



Below is a near verbatim transcript of the press briefing held by UNMIS Regional Coordinator for Southern Sudan, David Gressly

***5 March 2008
UNMIS Radio Miraya, Juba***

Please note:

First part on Abyei is missing. This is the summary of what Mr. Gressly said:

Reports of killings inside Abyei Town are false. There have been no shootings inside Abyei Town this year. Reported body counts of those killed in military clashes between SPLA and Misseriya or other groups cannot be confirmed or denied as the UN has not had access to any of the locations. Contrary to some reports in the press, no UNICEF staff are withdrawing from Abyei. UNICEF's work serving women and children in the area continues as normal. The UN stands against all forms of violence and deplores the killings that have occurred in the border region in recent days. We urge all parties to show restraint and use nonviolent means to advance their goals. We also extend deepest sympathies to the families of all those who have lost their lives.

Transcript follows:

The Census Commission has conducted a training of 40 principal trainers at the end of February who will then move out to carry out training in States' capitals.

[part missing]

UNICEF has also participated in bringing an expertise from outside of the Sudan, from their procurement to help package this. The first flight leaves this afternoon, it is scheduled to leave at 14:00, 25 minutes from now. I think we have the logistical basis, the training basis to move forward with the census and we do expect that we see a successful conclusion of this. We will continue providing assistance to the government here both in the delivery as well as retrieval of the materials and then that process will begin in Rumbek after the collection and retrieval of materials which will start in the month of May. We have also been providing assistance to publicize the censuses and I think it is important for all listeners to understand the importance of this census, the key milestone leading up to the CPA and as a prelude to elections scheduled for next year. I think I will also speak on issues ... I will stop here.

Thank you very much. I will continue. Now I will talk about the returns, which is also an important prelude to the census itself. Just a brief summary of where we are in terms of the return of both the displaced and the refugees outside the Sudan. We estimated approximately 2 million people have returned home in the last two years starting from the year 2004, returning both to the ten States of the South Sudan as well as to the transitional areas. This is a significant percentage estimated total of about 4.4 million refugees and IDPs. Work is continuing this year and we expect to see up to 483,000 people return this year, some of those will be assisted by UN, GoSS and other institutions

but the largest majority will return on their own. We are trying to assist as many as those who are returning on their own with food assistance and other assistances to help them settle as well as supporting those who we have organized return for. Thirdly, we have just opened up the return operation from South Darfur and into Northern Bahar El Ghazal. This work started yesterday and we expected to be moving about 500 people for convoy twice a week, the first convoy should be arriving the destination anytime from now. This one of the four IDPs operations we have planned to start this year including those from Khartoum to Southern Sudan, Western Bahar El Ghazal to Warap, Eastern Equatoria to Jonglei and South Darfur to Northern Bahar El Ghazal.

Since January we have been moving about 1000 people per week and we expect that to pick up in the weeks ahead. To date we have assisted 5,000 IDPs to return as well as 2,500 refugees, and we hope that will contribute to the overall target of over 400,000 this year.

Finally, I would like just to congratulate women in southern Sudan on the International Women Day which will be celebrated on March 8 as always. International Women Day is the day when women are recognized for their achievements without regard to divisions - national ethnic, linguistic, cultural, economic and political. It is an occasion for looking back on past struggles and accomplishments and more importantly for looking ahead to the potential opportunities that await future generations of women. We expect these achievements to be celebrated by all men and women in all parts of Southern Sudan and indeed in the whole Sudan. The UN collaborates with local government boards and the French Government has planned a workshop on cultural events on that Day at the University in commemoration of the International Women Day. So I think these are the general premises that I want to make today and I will take the questions.

Questions from Juba journalists:

Question: Will it be possible to repatriate the large number of the IDPs and refugees to south before the census start and also will it be possible for the UN to assist the IDPs while going back to the non-go areas or the insecure areas, will UN be able to help these people while returning voluntarily to the South?

Question: It is a pleasure to get this updating report. However I would like to know from you that the returnees who are returning from Uganda particularly along the eastern corridor, Nimule and Magwi when they return home it will be very difficult for them to settle because their homes have already been occupied by the IDPs who are there. Your organization and the government are not seem to be caring for taking these IDPs out of these areas, what plans do you have for these people?

Mr. Gressly: Yes, the first question with regard to whether or not all IDPs and refugees could return before the census takes place. As I said earlier about two million people have returned, roughly 50%, roughly half of all refugees and IDPs. Physically it is impossible to imagine that the other half will return in the next five to six weeks. Now the answer is that many of the IDPs and the refugees will not be back in Southern Sudan on the date of

the census. Those who are inside Sudan will be counted and the question (not clear) will they be able to capture the (not clear) from the South so that information will still be available.

There is a question of IDPs coming back into Southern Sudan. We do not have what is called no-go areas at this time. We are supporting those IDPs who are returning spontaneously. We are providing support to about 360,000 of spontaneous returnees at this time and we have food supplies for that so wherever people are returning will be provided with basic support to resettle. We see temporarily problems in different parts of the South. So far, they have always been temporarily but we have no place in the south where returnees have been temporarily stopped.

This leads me to the second journalist who asked about the return of IDPs to Magwi County in particular. We are quite aware of the situation where there is large number of IDPs in Magwi County who are occupying lands owned by refugees currently in Uganda. We have a programme to assist to move those IDPs which we could replace last year but as you know many of them are from Jonglei State and we saw a great deal of insecurity in Jonglei State later last year. That is now settled down. However, before it is settles down people stopped returning to Jonglei State because there are problem now that has been resumed and we do see people moving back to Magwi County. We will continue to support on an organized basis to assist many of those IDPs to go back home whether it is in Jonglei or other parts. We did support many IDPs to go who are not from Jonglei to continue to go to their homes from outside of Magwi even when we suspended movement to Jonglei State. We are quite conscious of the problems we are working with local authorities in terms of how we sequence the return of IDPs and refugees so that we will avoid any kind of conflict and so far we have not seen that. We also recognize the right of the people to settle in urban areas and we will be working in all parts of Southern Sudan for those who wish to settle in those areas whether Juba, Nimule or otherwise as they are free to do so. So let me stop there.

Now questions from Khartoum:

Question: Despite the signing of an agreement between the LRA and the Government of Uganda we still receive reports of killing of civilians by LRA, how do you explain this?

Question: You said that there is no logistical problem for the census but I think the problem will emerge from finance and funds. How can we solve this problem? I also want to know whether the census will coincide with other areas like in Abyei?

Mr. Gressly: The first question is related to negotiations still going on between LRA and the Government of Uganda but the question related to the fact that there are allegations of ongoing abductions and killings going among the civilians even though the peace talks are progressing. First let me give you an update on the peace negotiations. The progress is extremely far, we are really in the final stage at this point of time. With the success in signing a ceasefire agreement and the DDR agreement and the conclusion of cessation of hostilities agreement that is all done in the last week so this sort of agreements represent a

significant step forward. We do expect that by the end of this month a final agreement will be signed. From my understanding from the parties, what remains is much technical and administration. So in that sense we expect an agreement to be forthcoming in the next few weeks or by the end of this month.

In terms of the concern raised, indeed there have been a number of allegations that the LRA is involved particularly in Central Equatoria but also in the extreme west of Equatoria in abductions and in killings. What I have to say is quite difficult to confirm each of these incidents but there was an increase in these incidents in the weeks leading up to the peace agreement. It was important to note now is that things seem to be much quieter certainly in Western Equatoria and even in Central Equatoria, the violence seen in recent weeks is declining. One can easily attribute that to the progress made in the peace negotiations. I think at this point what is important is that we see the process through so that we can start the implementation of the peace agreement which foresees a transitional period that will result in repatriation of LRA combatants and non-combatants alike back to Uganda for reintegration into the Ugandan society. If this can be achieved it will be a significant achievement not only for Uganda but also for Southern Sudan and we look forward to the successful completion of that process.

Now questions from Malakal:

Question: David Gressly spoke about support for the return. What kind of support is this, if it is money then how much?

Question: How serious the agreement between Uganda and the LRA, secondly the census process is moving slowly, not covering all the Southern Sudan particularly the rural areas what is the reason for this?

Question: My question is about the returnees it has been reported that the returnees who have come back from exile have again returned to where they have come so what action have you taken so that these people do not go back from where they have come?

Mr. Gressly: On the humanitarian support, we basically have funding as I have said for about 3,600 people in terms of food support we have funding for about 100,000 households, seeds and tools and approximately the same for non-food items. So to agree that the number of the people returning are in that size so we have the ability to support them but if it exceeds that size then there is going to be some difficulties so if you want to know our level of funding that we can provide.

The second question on the seriousness of the peace talks let me say that I have witnessed that the talks at the beginning of July 2006 there have been good days and there have been not so good days. I have to say that during the last couple of weeks we have seen a series of very good days. I think both parties have persisted despite the fact that there have been delays, breakdowns etc. in the case that both sides want to come to an agreement want to end this conflict. Therefore, I think the parties are indeed serious and we will know this for sure only when this peace agreement is implemented. but I do think

that the parties feel that they have an agreement that they can live with and work with and I think we should be thankful for that and we will continue to provide our support both from the UN community and the International Community to help see that success through to its conclusion.

On the census the Commission has done the mapping throughout Southern Sudan so that is covered a couple of small areas where there is localized insecurity may not yet have been covered they will be covered in the actual census count. So in general there is a satisfaction that the mapping exercise though it took a long time was successfully completed and will lead to a successful census. Right now the key is logistics, questionnaires are out to the localities to the enumeration areas, that work is underway and it will not be an easy task and I do expect some problems along the way but I also expect that we will find solutions along the way. So I think every one should expect to be counted in the census and I encourage the people who are listening to fully support the census here.

The final question was on those returnees going back. I think in any kind of movement, large scale of movement of people we are talking about two million people here already, there will be those who have second thought in going back that is not quite what they expected. But any one traveling to southern Sudan must have seen the massive growth in the cities of Southern Sudan and have to acknowledged that many people have returned and stayed, by far the greater majority have stayed. So the challenges are not so much for those who have gone back but the real challenge is supporting those who have stayed to ensure that they have access to basics education, health, services, water so that they can settle whether in rural communities or in urban communities successfully reintegrated and help build a prosperous society here in Southern Sudan.

Questions from Juba:

Question: There are complains from GoS and GoSS that UN in Sudan made pledges to support Southern Sudan but most of this support has not reached. Secondly, with regard to returnees what is said and what is on the ground are two different things. Now the census is approaching, why these people have not been assisted to return much earlier so that they are also counted?

Question: My question is about returnees' safety particularly those returning to eastern Equatoria and Magwi. We have cases of many people died of land mines while returning. Now you are planning to bring more returnees so what are your de-mining plans because mines jeopardize lives of the returnees?

Question: My question is about the census, the counting of the returnees because the census result will be used for distribution of resources and wealth in various States. Now that some IDPs and returnees have refused to go back to their areas, will this affect their areas economically? Secondly, they have refused to go to their lands, they grabbed other people's lands, and that led to chaos like in Kapoeta so what are the plans of UN and GoSS to address the issue?

Mr. Gressly: Let me start with the first question with regard to the issue of pledges, which resulted in misunderstanding of what is actually pledged in Oslo. In fact, the pledges or the package of assistances was not all of it for Southern Sudan. A lot of that assistance pledges were for Darfur, humanitarian assistance in support to the AMIS so the largest percentage goes for these two components. Addition components go to the ongoing humanitarian assistance in Southern Sudan and in the transitional areas and the final amount is pledged for development in the north and in the South. A large part of what was pledged for development in the South went through what is called the MDTF which did takes some time to start to disperse (indiscernible) largely funded by the GoSS. This funding is now starting to become available and it is being used whether for training, infrastructure, capacity building and development activities which are now on the way. Therefore, it took some time and that is correct but that money is now available and it is now being used through the MDTF. We are also trying to find another funds from the International Community to fund recovery which will help provide the peace dividends that every one is talking about. so we are optimistic that that fund can be set up we [part missing] that it has been set up three years ago but now there is an agreement to do that so that should help to speed up the delivery of what people would like to see it on the ground.

In terms of returnees actually it did took long time to assist people to return. We started the first process of returning I think in May 2005, supporting a group of IDPs returning to Raja County area if I remember correctly and accelerated that every year. So we did in 2005 and we did more in 2006 start opening up the corridors from Khartoum and South Darfur and we continue that in 2007 and 2008. We closed the refugee return programmes in DRC and the CAR because all of them have returned and we hope to do the same in Ethiopia this year. So large number of people have returned over the last three to four years.

On the issue of returnees' safety, we are quite aware of the situation of landmines in Magwi County. We knew that they needed to be cleared before people came back. We embarked last year 2007 on a large-scale de-mining programme in Magwi County, which was completed in 2007. This mission was carried out despite great risk to our staff in fact, this is in fact the only casualty, the only death in action of an UNMIS soldier in Magwi County who was actually protecting a mine clearance mission. He was in fact killed by LRA. Those roads are now cleared and open and available for people to return. There is also a landmine impact study to look into overall landmines problems in Eastern Equatoria, it shows that landmines are not a big problem they are isolated problems and those are being corrected in collaboration with South Sudan De-mining Commission.

Finally the question on the census, it is true that the census will have an influence on how wealth is distributed, particularly non-oil revenues. However, of course the 'assembly' in other concerns can make an adjustment may be I can ask my UNFPA colleague to advice I know that will be a distinction, the people who will be able to advice they are southerners or not, they will advice which location they come from, will you advice what level? UNFPA says, "County level". Yes, so up to the County level regardless of

wherever you are at the time of the census. You can say I came originally from this County, am correct? If I am not correct, you correct me.

UNFPA Representative: That is exactly correct, three questions whether somebody is a northerner or a southerner then you have the original province. You have nine provinces three of which are in the South that is the Greater Equatoria, Greater Bahar El Ghazal and Greater Upper Nile. That is the region of origin. Then you have also the State of birth that is another question. The other questions are the County of usual residence and I do not think the refugees who are coming in will find usual residence where you want stay for next six months or where you have stayed in the last six months. However, I think the main issue in the question is the refugees who are coming in after the census are they not going to affect the whole distribution of power and resources. There is no way that you can take care of that one, you count people where they are in specific point in time, there will be other services, there will be other census to come so you can not accommodate somebody who is not there and say just include this person it is impossible to do that”.

Questions from Khartoum:

Question: You have spoken about issues of returns, census etc. but have not touched on the rehabilitation of the existing roads and construction of new ones. What are you plans for that?

Question: I do not agree with Mr. David Gressly with regard to Oslo conference. Oslo conference was specifically for the support of the CPA, Darfur is not involved. It was mainly for the implementation of the CPA and [unclear] programme?

Question: What about the fighting between the SPLA and Dinka in Bor?

Mr. Gressly: The first question, which is relating to roads, that is a major concern here in Southern Sudan. Southern Sudan never had a very good road network; it is always very undeveloped in that regard. Of course, due to war what infrastructure existed has collapsed. Since the CPA has been signed approximately 2,200 km of roads have been rebuilt but I need to be clear, these are emergency roads as they are built quickly. The permanent roads will follow and some of these are following through MDTF funding, EC, USAID, and others are contributing to that. Therefore, the initial push is to get emergency roads in place to open up in Southern Sudan for trade and transport and that is well underway. This recently following the Jonglei Canal we will have a team working together with Joint Integrated De-mining Unit to clear the canal so that roads can be built on top, that is about half done even as we speak. So this kind of work is underway but this will be another long term investment as required not only by the International Community but by the Government of the Sudan itself. Nonetheless, we still feel that we have the logistic capacity to carry out the census successfully despite this major handicap.

I am sorry that you disagree with me on the issue of pledges. But rather than disagreeing, I think what we should do is to provide a breakdown of what those pledges represented and I will ask the staff to put it together so that it can be presented to you, to all those

concerned so that it is quite clear and if I am wrong by chance, I certainly change (indiscernible) in future, we will give the accurate numbers on that.

Finally, with regard to the question of insecurity in Bor, the situation was quite difficult later last year. I have to say right now that I made a couple of trips to Bor already this year, most recently last week. I think there are serious efforts underway to try to ensure that that level of insecurity does not return. We are doing what we can to support that also from community security point of view we recently met with the Governor and his Minister was there in that regard and I think we have been able to put together a package to support these efforts. For a peaceful transformation in Jonglei State, I think we are very hopeful that indeed will happen. So we are very much watchful of what is going on in Bor and in Jonglei in general but the situation today is much better than late last year. So we hope that we can continue.