



United Nations Mission in South Sudan

Press Release

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Statement of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General Mr. David Shearer Briefing to the United Nations Security Council on South Sudan

Madam President,

Members of the Council

It is my pleasure to be with you here today. There have been considerable developments in South Sudan in the past months. I want to touch on these and then make a number of observations about the opportunities and challenges moving forward.

The peace agreement signed on 12 September was brokered by IGAD – but particularly through the commendable efforts of Sudan – and it continues to hold. It is also a testament to the efforts of the parties who built sufficient trust and confidence among themselves and have committed to work together towards durable peace.

Four positive changes are notable. First, Opposition politicians from different parties are moving freely around Juba without hinderance and are taking part in the various meetings as part of the peace process. I would like to recognize the Government for creating the space and security conditions for this to happen and thank Opposition leaders for having the courage to return and participate in the peace process.

Second, there have been more than 71 meetings and rapprochements held across the country where Government and SPLA-In Opposition forces and politicians have met. Many have been facilitated by the UNMISS. The enthusiasm for peace amongst people is palpable.

Third, overall levels of political violence have diminished significantly. In blunt terms, many people are alive today who might not have been without the agreement having been signed. The exception is Central Equatoria – where fighting close to Yei between the forces of Thomas Cirillo and the South Sudan Peoples Defence Force has intensified. Once again, civilians have borne the brunt, with reports of killings, looting and sexual assaults. Cirillo shows no sign of wanting to join the existing peace process.

Fourth, for the first time in three years, people are expressing a willingness to return home. An estimated 135,000 refugees have returned. In addition, many of those displaced internally have signaled they want to go home.

So far, actual numbers are relatively small when put against the approximately 2.3 million people who live as refugees and 1.9 million displaced inside South Sudan – a figure that comprises nearly one-third of South Sudan's population. But it reflects a trend: people seeking to travel in the dry season to be home in time to plant crops in July.



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That's the positive side. The significant challenge now is to maintain the momentum of the peace process.

The timetable set out in the agreement is well behind where it should be and many of the bodies set up under it are still dealing with procedural rather than substantive issues.

There are fundamental issues still to be resolved – many of which were deferred to enable the peace agreement to be signed. These include: resolution of the boundaries and states issue and the formation of a unified armed force to be deployed in Juba and all major towns. The constitution-making process has also faced challenges in this period.

The current phase of the peace process, the pre-transitional government period, ends on 12 May. From this point, the revitalized transitional government is scheduled to take over and the vice presidents, including the First Vice President, Riek Machar should have taken up their roles.

A peace that falters will generate frustration, anger and a possible return to violence, that could equal that which occurred in 2013 and 2016. We cannot allow that to happen. There are some who believe that a return to violence is inevitable. We don't concur. This agreement has broader buy-in from parties than the 2015 Agreement. It is widely embraced by the population.

We too have our concerns about the peace process, but there has yet to be a perfect process. For our part, the UN has – and will – continue to focus attention and resources on making it work.

I want to stress: there is no Plan B. There is only Plan A – this Agreement – and this path forward. And, for it to have a chance to work, it needs to be supported.

A year ago, most of us, including myself, did not believe we would be where we are today. It has confounded the critics. But we have arrived at this point through the leadership and drive largely from IGAD.

A fully engaged IGAD, supported by the efforts of the African Union, is absolutely critical. But the months ahead will be equally as challenging as those before, and I would welcome the urgent appointment by IGAD of the new R-JMEC chair, to help stir the process forward and overcome some of these challenges.

The UN has been working in partnership with IGAD and the people of South Sudan throughout. Through my good offices we have, and will continue to, inject specific expertise, ideas and opportunities into the process – to maintain confidence and trust and substantively move the peace implementation forward. It is an area where we would welcome a more explicit reference to an ability to play a more active role in our mandate.

We must also acknowledge that suffering goes on. Five months of a more stable environment cannot overnight redress the levels of food insecurity, nor the absence of health or education services. Humanitarian assistance is still needed, to bridge the gap to self-reliance and support those who people who want to move home.

We should remember that tens of thousands of South Sudanese citizens, young and old, are alive today because of the generosity of donor nations and the heroic work of humanitarian agencies. It is a reality that South Sudan's leaders often forget – or take for granted – that their country is supported by taxpayers around the world.

Last year, donor nations gave lifesaving support of more than \$1 billion – more than twice South Sudan’s state budget. This enabled humanitarian agencies to deliver assistance to 5 million people, or 83 per cent of those they had targeted.

This year’s target is \$1.5 billion to reach 5.7 million people.

Humanitarian agencies have largely been able to move freely across South Sudan. However, in specific areas such as Yei, particularly where there is conflict – and where civilians have been most vulnerable – denials have occurred. Governmental delays including processing of shipments and imposition of taxes has also wasted time and incurred costs in the past three months.

Peace saves lives. It also saves money. South Sudan is a country of abundance, where no one should go hungry.

The humanitarian bill is ultimately unsustainable. We have felt strongly the need to switch approaches in the country. In the past months, UN agencies and UNMISS, backed by donors, have begun to focus more on resilience – that fosters greater self-reliance within communities in more stable areas. There is potential in those areas where we can gradually shift away from purely humanitarian support.

Second, a Trust Fund has been established to intervene in areas of ongoing conflict. It aims not only to reconcile differences between warring communities but also to bolster agreements with economic support and services.

In the Wau PoC site, for example, Fertit want to move back to their land they were forced to abandon. A greater chance of success is likely if differences between them and Dinka cattlekeepers living in the same area can be reconciled and that the agreement that is reached is anchored with support to housing and health services that benefits all communities.

With the peace deal, some displaced families are choosing to return home and rebuild their lives. The number of people living in PoCs has dropped from about 205,000 before the Agreement was signed to 193,000 in just three months. The PoC in Wau is down to 13,000, one-third of what it was six months ago.

UNMISS supports the returns process. We have undertaken frequent ‘look and see’ trips, helicoptering people to locations to assess for themselves whether it is safe to go home. As a result, many decided to leave. Hundreds have now left the Bor POC – some transported by helicopter, others by barge.

Humanitarian agencies are currently programming agricultural, education and health support in areas of expected high return. UNMISS peacekeepers are refocusing priorities from more static operations around PoC sites to patrolling to areas of anticipated return to increase confidence.

UNMISS is very mindful of its protection mandate. Let me be absolutely clear: we will not push people out of the POC sites against their will. However, for those who want to leave, we will support them, because not to means condemning them to a life in a camp. But our actions will continue to be consistent with international principles and humanitarian NGO guidelines to be voluntary and dignified.

The next three months are critical. After that time, the rainy season makes land transport impossible and the window for planting crops will be lost, resulting in another year-long delay.

A key reason why people tell us they are reluctant to return home is, of course, security. Sexual violence continues to cause immense harm to women and girls across the country, most recently in northern Unity where the concentration of forces from all sides has led to horrific incidents.

This violence must end and the perpetrators be held to account. Ending impunity is a core function of government and a vital part of the reconciliation and peace process. It is UNMISS' mandated role to actively deter and prevent as much of these horrific abuses as possible, as well as monitor and report publicly on violations of human rights, particularly where sexual violence is concerned, as we did recently, in Bentiu.

But we are also working with the Government to build the capacity of the justice system to deal with these crimes. This includes operating a mobile court system – where prosecutors and judges are flown to hotspots like Bentiu and Malakal to hear cases. It has led to several dozen perpetrators being tried and jailed. At one session in Bentiu, our legal team reported to me that 49 women queued to give evidence in pre-trial meetings against offenders. Their desire for justice and to end impunity is inspiring.

In another case, four young men accused of gang raping a 15-year-old swaggered into court where they encountered the victim and witnesses. Their faces fell as they realized that the survivor of their brutality had the courage to testify against them and faith that justice would prevail. They were all convicted and sentenced to between three and 12 years. These are small steps but they are important ones.

This month, a UN supported special court will also open in Juba with jurisdiction to hear these sorts of crimes.

In conclusion, there are just over two months left of the pre-transitional period and progress has been slow. There is still much to be done. All of us – the parties and stakeholders – but most of all the regional partners – must drive the implementation forward and ensure it is adequately resourced. The Government needs to play its part to contribute financially as well.

This peace agreement is far from perfect. But it is the one that we have in front of us today and we are not going to get another chance at this. The cost of failure is unthinkable. So, while responsibility lies primarily with the parties to the conflict, it also is beholden on us all to ensure that we move forward together to make this agreement a reality for the sake of the people of South Sudan.

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