



UNMIS

Press Conference

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**Near-verbatim Transcript of the Press Conference by
Mr. David Gressly the Regional Coordinator for Southern Sudan
United Nations in Sudan
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Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen and welcome back to the Miraya FM studios here at the UNMIS compound. We're now less than 72 hours away from the start of voting in the Southern Sudan referendum and everything appears to be on track for the region's 2,638 polling centres to open at 8 a.m. on January 9. I wish to take this opportunity to congratulate the Southern Sudan Referendum Commission and its Juba-based bureau for the successful registration of over 3.9 million eligible voters at home and abroad. The commissioners, bureau members and their staffs have carried out their responsibilities under an extremely tight timetable in a politically sensitive environment. They all deserve a round of applause for the hard work and long hours they have invested in this process.

Thanks to their efforts, the many skeptics who never thought Southern Sudan would be ready to hold its referendum by next Sunday were proven wrong. Today the culminating event of Sudan's six-year-old peace process is just around the corner, and it is vital that the process be peaceful, orderly and credible to ensure wide acceptance of the referendum voting at home and abroad. Everyone involved in the referendum –from the voters and the foreign and domestic observers to the referendum centre officials and police officers charged with providing security – should do their part to safeguard the integrity of the process.

I'd also like to thank my colleagues at UNMIS and the UN Development Programme for all the logistical support, technical advice and security training they have contributed to this historic process. During a six-day period starting on December 30, UNMIS aircraft operated 50 flights to remote locations inaccessible by road to deliver referendum voting materials. As of last Monday, our UN Police colleagues had provided referendum security training to over 22,000 officers of the Southern Sudan Police Service and also instructed 1,448 members of the Service's formed police units in VIP security and crowd control techniques as well as special weapons and tactics.

By the end of this week UNMIS will have opened 19 new referenda support bases to facilitate support for the Southern Sudan referendum at the county level, and that will bring the total number of UNMIS facilities in Southern Sudan to 34. A basket fund created by the UN Development Programme to support the referendum process in Southern Sudan has contributed \$56 million towards the cost of conducting the registration exercise of last November and December and organizing next week's polling.

The general security situation in Southern Sudan is stable and generally quiet. Tensions along the north/south border have eased over the past three weeks. Media reports of major troop build-ups on

either side of the north/south border appear to have been exaggerated, and the movements we have seen to date have involved units on the scale of a company or a platoon level.

We are pleased to note the signing last night of a cease-fire framework agreement between the forces of Gen. George Athor and the SPLA here in Juba yesterday. The timing of this agreement is most auspicious for the conduct of an orderly voting process in Jonglei State, and it is one more example of the many steps that have been taken in the past six years to preserve and consolidate the peace in Southern Sudan.

The mission is closely monitoring a spike in cattle rustling involving communities that live along or near the borders separating Warrap, Unity and Lakes states. A raid originating in Unity State on a cattle camp inside Lakes State on January 1 left 11 dead and 25 wounded, and yesterday our UNMIS colleagues in the Civil Affairs Division met separately with the governors of Unity and Lakes states. A meeting of the governors of all three affected states is scheduled to take place in the Lakes State county of Maper on Saturday. UNMIS is also stepping up the normal patrolling activity of its military observers in the three affected states.

On a more positive note, we welcome the peace agreements reached between the Misseriya, the Riziegat and the Dinka Malual on December 28 to allow migration of the northern Sudanese tribes' cattle into Northern Bahr El-Ghazal state before the referendum voting begins next weekend.

An estimated 143,000 southerners have left Northern Sudan since the end of October, and more are continuing to arrive in the country's southern states at a rate of about 2,000 per day. About two-thirds of the returnees are believed to have reached their hometowns and villages. But many remain stuck in the capital cities of their native states in the south and are awaiting means of transport to reach their hometowns and villages, and UN humanitarian agencies are working with the Government of Southern Sudan to support their return.

Miraya FM embarked on a major expansion of its relay station network in Southern Sudan during the last two months of 2010, and I am quite pleased to report that by the end of this week, the station will be broadcasting from seven new locations. The radio station's staff also conducted a series of successful road shows throughout the region in November to publicize the voter registration exercise and generally drum up interest in the overall referendum process.

And with that, I think I'll stop there and open up this press conference to your questions. Many thanks for coming today.

Q&A

Q. Marvis Byeza, Voice of America: Are you concerned that the recent cattle raiding may deter people from voting in the referendum in the affected areas?

Gressly: On the first question, we're concerned about the cattle raiding that is going on. It's not unusual for this time of year to see this, we usually see it pick up. We don't think, from what we've seen on the ground, that even if left unchecked it will have any kind of material effect on the referendum polling itself.

But any kind of insecurity is a concern. This is why we are working with the state governments concerned, including increasing our military patrolling in those areas to try to work for a de-escalation of the tensions over the cattle raiding that's going on. We've had success in this in the past, so in the end I think this will have very little if no effect on the polling itself.

So we are taking measures, we're working with the government who is responsible for that, and I think it will not have a significant impact on the polling itself. Overall, as a side comment on this, I have to say that in the last several weeks, several months probably, we have seen probably the lowest level of insecurity in Southern Sudan since the CPA was signed. So far it's been a very conducive environment for the registration, we expect the same to continue for the polling period.

Q. Maggie Fick, Associated Press: Have all the ballot papers been delivered to the referendum centres and is training of polling staff complete? Secondly, in the UN's involvement in the Athor negotiations, was it clear to you what is the status of Gatluak Gai and David Yau Yau and those other renegade commanders or dissident officials? Are they also joining these negotiations?

Gressly: Some of these centres are quite remote so I can't say that everything has arrived. What we've been asked to deliver, we completed on 4 January, and that piece has been done. There is little reason to expect that the final distribution will not be completed well within the time frame for a January 9 start. The training continues, I don't have the details on that, we can get that for you separately if you'd like.

In terms of the other commanders, it's not fully clear that all dissident groups that emerged in the aftermath of the election have come on board as part of the ceasefire arrangement. I understand that that is the hope that that will happen, but we haven't gotten confirmation on that. That should become apparent in the next days to come.

Q. Reuters: Do you think Southern Sudan is ready to govern itself?

Gressly: It's important to remember that one of the central points of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) was to create an autonomous government in the south that basically governed the south. And as a result, what you have is a system of government that has built up over the last six years. It has its own presidency, the armed forces are under the command of the President of Southern Sudan, it has its independent ministries, the ministries of education, health and water are independent of their counterparts in Khartoum. They have their own legislature here in Juba, and governors in the states.

All the components of an autonomous government are in place for self-governance. Is it ready to govern itself? That's what they've been doing for the last six years, doing just that. It's important to recognize that they had to start with extremely little to work with, no structures of government or staffing. Frankly, they started with a president and a vice president and built everything from there.

So in that period of six years, I have witnessed a tremendous strengthening of that capacity for self-governing inside the south. So I think that needs to be recognized, and it is carrying out those kinds of responsibilities.

Q. In 2008, when violence erupted in Abyei, the UNMIS peacekeeping forces there did nothing. What are the precautionary measures that the mission has taken to prevent the loss of life and protect civilians in case of any insecurity and eruption of violence?

Gressly: I'd like to highlight the work that we did in Malakal in 2009 during the violence there. I was personally there in the immediate aftermath together with the (UNMIS) Force Commander, and we worked very closely with both parties to de-escalate the tensions there. There was a good sense of cooperation to do that. The UN mission forces were then deployed between the combatants at that point in time and used to help stabilize the situation.

We have been practicing, as would be routine in any mission environment, for possible violence erupting anywhere. We have a Chapter VII mandate under our Security Council resolution for protection of civilians. We have redefined our protection of civilians strategy to strengthen that, to clarify that, so I do believe we will be in a position to work with the authorities concerned. And that is our role, to de-escalate, to hopefully pre-empt -- but if that fails, to control violence together with the government authorities concerned.

Q. Egyptian TV: Will the ceasefire agreement with the forces of Gen. George Athor guarantee peace in Jonglei and Upper Nile states?

Gressly: The signing of a peace agreement, just as it was with the CPA, is not the end of the process but merely the beginning. Its implementation can be difficult. There are many steps to go with the ceasefire arrangements in Jonglei State. It is a ceasefire, we need to understand that. So it's important that confidence-building continue to reinforce the agreement that has already been reached, so that the ultimate objective which is the complete resolution of that situation is obtained. We've not seen the end of that process, but it's a very hopeful and very positive sign that they've reached agreement on a ceasefire and the provisions that were included in that agreement.

The same measures that I described that we're taking here in Southern Sudan are applicable in Abyei. Our force level is actually higher in Abyei than it was in 2008, for example. But the same kind of measures, including the application of our protection of civilians strategy and the preparations that we've made, are applicable to Abyei as well. We're working very closely with both parties in this case on Abyei.

Q. Marvis Byezza, Voice of America: We haven't heard any updates on whether UN has decided to deploy troops on the border between north and south.

Gressly: There was some discussion about possibly increasing forces. We still maintain the same level of forces that we've had, with 10,000 in Sudan as a whole. We of course adapt our deployment according to circumstances. Where we see sensitive areas and areas under tension, we of course increase our movements there. I mentioned Abyei earlier as one example, but there are other examples particularly along the border where we are monitoring very closely the situation.

I am very happy to report that in general, we see tensions less there today than we did a few weeks ago. I think that's positive. There are still occasionally incidents, it's partly a consequence of not having a demarcated border at this point in time. So it's important that the border be delineated and demarcated to help reduce accidental contact between forces because the border is a little ambiguous sometimes.

Those kinds of issues are there, but certainly we don't see anything on the border that indicates any kind of significant concerns at this point. It just requires constant monitoring at this point.

Q. Miraya: This morning (the non-governmental organization) Global Witness issued a report saying that the north and the south of Sudan need to reach new, more transparent deals on oil to prevent a return to the current deals which give the oil 50-50 between the north and the south, which are not transparent and were the main reason why the south pulled out of the federal government in 2007. They're saying that the normal outcome would be a return to war if that's not sorted out. Would you like to comment on that?

Gressly: Despite some of the fears of going back to war, what we've clearly seen over the period of the CPA is a drawing back from conflict anytime problems arise. We can cite many different examples including those already talked about today in Abyei and Malakal, where the two parties

have sat down to de-escalate localized tensions. That's the most important point to really walk away from here. The statements that have come out publicly from the parties in recent weeks have simply reinforced that. Working towards a sustainable peace between the north and the south is exactly what has happened under the CPA. There will be much work to do after the referendum. The referendum will determine of course which direction the north and the south will take, but they'll still be sitting side by side with each other and will need to work out a number of issues.

I mentioned the border earlier. We know that Abyei requires ultimately to be resolved. There are many other issues as well that they'll have to sort out in the post-referendum period. They've done it consistently in the past, and I think it will continue in the post-referendum period.

Q. Miraya: Recently we hear a lot of reports covering the situation of the returnees who have just returned to the south, a lot of reports talking of people being accommodated in schools and public places without any proper shelter and no proper food. And they don't know when this is going to be over. What is the mission doing concerning this?

Gressly: Overall, the responsibility for responding to this is the Government of Southern Sudan which is providing some support, supported by the humanitarian agencies of the United Nations and the NGOs who do provide food and shelter items, non-food items and so forth. I know that a lot has been pre-positioned to support this. I won't go into all the details, I would refer you to our OCHA (UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs) colleagues to give you the details on that.

It's also important to recognize that many people have returned to the south in previous years, over 2 million people in the period from 2004 to 2007. So the south has demonstrated an ability to absorb large numbers of people coming back, and I suspect they'll do the same here. That doesn't mean that people aren't in individual difficulty at this time, which is why there is a humanitarian response underway. But ultimately I'm confident that those who decide to return to Southern Sudan will be taken in. We didn't see any conflict associated with the return of people in the earlier years, I don't expect that now.

What will be a problem is just absorbing them into the very limited educational systems and health systems that exist in the south. That will stretch those systems even further.

Q. Egyptian TV: Is South Sudan ready for separation when there are so few educated people and so little health care available?

Gressly: The important thing is what I highlighted before. There's been a six-year period of opportunity for Southern Sudan to build a regional government that is largely self-governing. I've personally seen tremendous progress made in that regard.

That does not mean there aren't significant challenges, particularly in the areas you mentioned, health care, education and so forth. That will be a central challenge of the new government that emerges after the referendum, regardless of the outcome. Regardless of whether it's a self-governing entity in a larger Sudan or an independent country, it will be responsible for the same services that you mentioned.

It will take probably more time and external assistance to get to the level that I think we all would like to see here, including the leadership of the Government of Southern Sudan. Much work has been done to get the basic structures in place, much remains to be done regardless of the outcome of the referendum, and I think much support will be required after the referendum to make sure that happens.