

UN Peacekeeping Mission Head insists on “zero tolerance approach” and maintaining the civilian character of South Sudan’s displaced people camps

The Head of the UN Peacekeeping Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) has insisted that the mission maintains a “zero tolerance approach” to any attempts to militarize the camps for people displaced by conflict and that the camps remain civilian in nature.

David Shearer, who is also the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General, was speaking in Bentiu, where some 115,000 people are currently living in the Mission’s largest Protection of Civilians site or POC.

Last month, 22 men were taken into custody by Mongolian peacekeepers, after they tried to break into the camp to seek shelter from fighting.

“The only way to keep women and children safe in this camp and all civilians in need of protection is to make sure they do not become militarized,” Mr Shearer said.

UNMISS currently protects some 218,000 people in seven POC sites across the country where people have fled due to the ongoing conflict in South Sudan.

“Undoubtedly, UNMISS has saved tens of thousands of lives by providing these sanctuaries from violence, but ultimately,” Mr Shearer added “we need to find a longer-term solution so that these people can return home and live productive lives.”

“Only those civilians in imminent danger and whose lives are at risk should be sheltering in these sites,” the UNMISS Head said.

UN Police Officers are working with community groups in the POC sites to ensure the civilian nature of the camp, as well as security and stability are maintained.

“UNMISS is stepping up peacekeeping patrols outside many of its POC sites to build confidence for local people to return home,” said David Shearer. “That goes hand in hand with the efforts of humanitarian agencies to provide targeted assistance to surrounding communities to support that return.”

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