



PRESS RELEASE

Opening Remarks by Jean-Pierre Lacroix, Under-Secretary-General for UN Peace Operations **at today's press conference in Juba**

Near Verbatim

A very good afternoon to all of you here in the room and, of course, a very good afternoon to our listeners on Radio Miraya. It's always good to be with you and meet our media partners here in South Sudan.

Today is my last day here and before this I went to Port Sudan, then I came to Juba. I also visited Abyei for two days and met authorities and communities there. Additionally, I also briefly stopped over Aweil, in the state of Northern Bahr El Ghazal.

This early afternoon, I met with His Excellency President Salva Kiir Mayardit, and earlier in the week, I had a chance to meet with First Vice President Riek Machar and a number of cabinet ministers. I also met with the Vice President (Economic Cluster) Dr Benjamin (Bol Mel) in the early part of this afternoon as well.

So, let me open this discussion by saying that the key purpose of my visit was to convey an important message, the fundamental message, which is the continued support and continued commitment of the entire UN family to South Sudan, especially as it enters the fourth extension of its transitional period amidst a variety of challenges.

So, the commitment is fully there, both by UNMISS as well as by the UN agencies.

As all of you know, this latest extension commenced on 22 February, just a few days ago, and we felt it's critical to emphasize the message of that UN commitment when the country is doing its best to fully implement the Revitalized Peace Agreement and hold its first elections, that are due to be happening by December 2026.

At the same time, I'm aware that there are serious challenges faced by the South Sudanese people and their leaders—there is the dire economic and humanitarian situation and I'm also aware of rising insecurity at the subnational level, and we've seen currents of violence in various parts of the country, which are obviously of concern. There is also the impact of the Sudanese conflict on this country, in terms of the number of IDPs, the number of refugees, returnees, the impact of the economy, the potential impact on security in South Sudan, so obviously the conflict in Sudan is adding to the already existing domestic challenges in South Sudan. We have to take that into account.

The situation in South Sudan is part of simultaneous crises across the world, and these multiple crises, as you know, unfortunately, have led to considerable pressure on the international community when it comes to humanitarian assistance, and particularly on funding. Simply put – there are too many people in need and too few resources available. Our main contributors have constraints on their public finances, and we are on the one hand committed to continuing the advocacy in support of South Sudan, but definitely that will require the partnership of all, including the authorities of South Sudan so that we can have an effective advocacy in terms of the resources that are needed to support South Sudan.

Against this backdrop, I wanted to come and assure our interlocuters of the UN's and first and foremost, Secretary General António Guterres', again, strong commitment to continue supporting South Sudan, making sure attention will not be diverted out of the South Sudanese situation.

So now, let me cover some of the discussions I have had in the past days—we have spoken at length about current security and humanitarian concerns, intercommunal conflict and the road to elections as part of the implementation of the Peace Agreement, and, vitally, our ongoing efforts as the UN to assist the Government of South Sudan in holding credible and peaceful elections in December 2026.

I took the opportunity to highlight some of the main messages and the main positions that you have already heard SRSO and Head of UNMISS Nicholas Haysom, who is next to me, highlight, particularly our hope that the parties to the Revitalized Agreement will break political deadlocks through consensus and move forward swiftly to ensure this latest extension leads to elections under the best possible circumstances.

Completing a peaceful democratic transition is a common goal between South Sudan and the international community; certainly, it's a goal that we share. But it is the South Sudanese themselves, and first and foremost the authorities who must do the heavy lifting. As the UN, we are here to assist them in every way we can on their journey to a permanent peace.

We also spoke about the crisis in Sudan and Abyei-related matters such as ongoing intercommunal tensions between the Ngok Dinka and Twic Dinka communities, as well as the fallout from the conflict in Sudan on the Abyei Box. On these issues, we agreed that building trust and confidence among both communities as well as making sure there is active dialogue between all the key stakeholders is paramount. We reiterated our ongoing efforts in this regard, while noting that the issue of the final status of Abyei remains open, and of course we hope there is progress in that direction. But, in the meantime, again I reiterate that regular and effective dialogue between the parties is important to make sure that Abyei will be preserved from the current challenges that are resulting from the situation in the Box but also in the vicinity, both in Sudan as well as in neighbouring states of South Sudan.

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