



# United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS)

Spokesperson & Media Relations Unit  
Communications & Public Information Section

## NEAR VERBATIM TRANSCRIPT

11 November 2016

**Media Briefing by Mr. Adama Dieng, United Nations Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide on his visit to South Sudan**

*Juba, Republic of South Sudan, 11 November 2016*

**Acting Spokesperson Shantal Persaud** - Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen, and welcome to this special press briefing, being broadcast live on UN Radio Miraya from UNMISS Tomping base in Juba.

I would like to introduce our very important speaker today, Mr. Adama Dieng, the Under-Secretary General and Special Adviser to the UN Secretary General on Prevention of Genocide. USG Dieng is just finishing his 5 day visit to South Sudan, but before leaving he has taken time out of his schedule to brief us on the purpose and findings of his visit.

USG Dieng was appointed to his current position in July 2012, by the SG, he was in South Sudan to gain a better understanding of the issues around ethnically fueled violence and to provide assistance where ever needed. He is mandated by the UN SG to strengthen the role of the UN in preventing genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity.

Mr. Dieng has extensive experience as a legal and human rights expert, and throughout his career has significantly contributed to strengthening of the rule of law and fighting impunity. He has also contributed to the establishment of several non-governmental organizations in Africa and was the driving force behind the establishment of the African Court on Human Peoples' Rights, as well as the draft African Union Convention on Preventing and Combating Corruption.

A warm welcome to you USG Dieng, I will now turn the floor over to you.....

**USG Dieng** - I arrived in Juba on Monday in response to growing concern about developments here, including reports of targeted ethnic violence against multiple ethnic groups. My aim was to better understand the landscape of ethnically-fueled violence – including hate speech and incitement to violence – and to provide assistance, where requested.

The role of my Office is to strengthen the role of the United Nations in protecting populations from atrocity crimes and their incitement – by which I mean genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity, as well as ethnic cleansing – by collecting and assessing relevant information, advocating for preventive action, and raising awareness about the causes and dynamics of these atrocities. I work within the United Nations and with Member States, regional and sub-regional organizations, and civil society to develop more effective and possible courses of action.

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In the course of this week I have spoken to United Nations colleagues, senior government officials, civil society groups, religious leaders, and community members. I visited a protection of civilian site in Juba and travelled to Yei to meet with members of the community and government there. I have enjoyed good cooperation with all actors with whom I have met, and would like to express my appreciation to the Transitional Government of National Unity and to UNMISS for facilitating this visit.

That being said, I am dismayed to report that what I have seen and heard here has confirmed my concerns that there is a strong risk of violence escalating along ethnic lines, with the potential for genocide. I do not say that lightly. In place of the development of a South Sudanese national identity, I have seen that there is extreme polarization between some tribal groups, which has increased in certain places since the outbreak of violence in July this year.

Inflammatory rhetoric, stereotyping and name calling have been accompanied by targeted killings and rape of members of particular ethnic groups, and by violent attacks against individuals or communities on the basis of their perceived political affiliation. The media, including social media, are being used to spread hatred and encourage ethnic polarization, and letters threatening specific groups have surfaced in the last month. I am particularly concerned by the involvement of the youth of this country in this dangerous spread of hatred and hostility, as they are particularly susceptible to divisions within society.

The perpetrators and victims are not homogeneous, which makes an assessment of the risk of atrocity crimes in South Sudan very complex. But the patterns are there. Throughout the week, conversations with all actors have confirmed that what began as a political conflict has transformed into what could become an outright ethnic war. With the stalling of the implementation of the Peace Agreement, the current humanitarian crisis, a stagnating economy and the proliferation of arms, all of the ingredients exist for a dangerous escalation of violence.

In speaking to people here, I heard of tremendous mistrust between the civilian and military populations. Many people referred to an undisciplined army that was formed out of what had once been two opposing forces, and has now splintered into multiple armed groups, gangs and bandits which cannot be controlled by the central government. People no longer seem to see the military as their protector, but rather an entity to be feared – or to be joined as one of the few potential employers. One elder I met summed up the current ethnic polarization: he said that he could see fear in the eyes of some, and enthusiasm in the eyes of others.

I was last in South Sudan in 2014, and serious commitments made at that time to end violence have been unfulfilled. I am extremely saddened and disturbed to see South Sudan in its current state and I fear for its people. Even as the conflict becomes ever-more complex, the effects of the December 2013 outbreak of violence linger, and human rights violations committed at that time have not been accounted for. On the contrary, there is renewed violence on a daily basis, and any hope of reconciliation is elusive. Justice and accountability were common themes in my discussions during my visit, but there seems to be little hope of either at the moment.

I must emphasize that genocide is a process. It does not happen overnight. And because it is a process and one that takes time to prepare, it can be prevented. Action can and must be taken now to address some of the factors that could provide fertile ground for genocide. What surfaced over and over in my discussions this week was the presence of long-standing anger, combined with misconceptions and preconceived notions. These need to be addressed if there is to be a chance of peace.

My intention in reporting this assessment is to provide impetus for preventive action. I was encouraged by the receptivity, among the actors with whom I met, to my suggestion that there was an urgent need for reconciliation, as well as a willingness to engage in both community and national level dialogue.

I would like to highlight the situation in Yei River State, which I visited briefly this week. Until recently, Yei has been spared the widespread violence of other areas. Over the last few months, however, reports detail the expulsion of farmers from their agricultural plots into Yei town. These farmers have lost their homes and belongings, livestock and land. Property has been looted and villages have been burned. Yei has been subject to severe access restrictions, despite a grave humanitarian situation and the alarming targeting of civilians. Residents are confined to a small area within the town, or risk attacks by armed forces.

I heard reports of violence that included targeted killings, assault, maiming, mutilation, rape, and the barbarous use of machetes to hack families to death. Bodies have been found in the river.

There is widespread fear among the population. One person reported desperately to me, "Tonight I don't know what will happen to me." Another elder expressed terror that his community would be "finished."

Even on the day I visited, I saw families packing up the few belongings they have left and waiting on the side of the road for transport – either to Juba or to neighboring Uganda for refuge. The gravity of the situation in Yei merits immediate intervention – a full scale fact-finding investigation and enhanced humanitarian support. The population has been forced into town without access to food and they and the refugee population which Yei hosts are suffering.

Yei is but one urgent example among many. The signs are all there for the spread of this ethnic hatred and targeting of civilians that could evolve into genocide, if something is not done now to stop it. I urge the people of South Sudan to take action.

The State has the primary responsibility to protect its populations. That means all South Sudanese, irrespective of their ethnic, national or political affiliation. Other States, regional organizations and the international community can assist its protection efforts, however. I plan to do my part by informing the international community of my assessment and calling for action. I will speak with members of the African Union and the Security Council, as well as IGAD.

As I leave Juba, I will repeat what I said two years ago: South Sudanese, your leaders, the regional and the international community, I beseech you to take immediate measures to end the violence and uphold our collective responsibility to protect the populations of South Sudan from atrocity crimes. Ethnicity or political affiliation should not be used as a reason to incite violence or demonize and exclude any community or section of the population. We must all put strive for peace in South Sudan.

***Acting Spokesperson Shantal Persaud*** – Thank you. For Radio listeners, *we have just been listening to the Under Secretary-General Adama Dieng on the prevention of genocide. This is a live Press conference, and the Under Secretary- General Dieng is just about to leave South Sudan , he has been here for five days, and he has been sharing with us his findings and thoughts. while he's been here during the course of these days, he also travelled to Yei and expressed his concern on a number of issues . We will now open the floor for some questions and answers*

### ***Questions from the media and Answers***

**Q: (Radio Miraya)** - I did follow your conversation with these young gentlemen on Radio Miraya just a few minutes back. Just I would like to ask you on the advice that you said that you will give the international community and others. What would that advice be? And secondly you referred to Rwanda and 1994 and the world has been repeatedly saying, 'we don't want to see Rwanda happening again and also in Sudan in Darfur following the conflict the same rhetoric or speech was also made and now you are reporting the grim situation in our country, in South Sudan. What, do you think the international community, are they ready to act to help South Sudan, thank you.

**Q: (Associated Press)** - You said that you had seen the targeting of civilians and farmers in Yei in that area, that seems to me definition of ethnic cleansing because they've been removed from their homes and they cannot live there anymore. I am wondering if that meets the definition of ethnic cleansing in Yei. And also did you receive any kind of harassment or were you blocked from travelling at all from the government there? Thank you for coming also.

**A: USG Dieng** – First of all on the first question, is the international community ready to help South Sudan; as you know the International community has been in South Sudan for some time and as I reminded the leadership of this country the primary responsibility lies on your hands. Nobody will save South Sudan but the South Sudanese themselves and therefore it is critical that the leadership understand that the international community can only complement their efforts. But at the same time it is important that the leadership understand that sovereignty means responsibility. This is the youngest nation of the world which was granted sovereignty on July 9, 2011. But that sovereignty doesn't belong to any leader. That sovereignty is the property of the people of this country. And if the leadership of this country, if the state failed to protect the population, then the international community will have to come and rescue and answer to the protection of these people. And that is why in 2013 drawing lessons from its failure in Rwanda, the international community at that time closed the door of UNAMEER; it was the mission on the ground denying people to enter those places. But here in December 2013 the UN opened its door to protect those civilians. Today they have many POC's in this country. But that doesn't look good even for the leadership. They have to assume responsibility. These people whatever condition they are, this should come to an end. They should be able to return to their land and start a new life. A new life of peace. And this leads me to the question of the gentleman from AP. At this stage it is difficult to say, to determine that this is an ethnic cleansing, no. It is not yet the case. There is no genocide. If so I would not be here. I am here to prevent that genocide; I am here to prevent ethnic cleansing which as you many know is not legally defined crime. As part of the international crime ethnic cleansing was coined during the works of the former Yugoslavia tribunal. But in fact it almost equates genocide as you may know in light of its difficulties. Because simply when it comes to determining legally genocide, when a court has to make a determination, the physical element of the crime can be easily identified. When it comes to the emotional element, the intent would require further investigation. And if people today are afraid, the fear I am referring to in Yei is because the population have witnessed military trucks, Antinov planes, other aircrafts transferring population mainly of Dinka origin out of Yei to Juba. And then people say in addition to that movement we have been hearing messages, inflammatory speeches. And when we speak to the others who say that is not the Dinka element that started this move. Dinka element say a group of them were killed in a bus, but still we need to diffuse this tension by first of all developing a positive speech, make sure that people are not afraid. And of course you had the 19 October speech by President Salva kiir which also did not contribute to reassure the population, because people could interpret that speech in a way which might not be necessarily what he had in mind. And therefore it will be extremely

important that the leadership of this country make every effort to really clarify and also take action on those who are inciting violence, on those who are spreading inflammatory speeches. With the young journalists, I told them that President Uhuru Kenyatta was indicted before the International Criminal Court. I saluted the statement he made last June, where he said to the people of Kenya, 'Nobody will be above the law. I will not tolerate any incitement to violence based on ethnicity'. As you all know he faced trial before the International Criminal Court. At the end of the day his case was closed due to lack of evidence but I think he learned a lesson that as the head of state he is in charge of law and order. He is the (inaudible) responsible person. He knows that. And therefore he sent that signal. And my office will also help the national committee in Kenya which is in charge of prevention of genocide crimes against humanity and all forms of discrimination ahead of the election mainly to address the issues of incitement to violence. And the same with the project I am developing now with religious leaders and that is why here also in South Sudan I sincerely hope we will all join effort to help in diffusing the tension. I will offer my services to the government of this country in helping to promote reconciliation, to promote dialogue, and you don't need millions of dollars, you have to start at local level. Let people be (inaudible) developing this new atmosphere, but also the tone should be set from the top.

**Q: (Student Journalist)** - *I'm quite sure you've met some of our leaders and you've talked about for example what you said earlier around, the hunger and other things going on in our country, so what have you told them about what's going on and what have they told you ?*

**A: USG Dieng** - Well I will say that they were extremely receptive to the message I delivered to them reminding them about the responsibility, inviting them to care about their people. If they are in deceit today, that is to care about their people, but most importantly to make every effort to really diffuse the current tension. Because I told them, there is no genocide in this country today. But if this trend continues of fear from the population thinking that there is one party which is privileged and the others excluded, that will not be a good sign. Therefore inclusivity is extremely important. This government should make every effort to really assure its population that this is not a government of a Dinka, not an army of a Dinka, this is not a parliament of the Dinka, it is their and diverse. Ultimately it has to give evidence that it is managing diversity in the most constructive manner. Because if you see today what is happening in Iraq, it is the result of the exclusion which has been governing that country for a long time. The birth of Daesh is the result of the failure of the then prime minister following the fall of Sadaam Hussein. Al Maliki a Shia who excluded the Sunni and that's why a couple of weeks ago when Moses operation started I sent a warning that made every effort to answer that you will work on the reconciliation to prevent retaliatory fights against the Sunni population who were living in Mosul and might be identified as pro ISIL. So this means that we have to make every effort so that this government has to be as inclusive as it has to be as a way to prevent grievances from all the communities who might feel that they have been excluded. And we will work on that and we will encourage and support the government if it goes in that direction.

**Q: (Bakhita Radio)** - *Did you present your findings to the top government officials of this country concerning what might lead to the genocide and if so what was their response to this?*

**A: USG Dieng** - As I said, let me be very clear; there is no genocide while we are speaking but there are risk factors which are there and need to be halted. If you don't bring to a halt those risk factors, you will go straight in the direction of the crime of the crime; the crime of genocide. So that's why I made it very clear and I should say that they were very receptive. Now regarding the measure of how to address it, that's another but they agreed with most of the measures I am offering and certainly in the coming days when I will advise the Security Council I will also offer some other measures, I will also brief the sanction committee of the Security Council.

**Q: (Associated Press)** - *Today in South Sudan we saw the closure of Eye Radio which is a very popular national radio station and I was wondering what you think the effect of closing these radio stations that have a message of peace... How is that going to affect what you are saying... as one of these ways to detract from the risk of genocide?*

**A: USG Dieng** - I am a great champion of freedom of expression and freedom of opinion. However, I would never tolerate a radio like radio Des Milles Collines – the famous radio of hatred which was in Rwanda. Had we closed that radio at the time or used a device that could have prevented that radio to spread messages of hatred in Rwanda we could have certainly prevented what had happened in that country. In one hundred days near one million Tutsis were killed simply because of who they are. Therefore I cannot but seriously call on those authorities who have decided the closure of that radio. If you said to me this is a radio promoting peace, they should have rather encouraged, congratulated, used that radio as a model, say “from now on that is the message that we want” because that is what I have been asking them. I was not aware of this and I’m going to send a letter to the authorities asking them to reconsider their decision of closure before leaving the country today. This is a time when we need powerful and spreading messages of peace that is what we need, we don’t need hatred.

**Q: (Al-Arabiya TV)** - *You are urging the South Sudanese to reconcile among themselves, to end the violence; do you think this urging can bring peace and stability to the country without accountability? Many UN officials came to the country and said that they are going to make this accountability among the South Sudanese whether they are government forces or armed groups from IO. When will this accountability begin?*

**A: USG Dieng** - I think we should realize that there is conflict in almost all over the country. Where communities are settling all the scores fueled by the conflict. The lead is really of the cattle, the security apparatus is so fragmented that no one has command and control anymore. With arms everywhere, small conflicts are popping up everywhere and I think that the sole fact that two days ago President Salva Kiir meeting with the governors of the states instructing them to take control of security in their areas means that the situation is a serious situation. It also means that the government itself is not able to do this thing, and that is why I say that it is important that they diffuse the situation. Then the issue of accountability comes; when in 2014 I met with President Salva Kiir and his Vice President Riek Machar and I said to Riek Machar “my younger brother, you have to know that the history of Africa is repeated of rebel leaders who [inaudible], where is Charles Taylor? He is serving a sentence in the UK. Where is Forest Sankoh? He died while in detention in Freetown. Where is Jonas Savimbi? He died in the field in Angola”. And I could have gone on and on. I said “is it the future you want for you”? Therefore you need to avoid having the same end, bring your commanders to account for the atrocities committed, and I mentioned the same to the office of the President and said it clearly that we cannot allow amnesty to be granted to ring leaders of serious crimes. They have to face justice, and that’s why I’ve been among those who promoted the establishment... The idea of the Commission of Inquiry, establishment of the court, my office raised 300,000 to support the efforts of the AU. And they came with a report, at the time I was also very frustrated by the African Union delaying the process of making public that report. I was frustrated because at the time, when they took that decision many people, particularly in the western world, were very suspicious, including western NGOs. How can a former military coup leader [inaudible], how can he run this commission? He did an excellent work. If there is someone in that commission who disappointed me that will be my good friend and brother Mahmood Mamdani, there was a debate... peace, justice and reconciliation. Mamdani is a brilliant academic, at the end it was a big fight but I’m glad that despite all the delay a decision was taken, and in the Peace Agreement there is a chapter dedicated to that dimension and the decision was taken at a time where the Hybrid Court would be established and the

office of Legal Affairs in New York had been working closely with its counterpart at the African Union's legal counsel in Addis. We have also been supporting in terms of funding; a mission was supposed to come even here and they started recruiting the staff but we need to go in that direction. Without justice there will be no peace, and without peace no justice, how can you run the two together? It might be challenging but it is possible. People have to realise that either justice is done today; sooner or later people who commit international crime will face justice even if they are not part of the ICC. I hope that the government of this country takes seriously accountability; we need to help the government of this country to strengthen its own justice system because in Yei when you know that there are [inaudible] who have fled the country, the breakdown of the rule of law is there. We need to make an effort in that regard and that's why we must call on all South Sudanese politicians and ask them to be less selfish and to think about the interest of their people.

**Acting Spokesperson Shantal Persaud** - *Ok, if we have no further questions, Under Secretary- General Adama Dieng and Special Advisor to the SG on Prevention of Genocide, I'd like to thank you very much for your time this afternoon. This is the end of this press conference, thank you all; I wish you all a good and safe weekend.*

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