Opening Remarks:

I’d like to talk briefly about two key issues.

Firstly, the renewal of the UNMISS mandate by the UN Security Council.

As you’ll be aware, I travelled to New York recently to brief the Security Council on the political, security and humanitarian situation.

A major focus of my discussions was about how to make meaningful progress with the implementation of the peace agreement and what UNMISS can do to support the process.

I’ll speak in more detail about that shortly.

But first, I’d like to acknowledge the Security Council’s decision to extend UNMISS’ mandate for another year – until 15 March 2020.

This decision enables us to continue with our current efforts to protect civilians and build durable peace in South Sudan. Our troop numbers remain unchanged at a maximum level of 17,000 and our police personnel at 2101. Our focus on protection of civilians, monitoring and reporting on human rights, facilitating the safe delivery of humanitarian assistance and supporting the peace process remains the same.

However, there are some changes that were made in response to requests from UNMISS, that I believe, will make a positive impact on our work.

On our political mandate, the Security Council added a provision for UNMISS to provide technical assistance and or advice to the peace process. This is very important because it allows us to be more flexible and proactive in our support, for example providing experts to assist the various committees if they need our help with security arrangements, the boundaries issue, constitutional and administrative legal matters, transitional justice and accountability as well as electoral processes.

The mandate also now points directly to efforts to build confidence and to help mediation and peace-building across the country. This is something we are very focused on.

I’m pleased to see that at least 76 separate rapprochements have taken place between the parties at a local level. UNMISS has, and will continue, to support these discussions.
Another significant change made by the Security Council is the inclusion of the facilitation of safe, voluntary and dignified returns as part of our core Protection of Civilians mandate.

While tensions and clashes are continuing in some parts of the country, including around Yei, the overall level of political violence has diminished.

That means that many displaced families are beginning to feel more confident about returning to their homes. For example, the number of people living in POC sites have come down from 205,000 before the Peace Agreement was signed to about 193,000 today – and it continues to drop – with people wanting to return home before the rainy season to plant.

UNMISS is actively supporting the returns process. We have transported people by barge, helicopter, and in convoys of trucks to areas of potential return so they can assess for themselves whether it is safe to go home.

We will never force people to leave a protection site. But we should do everything we can to realise the dreams of people who want to rebuild their lives in their own home. To deny them that wish is wrong.

As a result, hundreds of people have now left the Bor POC to move back to New Fangak and Akobo, for example. The same is happening in Wau where the number in the POC is down from around 39,000 eight months ago to around 14,000.

And we will continue to work with humanitarian partners to ensure that families have a safe and supported environment to return to, particularly in terms of access to basic services.

Overall, our new mandate enables us to continue, and actually to step up, our efforts to support the peace process in support of IGAD.

My very strong view – and it’s one that I shared with the Security Council – is that there is no Plan B. There is only a Plan A – the peace agreement that we have in front of us – and this path forward.

But, for it to have a chance to work, the agreement needs to be supported.

A peace that falters will generate frustration, anger and a possible return to violence, that could equal that of 2013 and 2016. We cannot allow that to happen.

Like others, we have our concerns about the peace process. Progress lags behind what is expected. But there is no perfect process. And for our part, UNMISS is committed to continuing to focus attention and resources on making it work.

Certainly, a year ago, most of us, including myself, did not believe we would be where we are today. We have arrived at this point because of the commitment of the parties and the leadership and drive largely from IGAD, most particularly Sudan.

And for that reason, it is absolutely critical that IGAD continues to play a robust and active role in the months ahead.
There are challenges ahead of us. Many of the obstacles today were unresolved when the peace agreement was signed. They are tough issues.

We need a clear roadmap – and detailed, realistic work plans – for the international community to invest in the process. The Government must also step up and take the lead by making a strong financial contribution.

It is important that the various committees do not become bogged down in minutiae and procedural discussions at the cost of making real progress.

But most importantly, we must all come together and get in behind the process so that concrete outcomes are achieved.

The cost of failure is unthinkable. So, the responsibility lies with all of us to move forward together to make this agreement a reality.

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Q & A

AP: The International Crisis Group just put up a report suggesting a third-party protection force for when the opposition comes back, when Machar comes back, right now there has been a 700-person force between the government and opposition that is being floated around. But the International Crisis Group suggested perhaps UNMISS will provide that third-party protection. What is your position on that?

SRSG David Shearer: The Security Council, as part of the mandate, looked at the Regional Protection Force (RPF). The Regional Protection Force (RPF), as you know, has ceiling of 4000, currently there are about 2300 troops in position. But what it decided to do was to leave the question of what the composition of that force - the balance of that force would be - until we know the outcome of the peace process, until we know where we are going.

As you said, the parties and the government have floated this idea of the 700 strong, 750 strong force, that’s a new proposal, we are yet to have discussions with them. At the end of the day, a third-party force of whatever kind is still going to depend on the goodwill and the cooperation between the parties and particularly the government. A third-party force might be able to provide confidence but ultimately is not going to be able to provide the ultimate protection. So, it’s going to require the government and the opposition parties to have confidence and trust in each other in order to be able to move forward. There is no force that’s going to be able to be 100% sure in terms of being able to protect anybody. So, it’s really about trust and confidence.

VOA: The Government is talking about forming the Transitional Government of National Unity come May 12, and clear security arrangements are still far behind schedule in terms of the cantonment, training the forces, and maybe later on getting them together. From the UNMISS perspective, with this new mandate,
what advice do you have to give to the government, either to form the government or not to form the government?
The other question is that groups outside the peace agreement have been engaging with IGAD outside the country, do you know what results that engagement has so far made? Finally, I also want to know, UNMISS’ mandate has been renewed, what do you see, can you review the challenges you had in the previous mandate and this new mandate. How are you going to overcome these challenges?

SRSG David Shearer: The 12th of May is exactly as you say, it’s the end of the pre transitional period and the start of the transitional period. The transitional government should start on the 12th of May, should have the main opposition leaders in positions in their various capacities within the government. As you say, there is a long way to go yet before that happens. We hope that it will happen in the weeks to come, but it’s behind schedule at the moment, and that will include who takes over the roles of Vice Presidents for example, those positions. On the security arrangements, yes again, there is a lag and we are not seeing the forces coming together. My own feeling, I believe, we would like to see the strategy, the plan, the overall plan for this to occur. We have seen a budget for cantonment, a list of activities, but behind that there needs to be a plan. We are not a donor as the UN, but we can help support that strategy and that plan, we can bring in expertise and we have offered that as well, and we will continue to offer that. But that plan needs to be in place for donors to feel confident that they can start supporting it financially as well is what I believe.

On the issue of the meetings with people outside, my understanding is that the Envoy has had meetings with Thomas Cirilo and also with Paul Malong. I think that’s an important part of their role to make sure that occurs. I haven’t seen any dramatic change in their position. I understand Paul Malong is more interested in coming back and engaging, but at the moment the position of NAS and Cirilo is that they have some red lines for them that they would like to see in the peace process. Until that happens, they are unwilling to engage.

On the difficulties of the mandate of UNMISS, we face problems on a day to day basis. If I was going to say a general problem that we face, is effectively just the ability to access areas where there is perhaps fighting going on or where there are critical needs. We are able to access a number of places across South Sudan but at critical times we have been denied access. That would be the persistent problem that we have that we are trying to work with the government to enable greater freedom of access. That’s what we report on, on a monthly basis to the Security Council, that’s what we refer to as SOFA violations, so the Status of Forces Agreement states we should be able to move wherever we like. If we are obstructed or there are problems like that, then we report back.

Community Radio: On the agreement you mentioned that, the peace agreement need to be supported. Who will support the peace agreement when still there are some international bodies expressing unwillingness to donate and fund the peace process? Secondly, what are the roles of UNMISS to support the implementation of the peace agreement, and also, I need to know, what is your hope that the parties will meet the deadline to form a new government in May?

Also, about the report on human rights violations and sexual violence or assault that was reported in Unity a few months ago, what was the outcome? Up to today, there is no clear report about the finding that the government and the United Nations have made about those rape cases as have been reported.
SRSG David Shearer: That’s quite a lot there. Just in terms of the peace process and resources, obviously the decision to fund the peace process is very much the decision of States who have got those resources. So, I can’t speak on behalf of them, you have to ask them directly. But my strong feeling, as I have mentioned earlier, the government stepping up and providing the funding, concrete funding is an important step, because it provides some confidence that the government is willing to step up. Secondly, as I said before, including a budget is fine, but what we also need to see is a plan and a strategy over a period of time. What is the composition of the armed forces going to look like? What are the numbers going to be. The whole range of different aspects of that planning need to be there, so the donors have an ability to say, yes, we can see where this is going to go. It is not just about putting money into cantonments that have not yet been fully outlined. It’s really about a plan that has to be on the table. Your point about how UNMISS is supporting the peace process. We support the peace process in a multitude of ways. Just starting with the most basic, our presence across the country provides a degree of stability to enable the peace process to go forward. We have heard a large number, we are talking dozens and dozens of meetings on the ground between government and opposition and also between different tribal groups - a lot of the time, it’s over cattle raiding and issues like that - that’s occurring as we speak in Jonglei and Lakes, for example today. But we will continue to support the peace process in a number of different ways. We have brought groups together by bringing in people from outside, experts on mediation. We brought in some in from South Africa a couple of weeks ago. We have an expert who was providing some support to the boundaries commission and we will continue to do this. I don’t want to go into a whole list of things but it’s a multitude of different ways that we are supporting things. Will we meet the deadline? Well, as I said before, this is the big question. The 12th of May is coming fast and there is a lot to do. My sense is that it won’t all be done, because I think there is a lot to be done. We are behind and its going to take a super human effort to reach the deadline. Now that we are behind, its going to be more difficult. But it’s my fervent hope that there will be enough on the table and done, to enable the transitional government to take shape and to come into force. That will be my hope - that all the opposition groups could come together - even if we haven’t resolved everything, they might be able to sit together, and we can do that while the transitional government goes on.

In regard to your question about Unity and the rape cases, I refer back to our report that came out about 4 weeks ago - 5 weeks ago now. We have followed up with that. We are continuing, as UNMISS, to increase our patrols on the ground, increase our engagement with armed groups, increase our engagement with the government on the ground in Bentiu. We have seen a big decline in the number of cases that have been reported to us and we hope that continues.

Catholic Radio Network: Thank you, In relation to parties’ involvements in meetings I would like to know what the red lines are, because you said Thomas Cirilo said there is still some red lines, what are these red lines and what is the government’s response to these red lines and perhaps how you can advise them in this process and how UNMISS is going help them reach an agreement?

SRSG David Shearer: With regard to Thomas Cirilo, he's made it pretty clear, and I think he has fleshed out these various red lines in the various statements that he has made. But effectively what Thomas Cirilo is looking for is a greater degree of federalism, and the decentralization of power to the states, that’s very
much where he is coming from. Now I know that the IGAD special envoy met with him on a number of occasions. I have met with him many times over the past 2 years. He is very adamant that he wants to see those particular areas that he would want to see in the peace process there. But that would mean opening up the peace process afresh and starting again. So, we are in a situation, at the moment, where he is unwilling to compromise. The sad thing about this is, that the fighting that is going on in the area south of Yei, has displaced a large number of people - hundreds of people - and the government response to that fighting is also the same, it’s also creating problems, for people in those areas. There have been people who have had to flee their homes, some of them have gone to Congo, some of them are coming to Yei town. Humanitarian agencies are trying to deal with that. That’s the outcome of not being able to reach an agreement but it’s very much up to Cirilo’s forces, but also the way that the government responds in trying to create the atmosphere there where people are not subject to violence and intimidation.

Catholic Radio Network: How can you advise them and how is UNMISS going to help them reach an agreement?

SRSG David Shearer: At the moment, it’s the IGAD special envoy that is spearheading the discussions with Thomas Cirilo. From the UN’s point of view, we keep the communication lines open, but what we do not want to have in these situations is too many negotiators. But we have kept a line of communication open with NAS and Cirilo, and that’s the way that we work. The UN works across borders between different groups without sort of fear or favor. So, we will be talking with the IGAD special envoy in the coming weeks and we’ll be discussing ways in which we can support him and help him, and whether we can take a more active role. But at the moment, it's very much in IGAD’s court in terms of taking the negotiations forward.

Radio Miraya: You said the level of political hostilities in the country has generally diminished, you cited a case in Yei where still there are pockets of skirmishes going on, could you elaborate on who are those fighting? Is it government, NAS, IO, why are they fighting? And of course, in all these clashes we see it is the civilians bearing the brunt of all this happening. We just heard a report a few days back that that there are about a thousand civilians currently camping in the Episcopal Church compound in Yei Town and their conditions have been described as deplorable. They are in the open, no food, no shelter, and also about 25km west of Yei, we have Lasu refugee settlement. We have about 10,000 returnees who have come back from DRC, these people are in dire need of humanitarian assistance and nothing so far has come to them. I would like to know what is UNMIS doing in partnership with humanitarian agencies to help these people.

SRSG David Shearer: The situation you describe is very bad. The fighting is between, as you know, Thomas Cirilo's groups - Thomas Cirilo's fighters in those areas - and Government SSPDF. But SSPDF, as we understand, also often joins with the opposition group of IO as well. So, in combination, that is the parties fighting. And as you know, unfortunately in South Sudan, when there is fighting between different groups, it’s the civilians who bear the brunt, and that’s exactly what’s happening in this case as well. We think it’s
deplorable. We have called on all sides to stop fighting and to seek mediated settlement, a negotiated settlement, rather than a military settlement. A military settlement in these areas is not the answer. In terms of the humanitarian support, there are a number of agencies in the area responding to many of the humanitarian needs. Often when people are displaced spontaneously, it’s difficult to get to them and provide for all their needs immediately but over time there has been quite a big push in that area by humanitarian agencies to support them.

In terms of UNMISS’ response, we have increased our patrolling into the area south of Yei, and we have helped humanitarians, when needed, and others to get to areas and provide them with the force protection that is needed. We will continue to provide patrolling in those areas.

But it comes back to a couple of other things, one is our ability to get there, and it comes back to the question that was raised before, about access to these areas. It’s important that we are able to access them and we are able to help humanitarian partners. But at the end of the day, it’s about the groups themselves choosing not to fight and looking to a negotiated settlement rather than a military settlement.

**AP:** How do you view the peace process if Machar doesn’t come back in May when he is scheduled to?

**SRSG David Shearer:** Obviously the presence of Riek Machar is critical to the peace process and moving forward, we are in discussions with both him and his people here in Juba as well. We are a little way away from May, so what we doing is keeping our fingers crossed and hoping that, come 12th of May, there is sufficient progress made in the peace process that he will feel comfortable about coming back. If he doesn’t, that’s a hypothetical kind of area at this point. But what we would like to see is that there is at least a path forward where he would be able to come back as quickly as he possibly can. It’s a critical requirement for the achievement of the peace process and to maintain the stability in South Sudan.

**Juba Monitor:** My question is about the number of IDPs, particularly in UN protection sites. My question is that why is it that the number of those seeking protection at UN sites keeps fluctuating especially in Malakal and Bentiu? For instance, in a certain week you find that the number is reduced while coming to another week the number increases. What is really happening that they leave and also come back? Is there any threat they are facing outside that makes them to keep coming and going?

**SRSG David Shearer:** Perhaps three points on that. Each of the POCs is very different. So, Malakal is very different from Bentiu and Bentiu is very different from Juba or Wau. They have their own dynamics according to the people that are there, the ethnic group they come from, and the reasons why they are taking refuge in the POC is also a bit different. But in general, there are a couple of reasons for the fluctuations. One is just the practical reason that the count is not done everyday day. It’s done every so often, and as a result of that the count can go up and down. The second thing is that there are events that are happening. So, for example, in the middle of the year if we take Bentiu. In the middle of the year last year, when there was fighting in and around Koch and Leer, and around there, there was an influx of people coming in, because people were fleeing the fighting in that area, so the numbers went up. Right now, we are seeing that the numbers are actually coming down because people are starting to move back to their homes, so we’re looking at a large number of people in
Bentiu that are moving back to the areas that they are from, in and around Koch, for example Mayardit, in and around Leer, and we hope that continues.

The issue about this is that, what we would like to do as the UN and what humanitarians are doing right now, is to provide services in the areas of the people that are wanting to go back to. So, a lot of the drag of people not going back and not leaving POC site is not about protection, it’s about services. For example, their children are being educated inside the POC, and maybe the same services are not available in the area that they are moving back to. And so the humanitarians now are focusing... and they just got money... they have applied for money from what we call the Central Emergency Response Fund which is held in New York, that money can be made available to provide education, health services in the area that people want to go back to, so that they feel more willing to leave and go back to their homes. So, it’s quite a complicated process. It’s not simple. The POCs were set up because of protection issues. Because of the peace process, those same protection issues are not as acute as they were before. But the other issues of humanitarian support have become more prominent. Some people stay in POCs because they are getting humanitarian support, whereas the places they want to go to don’t have the same support, so we have to try and re-adjust that balance to make it easier for them to go back home again.

Catholic Radio Network: I heard that some officials, some UN officials from Bentiu, were detained. I don’t know which organization exactly, but can you confirm this? This happened last week.

SRSG David Shearer: I would have to have more information, I am not sure about this. But we can find out about this afterwards and get back to you. I am not aware of it at the moment.

The Dawn: Still on the issue of Thomas Cirilo, bad as it is you know at the local level, with all the displacements that have taken place, but how about at the national scene, about the peace process, how do you see Cirilo’s issue affecting the overall peace process in the country?

Them my other question is about food security. Just some few months back, there was the IPC report which said that by mid this year, from May to July, about 7 million people would be seriously affected by the food crisis in the country if interventions are not made at this point in time, could you just update us how the situation is?

SRSG David Shearer: With regard to Thomas Cirilo’s return, on the peace process, it’s important to realize that, while the fighting that’s going on between Cirilo and the government and IO is really a disappointing and tragic factor, it sits outside the peace process. And while we need to continue to have those negotiations going on, what we shouldn’t do is to get completely distracted by that and forget about the overall peace process that is continuing, because it’s important that the overall peace process, which brings in the great majority of the opposition groups into the process, that that continues and stays on track. Let’s not get sidetracked by what’s happening. That’s not to say what’s happening is not tragic and is disappointing, but we need to focus on the peace process going forward. So, my own feeling is that, let’s continue to work with the government, with the opposition groups to make sure that pre-transitional period ends with a transitional government. I think that will help and, at the same time, we continue these negotiations with Cirilo but don’t get side tracked too much and lose the sight of the big picture, if you like, of peace. As I said before in my statement, the
political violence - we know there is ethnic and cattle raiding violence that’s picked up over the last weeks in Wau - but the political violence has diminished dramatically from what it was a year or year-and-a-half ago. Certainly, I can remember a lot of fighting going on and you remember that as well and that seems to have dropped off in Jonglei, Upper Nile those areas, so it’s important that we stay focused.

On the food security issue, yes, it’s an important point to raise. We are coming now to the critical time with regard to food security, because we’ve got a couple of months of the dry season still to run, then there will be the rains but it will take time for crops to grow before they can be harvested so we’re looking towards the end of the end of the year - and certainly to September, October - before we are going to see an alleviation of the food security problem. Up to now, and I was speaking with the new director of the World Food Programme yesterday, the World Food Programme is looking to pre-position food supplies across the country. They did a very good job of that last year as a result of the work that we have done on the roads. UNMISS roads renovations and repairs, together with the World Food Programme repairing roads, has meant we have been able to be much more successful at pre-positioning food aid in places across the country. That means that we rely less on food drops from aircraft which is hugely expensive. So, their estimate is that will save tens of millions of dollars by the improvements in roads we have been able to make. In another week or so we will have an update on the road situation and will be able to brief you more fully. But just besides that, we are about over 2/3 of the way the 1700 kilometers of road that we have tasked ourselves to repair so it’s in good shape, at the moment, in terms of that.

CGTN: There is this disturbing situation of recruitment by in the area of Bal Ghazal region, the CTSAMVM, in its report yesterday, also hinted about that and they confirm, actually in their report that there is recruitment taking place in the area of Bahr el-Ghazal. The peace agreement doesn’t talk about recruitment in new groups, except just putting together the forces that exists. How do you look at this particular incident?

SRSG David Shearer: Well the CTSAMVM is the group that is tasked to look at that and you can see their report. Their report is out there. We think it’s very worrying that this recruitment is going on in different parts of the country, as you say Bahr el-Ghazal is one of them, and the Warrap and Lakes regions. That’s definitely what we understand from CTSAMVM. But we have anecdotal reports of various recruitments going on in other parts of the country as well. What we have said is that this is obviously not supportive or in line with the principles of the peace process. Recruitment is not what we want to be doing now. We want to be downsizing not upsizing on Military. Upsizing increases the possibility of violence.

Radio Miraya: A follow-up question, you just said UNMISS has done some repair work on some stretches of road across the country, could you be specific which region, which parts of the country, has this repair work been done?

SRSG David Shearer: Well it’s right across the country. So, it’s the main supply routes from Juba to Wau. There are works about to start from Juba to Yei. We have, once again, reopened the road between Bor and Pibor, so the price of food in Pibor has gone down drastically as a result of that. We have improved
the road between Juba and Bor so that we hope it will be an all-weather road - so that it will be able to sustain itself through the rainy season as well. This is just some of the work that we have done, but it’s been expansive, so what I suggest we do is, in that in a few days’ time when we have the results of where we are up and a proper progress report, we come back together and I supply you with maps of where that work has been going on. What we have done in cooperation with the government and the ministry of roads and bridges, we have looked at where we are planning to work. We have five different engineering units that are there on the ground at the moment and we have worked also with the World Food Programme. So the World Food Programme has looked at what we call choke points, which are areas where there have been, perhaps culverts or bridges, that have created problems - they have worked on those more permanent solutions and we have looked at, with our big machinery, the improvement of the road so that not only food assistance can be supplied, but more importantly in many ways improving the ability for traders to trade so they can get up to Wau, to Bor and get to Pibor. This is hugely important for the economy and for livelihoods of people. So, I think it’s a good story, but I will come back to you on it next week. Thank you very much everybody.

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