, one to try to de-escalate the tension in a short term and two, once it is de-escalated we will be able to move to peace conferences, or some sort of peace meeting, where we can try to resolve the underlying issues; so that is the strategy. As I said the moment the First Vice President Taban Deng is in Bor, he had said to us that he would like to go to Pibor to talk to both sides, if he does that and he would like any need of

transport, I said we will provide helicopter support for him to go to both sides of the conflict. At the moment, the two sides are situated on the Bor-Pibor road along the Manyibol are where they are standing off. But the important thing is that we de-escalate the tensions and provide an opportunity to talk rather than to fight because fighting only will result in a greater cycle of revenge in an ongoing conflict, it will be of no benefit to either group that is why we are engaged as we are.

The RPF is slowly, I reiterate the word slowly, taking up position here, and we have got the advance party of the Bangladesh Engineering group, which should be welcome.

I just want to say that the engineering group on the ground since I spoke to you last, some of you know that the Japanese Company that is here in Juba is withdrawing after five years of service. I think it is the longest that the Japanese has ever been in a peacekeeping mission and in an engineering capacity. They are leaving their equipment here and we are now looking for another Country to take over that equipment and continue with the Japanese good work. So the Japanese, we have Koreans in Bor, we have Indians, and as you know the British in upper Malakal and Bentui, Chinese in Wau and that road to Wau and the Bangladesh is coming in as well. The whole point about this is for us is to improve the road system so that we can ensure that supplies can get from South up to the North, and that trade can continue as often I don't think, because it is not same how much work can be done. One thousand kilometres stretch of road from Juba to Bentiu in the north goes via Wau, of the one thousand kilometres more than seven hundred kilometres has been renovated by the engineering group that are on the ground.

Just coming back to your RPF question, the Rwandans are coming in, the advance party is coming in in the next month or so, also and the Nepalese is coming in next month, so while it is slow; it is progressing.

VOA: Just clarification, these thirty to thirty five thousand people recently displaced is it this month or two months ago. Maybe my one last question is the fighting along Juba-Bor road, we did understand there are people displaced, any idea like how many people have displaced and maybe their conditions also, thank you.

SRSB: The numbers that I was speaking about, around thirty five thousand plus were in Aburoc, in Upper Nile, these are people who left Wau Shulluk and Kodok, and are moving largely by foot to Aburoc for what they believe a safer place in Aburoc. We don't have the exact number, They are doing registration at the moment. But it is estimated to be around thirty five thousand. As I said the most pressing issue for us is first clean water. If thirty five thousand living temporarily without clean water and outbreak of diarrhoea or cholera occurs, it can cut through a group of people very quickly and put a number of people at risk. In regard to your second question about the displacement along the Bor-Juba road, I don't have any estimation on numbers there yet, we have to get clarification on it and come back to you in future.

Asahi Shimbun: My question is regarding the killing on Bor-Juba road, can you tell us if the UN has a team to investigate, who did the killing and what is the motive?

SRSB: When the first deaths occurred with the NGO humanitarian organization, and seven were killed and including I think three Kenyans, that happened about four weeks ago, we sent a team up there to investigate we also called on the government to carry out an investigations as well. We don't have yet any confirmation about who is responsible. On this more recent attack where forty died and seventeen were injured, again we don't have absolute confirmation about who was responsible yet. I mean that is possibly a question you may want to ask the government. We are not carrying out an investigation ourselves into that incident, certainly not a formal investigation anyway.

Xinhua: I would like also to ask about humanitarian access to those in need, are you still facing probably some blockage or it has improved compared to previous situation in terms of accessing humanitarian assistance.

SRSB: I think the main point about humanitarian activities going on across the country is that we are able to reach the great majority of people in this country. That is important point to make. And I said before that I very much acknowledge the courageous efforts of the humanitarian workers, both South Sudanese and International people who are on the ground doing that work, without them, there is no doubt that thousands of people would not be alive today. In terms of access, there are issues that crop up, and we pursue those with the government, mainly the government because obviously they control most of the areas in south Sudan but also with the opposition groups as well. There are ongoing issues around that, the great majority of them I have to say are issues, which happen at a local level and that impedes our movement. Many times, we are able to resolve those issues either on the ground there, or sometimes we refer them to Juba and sometimes we get that there are situation resolved by intervention of the SPLA in Juba. So it is an ongoing issue. I am not sure it has got any better or worse, but the most important thing is that we getting to the great majority people who support and who need assistance.

Catholic Radio Network: This week the Catholic Bishop in Yei was talking about the WFP and the UN being misinformed about shortage of food in Yei, and some people in Yei taking advantage of people not around, they are stealing their food and selling it in the market. Do you have any idea about that and what's your reaction?

SRSB: I can't comment on that particular issue because I am not aware of it. We are sending now UNMISS patrol to Yei on a very regular basis, so probably in three weeks or every four we will have UNMISS presence there, the idea is to provide greater confidence in and around Yei town. That area is very tense and we are concern about human rights violations particularly attacks on women in and around Yei. But as to the specific incident about this, I don't have details I have to get back to you on that maybe tomorrow or after we can do some checks.

CCTV: What are the contingents from Britain, coming to do in South Sudan? The troops from Britain what is their main activity in South Sudan? And the second one is, you are talking of the regional protection force, but there are some contingency which are coming from Middle East, can you try to clarify on?

SRSG: On the British forces first. The British for are one contingent of UNMISS so they come under the command of their force commander and myself as well. They are here with the prime objective of building Level II hospital in Bentui. I was up in Bentui on Monday, they are progressing quickly with that. So it's mainly an engineering company with some support. But I am hoping that they may also be able to help us a bit with road network and try to develop some of the road issues. So the engineering force that the British have brought here falls under and come a part of UNMISS. Secondly, on the RPF the main contingents, the main battalions that are coming in with the RPF-Regional Protection Force are Rwandan, Ethiopian and Kenyan. However there were some components of RPF that the countries were not able to provide and that included the Nepalese and in particular the Bangladesh Engineering Contingent. So they are coming from outside. The main forces if you like are coming from the region. Again they are part of UNMISS. When they arrive although they are a separate entity within UNMISS and they are here to try and provide confidence for people in side of Juba to help people who have perhaps left Juba to come back to Juba and with the authorities to provide you know a safe and stable environment in and around Juba area. But they are very much part of UNMISS but they do have parts of that contingent which comes from not from the region simply because the region was at the time unable to provide the specialist areas.

Thank for your work, and the work that you do, the media has extremely important part in any democratic society and I know that there are difficulties for you, but I would like to acknowledge and pledge all support for your work that you do, thank you.