

Remarks by Ambassador Samantha Power and Minister Martin Elia Lomoro at a Joint Press Availability Following a UN Security Council Meeting with the Cabinet of the Transitional Government of National Unity

Juba, South Sudan

September 3, 2016

AS DELIVERED

MINISTER LOMORO: Ladies and gentlemen of the press. Thank you for being with us this very important day. We have just concluded a meeting between the Cabinet of the Transitional Government of National Unity and a delegation from the United Nations Security Council, led by Her Excellency Samantha Power, who's a friend of South Sudan. We had a very, very good discussion. Very wide-ranging discussions.

We briefed the United Nations Security Council on the current political situation in the Republic of South Sudan. We gave them an overview of progress in the implementation of the agreement. We also outlined the chronology of the events that took place between the 7th and the 11th, and raised some concerns with regards to issues of relevance to this particular visit.

We heard from the members of the Security Council from various countries – very useful comments about the implementation of the agreement and the need for us to move expeditiously so that they can see us moving. The need for us to create partnership with UNMISS and that the protection force that is being proposed is there to help us rather than to come and invade the Republic of South Sudan. And based on our own actions and how we plan it together with UNMISS, that force could be helpful to us in improving our security situation and giving more life to the people of the Republic of South Sudan.

We also addressed the specific issue of the unfortunate events that took place on the 11th in Terrain Hotel, where some criminals and some undisciplined soldiers unfortunately interfered with the freedom of some of our aid workers. That is a matter of high priority for the United Nations delegation here and we addressed it. We had a very positive exchange of views on how to conclude the investigations.

We talked on the issues of child soldiers, the issue of POCs and so on, but generally speaking, I want to assure the people of South Sudan that the rumor out there that the UN has come to impose on us and to bring foreign forces to take the freedom of South Sudan is not there. What is being underlined here is partnership between the Republic of South Sudan and the UN as to how to improve security and to prevent conflict in our country.

Thank you otherwise, and I want to welcome Samantha.

AMBASSADOR POWER: Thank you. Thank you all. We did have a very productive, several hour meeting. It went on an hour longer than I think we had anticipated because we felt we were making progress on a number of issues.

I want to underscore the point that was made just there at the end by the Minister, which is that part of the reason that the meeting was useful was we got to debunk, as a Security Council, some of the myths that have existed about what the Security Council has intended. In my case, I got to debunk some of the propaganda about the United States and our intentions with regard to South Sudan. And I think, I hope, that the Minister's view as he just articulated is shared by every other minister in the room that there is now an understanding that when we talk about sending 4,000 peacekeepers to South Sudan on top of the force that is here, it is with one constituency in mind, and that is the people of South Sudan. It is with an eye to protecting them. It is with an eye to insuring they get the humanitarian assistance they need. Some of them are facing famine-like conditions, as all of you know. And I think there has been a lot of rhetoric out there about what the Regional Protection Force will and will not do, and we got a chance to talk through, in very pragmatic terms, what some of its functions will be. And I hope that we have bridged some of the divides that have existed up to this point.

Another issue, as the Minister mentioned, that got a lot of attention, was that of accountability. And some raised the question of whether peace comes first, followed by justice, or justice comes before peace – fundamentally we know that they have to go hand in hand. For as long as armed actors rape, loot, and kill with impunity, for as long as they are not held accountable, it will be very, very hard for the cause of peace to take hold here. Even if the government can make bureaucratic changes, set up committees, move forward with legal implementation, the hearts of the people need to see justice in order for them to trust in this process. And so, the accountability measures, the national reconciliation structure that the government is setting up, the commission of inquiry that the government has set up generally and that has been set up specifically on the Terrain incident, all of these are extremely important. But it's less about structures and what gets created and more about what these bodies do, and whether those who have committed ghastly acts against the South Sudanese, against UN peacekeepers, against aid workers, whether they, in fact, are held accountable. And so we had a discussion about what might strengthen some of the bodies that have been set up, including more perceptions of independence and more independence for some of the institutions that are carrying out the investigations.

I just want to say, briefly, in my national capacity, a word about the Terrain attacks, because American citizens were involved. They were raped by soldiers wearing government uniforms. The investigation is under way. It is extremely important that witnesses and people involved in those attacks feel comfortable coming forward. And therefore it is extremely important that there be some independent mechanism or independent body that can take testimonies, witness testimonies, because many of the victims feel frightened to come forward for fear that then they will be retaliated against or, those who are still in the country, raped again. So I just want to underscore that's a point that I had a chance to make and I hope the government will take into account.

The very last issue I want to raise is that as a united Council we raised concerns about the obstruction of UNMISS, the inability to move. We got assurances from the Minister that there is no intention to block the movement of UN troops that there's no intention to block the humanitarian actors from reaching people in need. Indeed, it struck us that there might be some information gaps because many in the meeting said they were not aware of humanitarian actors unable to reach people in need, and so out of this meeting we hope very quickly to make progress on the severe freedom of movement concerns that the Council has brought with us to South Sudan. And we really appreciated the constructive spirit in which the meeting was held. And I think a message sent by each side to the other: that we hear you, we hear your concerns, we want to take them to heart and we want to see how pragmatically we can move forward in a way that addresses the concerns of each side. With that, Fodé Seck from Senegal, the co-chair.

AMBASSADOR SECK: Nothing.

AMBASSADOR POWER: Nothing? Ah okay. I think we're going to go because we're so late

—

MINISTER LOMORO: I'm afraid we can't take any more questions. Unless. One. Quick. Please?

QUESTION: Justin Lynch from the Associated Press. What is the U.S. position on an arms embargo?

AMBASSADOR POWER: I addressed that yesterday in the press conference.

QUESTION: Uh, the U.S. position on an arms embargo?

AMBASSADOR POWER: I addressed that at the press conference.

QUESTION: (Inaudible.) What exactly is the position of the government? Are these 4,000 strong troop protection force coming or not?

MINISTER LOMORO: We are discussing the modalities on how to implement the resolution. Thank you.

QUESTION: In addition to peacekeepers being hindered by soldiers or by armed groups, the UN also has had (inaudible) in the camps and around the periphery. Is there anything that's being done to (inaudible)?

AMBASSADOR POWER: Yeah. Let me say a couple of things. First, I think it's extremely important, as the Secretary-General has said, that the UN look at its failures to respond to civilians who were in desperate need – South Sudanese civilians who were being attacked right outside the POC sites and of course American and other international aid workers who were calling – appear to have been calling – UNMISS looking for help and not having their calls even taken.

So all of that is very important, and the investigation the Secretary-General is doing is important, and whatever lessons are learned need to be applied quickly. However, it is also very important, I think, to note that the primary responsibility for those attacks lies with the attackers. And some of the focus on the UN role, I think, has diverted from the fact of, in some cases, government-affiliated militia carrying out these attacks, in some cases opposition militia, and this is why it is so important that the commitments that have been made on accountability to end impunity, to ensure that the perpetrators are held responsible, that is where the emphasis should be in this country. I assure you that the Security Council is not going to rest until the UN itself looks at its apparent by-standing in the face of some of these attacks, but the primary issue is that those attacks occurred, and the perpetrators need to be held accountable.

And just on the arms embargo question, because I think I answered it yesterday, but let me come back to it. We – the United States has made very clear as the pen-holder and as the authors with the rest of the Council of the UNMISS resolution that this Regional Protection Force is an important element of seeing stability improve, physical security for civilians here improve. And the resolution makes very clear that in the event we can't work through the modalities, which again I believe that we can in a spirit of partnership, that we will have to look, as a Council, at other measures. The U.S. position is that we will support an arms embargo if we are not able to get the deployment of the force in a manner that actually enhances the welfare of the South Sudanese people.

QUESTION: Okay. Thank you. (Inaudible.) The time you're going to spend in South Sudan is short. A lot of activities. Meeting government officials. Visiting other parts of the country. Is it enough time to assess the situation on the ground? Two, Juba has been calm for some time now, since the fighting erupted here (inaudible). Do you still say the troops are to be deployed here in Juba or in other parts of the country?

AMBASSADOR POWER: So this issue came up of whether the Regional Protection Force was still needed given that Riek Machar has fled the country, given that the transitional government is working more smoothly. And, I think, we as a Council send an unequivocal message that yes, this force is still needed. When the UN deployed, or when the UN Security Council first created UNMISS, it never imagined that there would be 200,000 civilians gathered at UN sites. And those sites are tying down a very significant portion of the capacity of UNMISS. So, in order for UNMISS to be out and about, to be patrolling the streets, to be offering civilians confidence, and to be protecting installations and ensuring freedom of movement, this infusion of these regional forces is very important.

You raise the question of whether the forces should deploy outside of Juba given that the situation here, at least for now, appears to be calmer. I think it's a very fair question. The mandate does not restrict them to Juba, it says that *en extremis*, they would be able to deploy elsewhere. And I think that if the Force Commander and the Special Representative, in consultations with the government, if there's an assessment that UNMISS' forces who are currently in Juba, UNMISS as it is now, that those could better be deployed to Wau or to equatorial parts of South Sudan – that's a judgment that can be made over time. But we know that UNMISS as it's currently configured, is not providing sufficient security to the people of South Sudan.

I do want to note that, in meetings with youth and women and other members of civil society – notwithstanding the apparent return to greater calm in Juba – there’s still a great sense of fear that exists even just here in Juba. And if that’s true in Juba, I’m assuming it’s going to be true in parts of the country that are experiencing violence as we sit here today, as we speak.

Your first question was on whether we felt comfortable in such a short trip making judgments about the situation on the ground – we would love to be able to deploy here as a Security Council, and to live among our South Sudanese brothers and sisters to really get a sense of the circumstances on the ground. We have great humility about how much we can learn in a three-day trip and we are fortunate, many of us, to have embassies on the ground who will continue to keep us informed. We are very fortunate to have UNMISS, that sends reporting back. And we also, particularly as we build on the productive conversations that we had here today, look forward to staying in touch with ministers in the government directly, as well as some of the civil society actors that we’ve gotten to know. So, we will never know South Sudan like the South Sudanese, but we think it’s important to get out here and we will know more certainly after three days than we knew before arriving. And we will continue to take advantage of the knowledge that the rest of you will provide. Thank you.

MINISTER LOMORO: Thank you very much.