



UNMISS
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United Nations Mission in South Sudan

Press Release

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Briefing to the Security Council on South Sudan

Special Representative of the Secretary General

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Often when I brief the Security Council on South Sudan, the news is not encouraging.

However, today is different. There have been positive developments that have moved the country further along the road to sustainable peace.

On 15 February, President Salva Kiir – against the wishes of many of his supporters – agreed to compromise to return South Sudan to its pre-2015 position of 10 states, although he added three administrative areas.

With that shift, Dr. Riek Machar accepted the challenge to join a transitional government in Juba serving as the country's First Vice President – despite transitional security arrangements not yet in place.

With the deadlock broken, four Vice Presidents were sworn in at a ceremony in Juba attended by senior leaders from Sudan, South Africa and Uganda. The fifth was sworn in the following day.

I acknowledge the role of President Museveni of Uganda, General Burhan of Sudan, IGAD Heads of State as well as the South African President Ramaphosa and regional envoys Stephen Kalonzo, Ismail Wais for supporting the process.

But the progress is attributable to the political willingness of two men who put the interests of their country first: President Kiir to make critical concessions and Dr. Riek Machar to agree to return to the capital that he left during fighting in 2016.

We often speak of courage in war and battle. But peace also requires courage.

Relief was the overwhelming feeling expressed to us around the country; the consensus being that the priority is to form the transitional government so that the peace agreement – and the country – can advance.

Parties are now negotiating as we speak over the allocation of ministerial portfolios.

Meanwhile, non-signatory groups, through the mediation efforts of Sant'Egidio, committed to cease hostilities last month. The return to Rome next week will aim to bring them into the Agreement as well.

The new government can prompt positive change.



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The number of displaced and refugees is likely to increase. Already around 800,000, according to IOM, have come back since the signing of the 2018 peace agreement.

The first joint statement from the new 'presidency' – the president and vice presidents together - last week urged people from protection sites and neighbouring countries to return to their homes. Their collective message is significant and timely, coming ahead of the rainy and also the planting season.

The message does, of course, put onus on the new government to ensure that areas of return are safe for those coming back.

For its part, UNMISS has stepped up its protective presence to build confidence in areas of return. In addition, UNPOL is expanding technical assistance and beginning to co-locate with the National Police Service to enhance policing capabilities.

Yet, the dearth of health and education services in rural areas has discouraged returns. The imbalance between services in a protection of civilians site and outside is glaring. It needs urgent redress by humanitarian and development actors – including donors.

The Bentiu Protection of Civilians site, for example, faces high numbers of 'unaccompanied' children who have been left in the POC site to continue schooling while their parents go back, simply because schools don't exist in their own villages.

The protection environment has also changed. The ceasefire and the free movement of opposition leaders across South Sudan has lowered the risk of violence – something that is confirmed by security risk assessments that have been carried out by UNMISS and its partners.

Consequently, UNMISS has prioritized peacekeepers to hot spot locations and areas of return. Between five and eight temporary operating bases at any one time are being manned in remote areas.

For example, the Force presence inside the Bor POC has been reduced by 70 percent.

That has freed troops to respond robustly to protect civilians against extreme inter-communal violence in Jonglei last week and this week.

Our Pibor base was reinforced to better protect 5,000 civilians who fled to adjacent areas to our base and three temporary operating bases have been established in surrounding villages.

Nevertheless, the new government faces a daunting array of challenges on Day One that will test its unity.

Most urgent is the need to move on the transitional security arrangements. The pre-transitional structures are now redundant. The implementation is dangerously lagging.

UNMISS has transported more than 250 MT of supplies to training locations to plug urgent gaps. But universally across sites there is no registration, no substantial training and a shortage of supplies for those troops assembled.

The new government will also face a precarious humanitarian situation in many of the states.

The anticipated improvement in harvest levels 12 months ago was quashed by the extensive flooding last year. Crops were destroyed and livestock were lost. The floods contaminated water supplies, worsening health conditions, particularly for children in areas that have sparse access to health resources.

It has also contributed to communal violence between pastoralists. It is no coincidence that the most severe food insecurity conditions also coincide with the heaviest fighting in Jonglei State where livestock losses have undermined the social fabric of the society which centres around cattle.

The threat of damage from locusts on South Sudan is yet to have a substantial impact and FAO is gearing up its preparations to spray to protect crops.

A unified government heralds the start of a new phase.

The peace agreement, of course, will be the roadmap for the coming three years.

But in concert, South Sudan needs to address four issues for the cornerstones of a properly functioning state.

First, ending impunity. This will require increased support to police and the justice chain from the collection of evidence right through to the prosecution and court trials. Where crimes are committed, especially the number of sexually based offences, perpetrators should be brought to justice.

Second, ending corruption. This requires financial accountability and transparency. Government mechanisms exist but are often bypassed. For example, if government workers and security services receive their salaries regularly every month, they will focus on their jobs, not on other activities to support their families.

Third, ending dependency. It requires a determined shift by both the government and international community to support programmes that promote self-reliance where it is appropriate. Yes, there are areas where humanitarian assistance is urgently required. But interventions should be progressively more surgical and vigorously monitored.

And fourth, ending exclusion. This requires that all South Sudanese are part of the democratic process: a greater role for civil society, a political space where it's okay to speak out and to criticize. These are foundation that underpin the constitution and election processes that are upcoming.

UNMISS's mandate is due for renewal.

South Sudan is in flux as the new government is established – and, therefore, it is premature to propose significant change. A better understanding will be possible in the coming months.

Until then, the current UNMISS mandate is sufficiently broad, in my view, to continue activities to build durable peace and protect civilians.

Nevertheless, there will be a need to focus on two areas.

The mobility of peacekeepers has improved, and plans are in place to enhance it further through increased riverine and air support, particularly during the rainy season.

UNPOL's role and our Rule of Law unit will expand its activities to better tackle impunity and support the shift to civilian law enforcement and accountability.

Finally, the doubters are telling us that we have been here before. But it's also important to acknowledge these are changed circumstances.

The international community will likely lean on the side of caution wary of repeating past mistakes. And that, of course, is fair. But neither can we totally step back to wait to see what happens before we make a commitment.

Our actions can push South Sudan further toward sustainable peace; our inaction can help condemn it to failure.

In the past weeks, its leaders have shown leadership. It is hoped that will continue.

It is imperative there is no renegeing of the peace agreement or of the ceasefire.

International partners must remain engaged – both in solidarity and, at times, with pressure – to encourage compromise in order to achieve and maintain the unity.

South Sudan's future depends on its ability to compromise and maintain that unity.

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