



United Nations Mission in South Sudan

Press Release

25 June 2019

Statement of the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General David Shearer

Briefing to the Security Council on South Sudan

Thank you, Mr. President and Members of the Council

It is my pleasure to brief you on the two over-arching areas of focus of the UNMISS mandate: building durable peace and protecting civilians in South Sudan.

The peace agreement continues to progress and the ceasefire, except for Central Equatoria, holds. Just that one simple reality has produced significant change.

The drop in political violence – based on the trend of past years – has meant hundreds, if not thousands of people, are alive who otherwise would not be.

Many displaced families have decided it is safe, and time, to return to their homes. Since the signing of the revitalized peace agreement, according to IOM, more than half a million people have done so – including more than 210,000 who returned from neighbouring countries.

Humanitarian partners report improved access to areas of need, though bureaucratic impediments continue to dog some operations. Their efforts have been assisted by the rehabilitation of 2,500 kms of roads by UNMISS's five engineering companies and World Food Programme projects. This has enhanced the ability to move food to remote locations in advance of the rains and cut down reliance on expensive airdrops. Together with opening of river corridors and a reduction in illegal checkpoints around the country, WFP report cost efficiencies of up to \$113 million.

The latest food security analysis however remains dire. Seven million people are facing crisis or worse. But for the first time in years, some counties will see slight improvements where relative calm has enabled households to resume cultivation.

These positive signs come from a very low base. But it's a glimmer of what is possible with peace. And it is vital that this trend continues.

Since the signing of the peace agreement, more than 110 rapprochements have occurred in communities around the country. UNMISS directly facilitated more than a quarter of these.



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I have attended a number of these meetings, including a recent joint delegation with the IGAD Special Envoy and chair of R-JMEC. Helicoptering into Panyume in central Equatoria – a proposed opposition cantonment site where tensions remain high – we were met by dozens of opposition soldiers. Their welcome was warm as we sat under the mango trees together with hundreds of local people to talk reconciliation.

We then flew to Yei where we met with Government authorities, youth, women and religious leaders. This visit showed that while groups are on opposite sides of the political divide, their experiences of war and their hopes for peace are the same. That one example matches what my colleagues and I have witnessed on many occasions in recent months across the country where the sides have come together.

The desire for peace is palpable and there is a fierce aversion to any renewal of fighting.

My observation is that the pace of dialogue and peacebuilding at the grassroots level is moving much faster than amongst the elites negotiating nationally. The country's politicians need to listen to the mood of the people and follow the lead set by these local communities.

In that vein, it is a shame that the National Dialogue process has so far failed to achieve the inclusivity required for a true consultative process.

The strong desire for peace is echoed in results of a Perception Survey carried out by UNMISS which interviewed 2400 people in 10 locations.

The survey exposed the shocking impact of the conflict. Seventy-nine percent of people interviewed reported that members of their family had been killed. The same proportion reported family members forced to flee violence.

And yet remarkably, 89 percent of those interviewed believe there will be lasting peace by the end of this year.

Mr. President.

Let's be frank. The fighting has stopped because the leaders ordered their soldiers to stop. If it resumes – against the will of the people – it will be because those same leaders want it, and ordered it, to happen.

In May, the parties unanimously decided to extend the pre-transitional period, delaying the formation of a transitional government until 12 November. While the postponement is disappointing, it does give time to resolve outstanding issues that might otherwise derail the peace deal.



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Implementation is frustratingly slow. Many benchmarks are still to be met. More compromise is needed, particularly from the government which holds the much stronger position.

The transitional constitution, incorporating the peace agreement, has been returned to the National Constitutional Amendment Committee for further updates. The International Boundaries Commission reported back last week and how its conclusions play out in the coming weeks remain to be seen. Security reform and unification of armed forces has been sluggish, despite the much-appreciated efforts of IGAD Special Envoy, Ismail Wais. UNMISS is providing political and technical guidance to help the parties in line with its new mandate.

A fundamental challenge is the lack of regular face-to-face meetings between President Salva Kiir and Opposition leader Dr Riek Machar. If at a local level, former bitter enemies can put the past behind them and reconcile, their national leaders must do the same. These leader-to-leader meetings, preferably held in Juba, are critical because trust and confidence can't cold start the day a new unified government is formed.

The Government should also meet its commitment to release funding it pledged for implementation as an example to other donors.

The African Union, IGAD and the UN have been working collectively to support the process. We are strongly unified in our position that the six-month extension must be the last one.

We accept some tasks may not be entirely complete by November – however we define ‘complete’ – but this should not delay the formation of the transitional government.

We should see the peace agreement as a living document, not set in stone. There are no pre-transitional tasks that cannot be achieved within a unified transitional administration.

In fact, there are advantages to decisions made within a transitional government – decisions made collectively, more transparently where all parties can be better held to account by their citizens.

Mr. President.

The decision by the UN in 2013 to open its gates to people fleeing for their lives was one of the most noble actions this organization has ever taken. It saved tens of thousands of people and it remains at the heart of our protection of civilians mandate.

However, our protection of civilians mandate also stresses the importance of supporting conditions for safe, informed, voluntary and dignified return of IDPs and refugees. So far, actual numbers of returns are relatively small compared to the 2.3



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million refugees and 1.9 million internally displaced. But there is a growing trend of return.

Prior to the signing of the peace agreement the number of people returning home each month averaged about 18,000. Since the deal was signed, this number has jumped to 76,000 each month.

Some families have returned under their own devices, but thousands of others after many years living in a POC will need assistance. Most wanting to go home are women and children without the ability or resources to leave without help.

UNMISS, UNHCR and humanitarian partners are providing this support in line with international humanitarian principles and following guidelines agreed by the Humanitarian Country Team. A key challenge ahead is the lack of basic services within communities of return. Today the most common reason cited by IDPs not wanting to leave POCs is a reluctance to take their children out of school, not a fear of insecurity.

In parallel, UNMISS is shifting its focus from static duties guarding POC sites to more long-range patrolling, concentrating on areas of return. A substantial component of UNMISS's effort is devoted to POC site protection.

Mr. President,

Despite the reduction in political violence, fighting continues in Central Equatoria causing ongoing suffering. Early next week UNMISS will release a human rights report on this situation. Our investigations reveal atrocities – committed by all sides – against civilians, including killings, rape, abduction and looting. In response, UNMISS has beefed up its patrolling presence in Yei, matched with increased political engagement.

Mr. President

Protection of civilians will continue to be a top priority. But our protection role will naturally diminish if there is peace. We can then look to adjust our troop requirements accordingly while continuing our mediation and peace building actions.

In two weeks, South Sudan will celebrate its 8th anniversary of gaining independence. With that sovereignty comes responsibility, an obligation that is acknowledged only rarely, including for leaders to use the country's resources in the best interests of their citizens, not their own.

The message from the people of South Sudan in that regard is very clear. Live up to your responsibility and give us peace.

Thank you, Mr. President.



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