



PRESS RELEASE

Remarks on The International Day of UN Peacekeepers by Special Representative of the Secretary-General in South Sudan, Mr. Nicholas Haysom

27 May 2022
[Near Verbatim]

Minister of Peace Building, Honourable Stephen Par Kuol;
Excellencies, members of the diplomatic community;
My fellow UN colleagues and peacekeepers;
Distinguished ladies and gentlemen.

It is my pleasure to welcome you to UN House on this International Day of United Nations peacekeepers.

Today, we honour the more than one million women and men who have served as United Nations peacekeepers since 1948.

We pay tribute to the nearly 4,200 heroes and heroines who sacrificed their lives in the cause of peace around the world.

In South Sudan, we are deeply grateful to the 12000 military, 1500 police, and 2500 civilians – including nearly 400 UN Volunteers, serving with dedication and professionalism under the UN flag to realize the prize of peace.

Our diversity gives us enormous strength particularly when harnessed under the ideals of the UN flag. The uniformed personnel alone come from 55 different countries – with a variety of different languages and cultures.

This year, the theme of the International Peacekeepers' Day is "People. Peace. Progress. The Power of Partnerships"

We know that peace is won when governments and societies join forces to resolve differences through dialogue, build a culture of nonviolence, and protect the most vulnerable.

In this spirit, UN peacekeepers in South Sudan work with National and Local Government Authorities, Opposition groups, Civil Society, Humanitarians, the media, and communities, to foster peace, protect civilians, promote human rights and the rule of law.

We do so in the face of enormous challenges, including risk of physical harm, flooding, and COVID-19 pandemic.

Distinguished guests and colleagues,

To guide our actions in UNMISS, we have expanded a three-year strategic vision to prioritize durable peace at the local and national levels; and to support inclusive and accountable governance leading to a free, fair, and peaceful elections.

In this regard, we are (1) stepping up support to implementation of the peace agreement; (2) enhancing and contributing to a safe and secure environment; (3) intensifying grassroots civil engagements; (4) supporting rule of law institutions and processes; and (5) reenergizing national and local partnerships.

Over the last year, we have encouraged the transitional government to take primary responsibility for protecting civilians, including responding to intercommunal clashes. At the same time, we are doing all that we can, within our capabilities, to help deter violence, restore security, and build peace.

By way of example, when violence broke out in Tambura in Western Equatoria, we quickly deployed peacekeepers to establish a Temporary Operating Base that enabled us to carry out patrols to deter violence. At the height of that conflict, we protected over 8,000 displaced people near our base, ensuring local communities can safely collect food and water, humanitarians could deliver food and medicines, while supporting numerous reconciliation and peacebuilding efforts at state and national level.

We continue to work with humanitarian partners to create the conditions – both security on the ground and services – for displaced people living in the IDP sites around the country to their places of origin.

Our military engineering contingents have built or repaired hundreds of kilometers of roads, as well as dykes across the country. This is vital to enable communities connect easily for peace building, boost trade and economic growth, facilitate the safe delivery of humanitarian aid, as well as mitigate the effects of the floods.

At the grassroots level, we have led more than 170 conflict resolution and peace-building activities resulting in over 34 local peace agreements being signed to resolve intercommunal violence.

Looking forward, we will continue engaging the government to explore opportunities to jointly address perennial conflict between cattle keepers and communities in Greater Equatoria and in Jonglei.

Nationally, we have hosted constitution-making and electoral workshops, organised forums for political parties, leadership retreats for newly appointed local authorities and provided peace fellowships for youth.

We have a vital role to save lives. But we must also build local capacities and look for durable and longer-term solutions.

Peacekeepers can work to protect civilians, but ultimately, a safe, secure future will only come through inclusive political solutions.

Peacekeepers can never be a substitute for the political will of the parties to end conflicts.

Partnerships with regional organizations, the government, and communities, are critical for UN peacekeeping to achieve results, and for those results to be sustainable and long lasting.

Distinguished guests and colleagues,

Over the last year our UNMISS leadership continued to travel throughout the country to meet local communities, government officials and UN colleagues.

They have seen the harsh struggle of South Sudanese women and men, especially in the villages, compounded by the devastating effects of the floods.

We have witnessed the significant role played by UNMISS and UN partners to alleviate the hardships experienced by millions of people around the country, but we have also seen the incredible resilience of the people of this country.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to pay my respects to the Government and people of the Republic of South Sudan. As your partners in the peace process, we appreciate your support for the work of the UN in South Sudan.

On today's International Day of UN Peacekeepers, I would like to thank all colleagues; uniformed and civilians, those in more prominent roles as well as backroom staff in less public, less glamorous functions — for your strength, courage, and commitment in standing by this country and its people in their journey from war to peace.

Sadly, some of our colleagues have paid the ultimate price in the line of duty.

I take this opportunity to pay tribute to the 104 peacekeepers who have paid the ultimate price in service of peace since the inception of UNMISS. Their legacy lives on and inspires us.

Let me use this opportunity to acknowledge two of our peacekeepers who have received recognition from the Secretary-General this week in UN Headquarters.

First, the commendation letter to Captain Md Mahatab Uddin of Bangladesh, who in November 2021, went above and beyond the call of duty by courageously negotiating with armed groups to prevent attacks on civilians and UN personnel in Tonj.

The second, Major Winnet Zharare from Zimbabwe, who recently completed her assignment in Bentiu, received the 2021 United Nations Military Gender Advocate of the Year Award. She ensured that patrols included women to improve protection efforts and gained the trust of local military commanders who would reach out to her on issues pertaining to women's protection and rights.

It is my profound hope that in 2022, the people of South Sudan will be able to welcome the sustainable peace they so richly deserve.

I can reassure you that UNMISS remains this country's steadfast partner as we work collectively to make that hope a reality.

Thank you.

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