



Thursday 19 January, 2012

**CHECKED AGAINST DELIVERY**

**OPENING REMARKS BY SRSG HILDE F. JOHNSON**

Good morning ladies and gentlemen and welcome to the first UNMISS press conference of 2012.

Let me start by wishing you, the members of the media, a happy and prosperous new year. Your role is key to a healthy democracy and I hope our interactions will help keep the people of South Sudan informed not only about our role but also about the important ongoing work in consolidating a democratic transition. I would like also to welcome and introduce my new Deputy, Mr Raisedon Zenenga. He joined the mission few days ago as Deputy Special Representative (Political) in charge of the political pillar of the mission. Mr. Zenenga has over 28 years of service in the United Nations, government and diplomatic positions. His experience in managing peacekeeping operations in conflict and post-conflict areas constitutes a timely reinforcement and a significant asset to the mission's leadership capacity.

**6 months of independence**

Six months ago we witnessed the birth of a new nation, South Sudan, and the launch of the United Mission In South Sudan (UNMISS). It is an appropriate time to reflect on the initial months of UNMISS and look ahead to the issues and challenges that will face all of us in 2012 and beyond.

As we are entering the first full year in the history of the new nation, South Sudan; the South Sudanese Government and its people will take decisions that will impact not just their lives, but those of their future generations of this country.

South Sudan is moving progressively and with determination towards consolidating its independence on the national and international scenes. The new state is joining the AU, UN, IGAD, Great Lakes Conference, COMESA Nile Basin Initiative, and G7+, and has submitted its application to join the EAC. The relation with Sudan is critical to the stability not only of the two countries but also of the region. In this regard, resolving the outstanding issues relating to the border, oil and citizenship, will be determinant to the stability and the development of two countries.

On the national scene, political reforms and security are among the major challenges that the new state is facing. However, the government's introduction of political and security reforms show strong commitment to establishing a stable and democratic state worthy of the people of South Sudan. In this regard, I welcome the passing of key pieces of legislation. The Political Parties Act and the Elections Acts have both passed the Council of Ministers and now await final endorsement by Parliament. We are now awaiting the Media Bill, and hope to see the Act be passed as soon as possible.

We welcome the timely establishment of the Constitutional Review Commission, which will have a critical role to play. The constitutional process is a key part of UNMISS' mandate, and we offer our support to the Commission and its work, both institutionally and with broad-based nation-wide consultations, as envisaged in its mandate.

Transparency and Accountability are key to good governance and a functional state. The strong commitment that has been expressed from the government needs to be followed up by action. With the two recent Presidential decrees, of 9 December and 22 December, covering a number of measures, commendable actions are now being taken.

All these actions are vital measures in the way forward to ensure a peaceful and orderly transition and to consolidate the institutions of the new and independent state.

The Mission's mandate was clearly spelled out last July by UN Security Council Resolution 1996 to set up UNMISS "to consolidate peace and security and to help establish the conditions for development" in South Sudan in order to strengthen the capacity of its Government "to govern effectively and democratically". In implementing our mandate we have established a UNMISS-Government mechanism. It meets regularly, and is co-chaired by the Vice President and me. This mechanism represents an important platform in which challenges and issues are being addressed. We are meeting today, and will discuss a number of issues, including the situation in Jonglei.

### The Jonglei-crisis

The ongoing security crisis in Jonglei State is a test for all of us. All concerned should redouble their efforts to put an immediate end to the cycle of violence, which is putting thousands of lives at risk and threatening the stability of the whole area.

UNMISS strongly condemns the use of violence by communities and urges their political, traditional and youth leaders to do their utmost to end killings and confrontations in an area that has suffered far too many casualties.

In this regard, we are deeply concerned about statements hate messages that have been made by some individuals and groups. The statements could incite systematic ethnic violence. Threats were made to wipe out an entire ethnic group from the face of the earth. Such statements are in violation of both international law and South Sudan's domestic laws. Any statements that could incite ethnically based violence are totally unacceptable. The United Nations condemns them in the strongest terms. We

have been informed that repetitive hate language continues to be used, calling for ethnic violence and inciting communities to take aggressive actions. This is of grave concern. I urge the leaders of all communities at all levels in Jonglei state, and nationally, to call for a halt to any such rhetoric. I also call on the Government to bring the full force of the law to bear against those responsible for inciting violence. This kind of hate language and terminology has no place in a democratic country.

Protection of civilians is core to the mandate of UNMISS. In accordance with Security Council Resolution 1996 and within its capacity, the Mission took decisive measures. It committed around half of its combat-ready personnel to the heavily populated areas like Pibor and Likuongole. We moved our forces to where civilians were under greatest threat. These actions combined with the presence of government troops helped save many lives.

Thanks in part to early warning, tens of thousands of civilians in Jonglei State were able to move out of harm's way in the days leading up to the attack against Murle communities. When the attack happened, the combined use of force by the SPLA, who opened fire on the armed attackers, and the effective positioning of Armoured Personnel Carriers (APCs) by the UN Mission, helped turn the Lou Nuer column around and seize the attack.

Since the attack, there has been several numbers of casualties circulated. Our preliminary findings have confirmed evidence of a number of civilians killed and injured, which is completely unacceptable. However, the findings so far do not provide the basis for the scale of casualties claimed by some media. We urge leaders and the public to avoid jumping to conclusions based on unverified human rights violations. UNMISS also commends the government's decision to conduct an investigation into the events and the numbers and who may have been responsible. We call upon the Government to hold the perpetrators of these terrible attacks and counter-attacks to account.

Sadly, the chain of retaliatory violence continues unbroken. As we all know, a number of attacks have the last few days happened on Lou Nuer communities, and now also the Dinka. We have been relocating our military forces to locations most at risk in both communal areas. Their role will be primarily to act as a deterrent to attacks from other communities. As you know, the latest target, the Dinka village of Duk Padiet, was attacked on the evening of 16 January. Not being able to fly at night, UNMISS peacekeepers deployed at first light to the area where they established a presence and provided medical aid to the victims of the attack, and helped evacuate a number of casualties to Juba and Bor.

The cycle of violence in Jonglei has caused huge suffering to all the people in the area. It has to end. UNMISS remains very concerned about the deterioration of the humanitarian situation and reiterates

its call, urging the international community to respond generously and rapidly to humanitarian needs.

The UN humanitarian community has launched one of the most complex and expensive emergency operations in South Sudan since the CPA to assist 60,000 people among the 90,000 affected people in the area. UNMISS will continue to support and help in delivering vital supplies, particularly in remote areas where some of the most vulnerable people are located. My Deputy SRSG, Lise Grande, will present more detail on the humanitarian situation in a separate press conference shortly.

Over recent months UNMISS has consistently deployed its limited resources to reinforce efforts to prevent and mitigate conflict in Jonglei State, including to the Lou Nuer, Dinka and Murle communities. We have statistics that show this, as you will see. Military patrols and deployment has happened into all three communities throughout the fall to deter violence and protect civilians through preventive measures.

However, more government forces are urgently needed in key locations, as well as to patrol in the buffer zones between the communities to de-escalate tensions between the communities and avert further violence. I urge the Government to deploy additional forces and further strengthen its forces in the key areas to stop further violence.

This will also provide a basis for a peace process to make progress between the Jonglei communities. I welcome the Government's decision to establish a peace team to lead the peace process. This is a promising and positive step.

The most critical intervention is, indeed, to get the peace process between the communities off the ground. It is now very urgent that a dedicated team is appointed to move the process forward. UNMISS is committed to support this process. An impartial UNMISS will continue to be actively engaged to help prevent further violence in the area and to help the GRSS to discharge its primary responsibility to protect its civilians.

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