



# United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS)

Spokesperson & Media Relations Unit  
Communications & Public Information Section

## NEAR VERBATIM TRANSCRIPT

21 March 2017

**Media Briefing by Mr. Hervé Ladsous.**

***Juba, Republic of South Sudan, 21 March 2017***

### **UNMISS Spokesperson – Daniel Dickinson:**

So, good afternoon ladies and gentlemen, my name is Daniel Dickinson spokesperson for UNMISS and I have met many of you before. I would like to welcome you and the listeners of Radio Miraya to this press conference with the Undersecretary General for Department of Peacekeeping Operation of the UN Hervé Ladsous am sure many of you have met before, and our USG designate Jean-Pierre Lacroix.

Mr. Ladsous first of all on behalf of UNMISS thank you very much for your service to the UN and the support you have given to UNMISS and Mr. Lacroix we look forward to working with you.

Mr. Ladsous is going to make a statement and then take questions, there will only be Mr. Ladsous on this occasion, we will have hopefully in the near future a chance to meet again with Mr. Lacroix.

Mr. Ladsous will make a short statement and then we'll take Q & A, so could you please identify yourselves and the organizations you are working for, and because of time limitations, we'll be wrapping up in about 20 minutes so thank you very much.

### **Under Secretary-General for Department of Peacekeeping Operation - Hervé Ladsous:**

Thank you very much indeed Daniel and good afternoon to all of you. Pleasure to see many of you again.

First why did I decide to come just less than 10 days before the end of my tenure to Juba, because this has been I think a very important part of my job you know the issues of South Sudan and UNMISS and I thought it appropriate to come and take stock of the situation and also take leave of excellent colleagues here and our South Sudanese interlocutors and take the opportunity to introduce my successor to this very important mission.

Also because as you know, the situation in the country remains a source of many concerns an issues that the Secretary-General since he came in the UN in January has put amongst his chief concerns and on which

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he has already personally engaged many actors, South Sudanese and foreign actors and of course one that remains constantly under the close scrutiny of the Security Council.

So I was very pleased that yesterday and today, there were opportunities to discuss this problems with His Excellency the President, the First Vice President, with several ministers, and opportunity of course to listen to them and at the same time to convey messages from the United Nations' point of view.

What are our messages? Our message is first and foremost that, in the very dire circumstances that South Sudan has faced for a while now, and that are illustrated by the very serious humanitarian situation, the very worrisome security issue, fighting that takes place in many parts of the country and because of either or perhaps both issues.

Both the humanitarian situation and the security situation, the large numbers of South Sudanese who elect to leave their place and either displace themselves within the country, or become refugees abroad and the numbers are very large, and we see no sign of these numbers dwindling or stopping all together.

In this context, it is very clear that there can only be a political solution, the continuation of hostilities is not a solution because there will always be a group or subgroup and we do not fail to notice that there are further divisions, further defections, that the picture is getting very complex indeed.

So you cannot hope that a solution will come by the use of weapons, the solution has to be political and I know that there is work being done on the 2015 peace agreement. I know that a number of partners, especially African partners are engaged to find that political solution, I am thinking of IGAD and I am thinking a lot about the African Union. President Konaré the Special Representative of the AU was here recently and is engaging actively, and let me assure you that the UN supports President Konaré very actively.

So all this is taking place and of course, we cannot but notice and I said so to the President today that he himself President Salva Kiir has offered a National Dialogue which I think is something that deserves close following up, in the knowledge that it cannot be a substitute for the political solution but that it can play a very important role to move along towards that solution.

I must say the meeting with Mr. President was a good one, he offered a lot of clarification and he also assured me that because that is an issue that we have been facing for some time, he assured me that the government wanted to support the action of the UN to help us do our job and that is very important because as you know we have faced at various points impediments in terms of freedom of movement, in terms of freedom of getting clearances. Very importantly, the humanitarian actors have been severely impeded in their action on the ground and I think South Sudan is one of the countries in the world where we had the most incidents of humanitarian workers being prevented from doing their work, for humanitarian workers being actually killed or injured while on the job.

So I welcomed of course the reassurances of the president that this is not going to happen further.

Let me finish by one very important point from the point of view of UNMISS and also it is a very high priority item for the Security Council, and for the government, it is the deployment of the Regional Protection Force. We are working actively on it, we did lose time because there were number of slowness's in getting clearance, authorizations here, but we are sparing no effort to speed up and I think I can say that in the next few weeks you will see the first vanguard of the Regional Protection Force being deployed here in Juba and that I think will be a very important signal that things are moving ahead. Actually tomorrow

afternoon almost straightway from the plane landing in New York from here, I will chair yet another meeting of troop contributors to check where we are on these deployments, they are very important and you will see that before long, actually quite quickly.

So maybe I will stop there and take a few questions.

#### ***Questions from the media and Answers***

**Q: (DPA News Agency)** – Recently famine was declared in parts of South Sudan. As Under Secretary for Peacekeeping Operations in South Sudan, the UN and the world says that it is a man-made crisis. Why is UNMISS not deploying Peacekeepers or troops in affected areas which are not reached by aid due to prevention on the ground?

Secondly, you have talked about the Regional Force, you said that they will be deployed soon, can you give us a timeline? And which countries will the troops be from?

**A: USG Hervé Ladsous** – Thank you, yes indeed, it is the observation we all have made, that the famine in South Sudan is man-made. It is the result of several years of fighting, of displacements, of farmers not being in a position to tend to their lands, to their animals. It is a tragic situation and I believe that two counties in Unity, Mayendit and Leer, have been formally declared a state of famine. That is not going to improve because right now would be normally the crop planting season but farmers are simply not there, they are moving around, they have gone abroad and so the mitigation of the famine after the next cropping season is not going to happen in a satisfactory way.

You also asked why we are not deploying, well, I tell you, we are deploying, we are ready to deploy but sometimes, quite often, we are prevented from deploying because precisely in those areas where there is fighting, the authorities or the other side tell us you should not deploy because we do not want you there, or we are attacked, of course humanitarian workers are not soldiers, they are humanitarian workers and they are prevented from doing their job. Whenever we can we do go with them and we try to help them to provide security, but then in a country this large, this wide, what can you expect with 12,000 uniformed personnel? We simply cannot have a blue helmet behind every South Sudanese citizen. And don't forget that we have the IDP sites here in Juba, in Bentiu and other places and that takes up a lot of staff to ensure their safety. It's not an easy situation but certainly we are seeking and I like to think that I got assurances that the hindrances to the deployment both of UNMISS units and of humanitarian workers will improve and that is how it should be because it is international humanitarian law that aid workers should be allowed to perform their tasks.

About the Regional Protection Force, as I said, it's a vanguard of several units that will be deploying in the next few weeks. Units from Rwanda, Nepal, Bangladesh, and others will follow, Ethiopians and others. We are as I said sparing no effort to make it happen as quickly as possible.

**Q: (VoA)** – You did say that the current situation in South Sudan requires a political solution but we already have a Peace Agreement in place, are you referring to the 2015 Peace Agreement? You did talk about

engagements that are taking place, the AU, the UN leadership is involved. Are these engagements working towards a new process or is it trying to see how the Peace Agreement can be best implemented?

Also, what is your take on the National Dialogue declared by the President? The government believes that it is the solution to the problem in South Sudan. What is your comment on this?

**A: USG Hervé Ladsous** – On the Peace Agreement, I think the 2015 ACRSS as it was called I recall... That agreement is there, we are not looking at an alternative, but the problem mostly is with implementation. What has happened towards implementation of that agreement which is soon going to be two years old? So I take heart to assurances given by members of the government, that they are working hard towards implementing various chapters of this agreement although we know the constraints, but I think this is a process that has to move on, one that is actively supported by the Special Representative of the African Union, President Konaré, and we are bringing every support possible to President Konaré, as we did and continue to do to the President of JMEC, the President Mogae, through CTSAMM for instance, to perform their duties.

National dialogue, I said in my earlier remarks that it is a very useful concept. It cannot be a substitute for the political solution that we advocate and it's true that the National Dialogue to be, and we say that on the basis of experience in many other [inaudible] elsewhere on the continent and beyond. A National Dialogue is most usefully held in a context where hostilities have ceased, where there is no more fighting, where the humanitarian context is not perhaps as bad as it is right now. When people are concerned about their very basic livelihood, maybe they don't have so much time to spare for political dialogue. Lastly, it is of course very important that the process be as inclusive as possible, and if it can be accompanied by a widening of the political space because at the end of the day what you want from a National Dialogue is a consensus on the way ahead.

**Q: (Bakhita Radio)** – The Japanese Self Defence Force said that once their contract ends in May, I will not be renewed. Is there any other country that will replace Japan? And why is this happening when the country is in need of UN personnel in the country?

The second question is about the Regional Protection Force [RPF], this is not the first time that the UN is calling for the deployment of the Regional Protection Force, they have been calling since last year and it has not happened, so how are you going to assure the citizens that this time it will happen?

**A: USG Hervé Ladsous** – About the Japanese Self Defence Forces, off course you have to ask the Japanese. It's not for me to speak in the name of Japan, but what I can tell you is that we have to recognise that the Japanese Engineering Unit worked for almost five years here in South Sudan and did very useful things for the benefit of the people, building roads, bridges and facilities, and that we have to be thankful for. Of course, yes, we are looking for a replacement, but engineering units take some time because they need heavy equipment, they move in and it's not going to happen overnight.

On the RPF I think I've already responded, you will see in the very next few weeks, the first units of the RPF and then others will follow as they bring along the equipment and set up. It's not for lack of wanting them earlier but I have to say that there was time lost because it took time for the government of South Sudan

to metabolise the resolution voted on last summer by the Security Council, it took time for the government of South Sudan to give us the land we need to deploy those people, we need to build camps, facilities, we need to sort out the details, we need the clearances to get the equipment in, and all that was painfully slow here. So now we are clearing the obstacles, and it is my hope that now we will be able to proceed much more quickly.

**Q: (Al Jazeera)** – One of the main points about the RPF that the government rejected is protecting the airport, have you reached some kind of compromise with the government regarding that? And the RPF is supposed to be comprised of 4,000 on top of the 12,000 personnel that you have here, do you think that the 12,000 and the 4,000 additional troops have peace to keep on the ground here in South Sudan?

**A: USG Hervé Ladsous** – On the airport we are still requesting joint work to define precisely what it is that we can best do together to make it so the International Airport of Juba remains open and functional, but that is still under discussion.

About the RPF, the goal is once the Force is deployed here in Juba, it will free a number of units of UNMISS that are presently here, and make them available for other duties, in particular to project themselves in the countryside to better protect the civilians and do a number of tasks that we are somewhat constraint at present to do. Never forget that Protection of Civilians is the heart of the mandate of UNMISS, as many other Peacekeeping Missions. So the more people we have able to project... And we are doing that in the North, in Unity... We are doing that in Upper Nile, we do everything we can when we get information to try and do the best job that we can. But as I said, we cannot have one blue helmet behind every single South Sudanese citizen. The responsibility to protect its own citizens is that of the government. And we are here to support, to facilitate, to help the government of the sovereign country of South Sudan.

Thank you.

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