



UNMIS

Press Conference**05 July 2009**

**Near-verbatim transcript of the Press Conference
by the UNMIS Regional Coordinator,
David Gressly
Radio Miraya Studios
UNMIS, Juba**

UNMIS Regional Coordinator, David Gressly: Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen and welcome back to the Miraya FM studios. It's been a little over three months since our last media encounter and there is a lot of ground to cover in the time we have today.

As many of you know, the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon is scheduled to arrive in Juba at 4:30 p.m. on Friday, 8 July at the head of a delegation that will include the President of the UN General Assembly, Mr. Joseph Deiss of Switzerland, and four UN undersecretaries-general including the head of peacekeeping operations, Mr. Alain Le Roy. On that same afternoon, the designated Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for a proposed peacekeeping mission in South Sudan, Ms. Hilde Johnson, is also expected to arrive in Juba. The Secretary-General is scheduled to meet with President Kiir and there will be a joint press encounter at the J1 presidential guest house following the meeting at approximately 7 p.m. on that day.

This seems like an appropriate opportunity to review briefly some of the more notable achievements of the United Nations Mission in Sudan as we head towards the official end of its mandate on Saturday.

I have been present in Southern Sudan throughout the six and a half year tenure of UNMIS and would draw your attention to the outstanding work of our colleagues. In conjunction with other UN agencies, various non-governmental organizations and private contractors, our civilian and military de-miners have removed or destroyed over 28,000 anti-personnel and anti-tank mines and nearly 590,000 pieces of unexploded ordnance in the country's ten southern states since January 2005. Over \$200 million was invested in this vital exercise, and as a result of their combined efforts, over 18,000 kilometers of cleared roads have been opened up across southern Sudan to facilitate the revival of commerce and other sectors of the regional economy.

One of our early achievements was the support our military colleagues at UNMIS gave to the Cease-Fire Joint Military Committee that oversaw the disengagement of the two armies and monitored the removal of all Sudan Armed Forces units from southern Sudan, which was completed by early 2008.

Our UN Police advisers have trained tens of thousands of Southern Sudan Police Service officers over the years here in Juba and also throughout the region. At present, 460 of our UN Police advisers continue to offer such training in all of the ten southern states.

The mission has also played an important role in conflict mitigation as an intermediary between the two CPA parties when crises have arisen. I have in mind the outbreak of fighting in the Upper Nile State capital of Malakal in November 2006 and again in February 2009. In both instances, UNMIS used its good offices to help de-escalate tensions between SAF and SPLA units – which were,

incidentally, Joint Integrated Units (JIUs) -- and restore peace and normalcy to the situation on the ground in that city.

The radio station that is airing this press conference live also stands out as one of the mission's success stories. In partnership with the Swiss-based Fondation Hironnelle, Miraya FM has established itself as the most popular radio station in southern Sudan based on audience market share surveys since it began broadcasting in June 2006. It ranks today as *the* go-to source for fair and balanced news coverage of developments in the region.

I would also like to thank our colleagues of the mission's Electoral Assistance Division and the United Nations Integrated Referendum Electoral Division for the invaluable technical advice and logistical support that they provided to the National Elections Commission and the Southern Sudan Referendum Commission, respectively, in connection with those bodies' successful implementation of the 2010 general election in Sudan and last January's historic referendum on self-determination for the south.

I would also like to acknowledge the important roles played by the mission's military and civilian staff in assisting the CPA parties to implement the 2005 peace accords. My colleagues' efforts made a significant contribution to maintaining the overall peace and stability of the past six years, which have brought us to where we are today as the countdown to South Sudan's independence enters its final phase.

We note with concern the continuing incidence of violence between various ethnic groups and tribes in parts of the south and also between rebel militia groups and SPLA forces. The violence has been especially fierce in portions of Warrap, Unity, Upper Nile and Jonglei states, and I led two fact-finding missions to those states last month to get a first-hand sense of what conditions on the ground are like for the thousands of civilians displaced by the fighting.

The mission is also in the process of rebuilding or upgrading ten county support bases in those four states to improve our ability to respond quickly to new outbreaks of violence and assess the humanitarian needs of civilian populations uprooted by such incidents.

We note with approval the recent decision of the militia group leader David Yau Yau and his followers to lay down their arms and begin the process of integrating themselves into the ranks of the SPLA.

Before ending these opening remarks and opening up the conference to your questions, I would like to share with you some personal news. I will be leaving southern Sudan next month to take up my new assignment as regional director of UNICEF in West Africa based in the Senegalese capital of Dakar.

Q & A

Question from Andrew Chung, Toronto Star: Mr. Gressly, what do you think the likelihood is of SAF incursions into border areas of the south, considering what is happening in Southern Kordofan and Abyei?

Question from Matt Richmond, Bloomberg News: I was wondering if you could explain a bit on these ten county support bases in the four states and whether or not the UN would have the authority to respond with force in the event of attacks on civilians.

Question from Voice of America reporter: My question is basically on civilian protection. There are concerns that the UNMIS peacekeeping force here appears not to have done enough in recent cases of violence. I was wondering, as you set up these ten support bases in the states, is there going to be any unit concerned with the protection of civilians?

Gressly: On the first question about the possibility of incursions across the border, I think what is important to highlight here – I think everybody knows it, but I think it is also important to understand the implications of that – is that on the 9th of July, South Sudan will be an independent country, and any kind of movement like this as you have described would be a threat to international security. I think those boundaries will be respected. There are issues of the border demarcation which remain outstanding, and that is somewhat worrisome. The issue of Abyei still remains. Because of the uncertainty of the borders, those can contribute to the possibility of conflict along the border zone. But in terms of the question as presented, no, I don't think that is going to happen. It would be an independent country, so this would no longer be part of the internal affairs of Sudan. That makes it very unlikely.

In terms of the second question on the ten support bases, the intent of these bases is actually multi-fold and we would have more and actually have others in other locations. We are particularly interested in having bases all the way along the border area for monitoring purposes, for early warning – they are sensitive areas – so that we get better information about what is happening and we can share that with the authorities here so that there is a clear understanding of what is happening on the ground. It is very difficult sometimes to separate rumour from fact in that regard.

There would be possibilities of deploying military units to these areas. We are right now moving a small unit on a temporary basis – it is basically a long-range patrol – into the Pibor area, which has been an area subjected to considerable violence in the last ten days or so. One of the purposes of this is to be able to deploy in that kind of fashion.

But I'm speaking really between now and July 9th. What is important – and that goes to the third question as well – these are more forward-looking questions, and after the 9th of July we are really looking more at what a new peacekeeping mission might have as a mandate. There is no mandate at this point in time. There is an expectation of one that has not yet been approved and endorsed by the Security Council, so it is very difficult to talk about it today. But it would be difficult to imagine that there would not be a protection-of-civilians component in that. So I would, unfortunately, have to defer a bit about going into detail on a mandate that does not yet exist, better to talk about that after the mandate has been approved.

Question from reporter in Malakal: Since it came into being, we have not seen any UNMIS intervention, especially given the incidents in Malakal and its environs. The next mission may have a force with a Chapter VII mandate. Do they really have forces capable of intervening to protect civilians in the event of an outbreak of violence between militias and government forces?

Question from reporter in Malakal: What role is UNMIS playing with regards to the boundaries of Abyei?

What role does the Mission play with regards to the return of southern Sudanese from the north?

Tribal conflicts still exist. What role could UNMIS play with regards to putting these to rest?

Gressly: Those two questions are somewhat linked, so I would just try to answer both with one response. I would speak about Malakal first – it is a very interesting case and I made reference to that in my own comments. I think it is important first to understand the concept of peacekeeping. Peacekeeping is not the same thing as peace enforcement. Peacekeeping is basically a term that refers to a mission whose role is to help two parties that have come to an agreement on ending hostilities to implement that agreement, to provide, primarily, monitoring of the implementation of that, to provide facts to the two parties to resolve differences that arise in the implementation of that agreement. It is not primarily intended as an intervention force to force the parties to adhere to the agreement. It depends on the goodwill of the two parties to do so.

Having said that, the current UNMIS mission which does end at the end of the CPA period has a protection-of-civilians component. It does have a piece of Chapter VII, which is the term that is used. Basically it authorises the use of force for protection of civilians in imminent threat within the capability of the force that is available. So it does not mandate that intervention always takes place everywhere. It is linked to the capability of the force and also to its proximity to the events that are happening. It is important to keep those principles in mind.

In the case of Malakal, what happened in both 2006 and 2009 when the two JIU units clashed in the middle of Malakal town – I was there both times in the aftermath when that happened – the key role was to get, first of all, senior leaders from both armed forces, up to the Chief of Staff level, to Malakal to sit down and to start working out modalities to separate the units, to work with the civilian authorities as well, to negotiate an end to hostilities and then to create a separation. Particularly in 2009, a line of UN forces was put between the two groups to help create confidence in the implementation of that local disengagement of forces, and that worked in 2006 and in 2009.

I would like to put that into context. I am trying to remember the exact total number of forces at that time but there were roughly 1,200 personnel on each side of that particular conflict on both the SPLA and the SAF sides. The UN had 140 personnel in the Malakal area at the time. So the ratio was about 20 to 1. This is not a force designed for intervention. It is designed for re-establishing confidence, to create a space for a political solution which was achieved in these circumstances, to de-escalate the tension. That is how this kind of work actually happens.

On the other question that was asked in terms of our role on the border issue, we have provided technical support to the negotiations over defining the border. There is a border commission established for that purpose and we have provided technical support to that commission. We provide monitoring along the border – in most parts of the border, as there are some areas we have no access to, which limits our abilities in that regard. But ultimately, as with everything with the CPA, it is the two parties who agreed to resolve these issues and they determined how to resolve these issues. They are ultimately responsible for this. We

can facilitate, support and provide factual information. But at the end of the day, it depends on the goodwill of the parties to do so.

On the question on returns, I would make a historical summary on this. Over two million people have returned to southern Sudan over the period of the CPA - most of them in the early years of the CPA, actually some in 2004 before the CPA. People had a sense that peace was going to come. (The years) 2004, 2005, 2006 and 2007 were when the bulk of these people came. We now have additional people who returned just before the referendum, and we are seeing people return again in the run-up to the independence of South Sudan.

On the question of what is the role of the UN, this is primarily a humanitarian issue and we rely on the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) to provide overall humanitarian coordination on this. They can provide you with information on the kinds of support that are provided to people who are returning. But also the government here has a responsibility, which they have increasingly been able to take up.

We have to remember that all of these things are the responsibility of the government, and the UN comes in to support, not to replace, the government.

On tribal violence, again it is really the responsibility of the government to intervene to protect civilians. We can and have supported the government to do so. We can and have intervened where we have been capable of doing so, but we can't have the capability to do so everywhere and at all times.

Question from Matt Richmond, Bloomberg News: This is about the outstanding issues on the CPA. Do you get a sense that those issues have to be resolved before the Ethiopian peacekeepers arrive and the two armies leave Abyei?

Gressly: No, I think the deployment would proceed with or without a resolution of those. It is important that it take place on its own, and work is already underway to deploy. I am not in a good position to give you details because, once again, that is outside my area of operations. But it would proceed based on the Security Council resolution already issued.

Question from Miraya FM reporter in Wau: Cattle raids continue to be a major cause of insecurity around the Wau area. What role could UNMIS play on that?

What is the way forward and what negotiations are ongoing now to address the issue of the armed opposition groups such as Peter Gatdet's forces?

Question from Radio Wau reporter: What is the role of UNMIS in supporting the new nation in terms of economic and social development?

Question from Radio Wau reporter: What is the role of UNMIS in terms of addressing insecurity in southern Sudan?

Question from Radio Wau reporter: What would be the new mandate of the mission in southern Sudan?

Gressly: A lot of these questions were on cattle raiding which is a major problem, especially in Jonglei where we saw the biggest problem this year, though there has also been some in Warrap State and in other locations on the western side of the Nile. Once again, as I said, this is still the primary responsibility of the government. What have we been able to do? I would speak from the western side of the Nile, talking about cattle raids that have taken place in Warrap State, Unity State, Lakes State. Actually, this year is better than what we have seen in previous years. Insecurity has been reduced that it is still periodically a problem. I think one of our successes came with our work with the three governors of those three states where we worked to move together with them. They had tri-state meetings to look into the issues that came about, particularly in the border areas of these states. We were able to move the governors around, helped to do monitoring in the areas that cattle raiding might take place. In general it seems, together with their work, that they have been able to pinpoint where to put security forces on the ground, and we have seen an overall reduction in cattle raiding in that area. I think that is an example of how we can work together with the government, which is what we want, to support their efforts to increase security throughout southern Sudan.

In terms of the breadth of the problem that we generally see in southern Sudan, I mentioned in those two areas that that is still going on and there are still some tensions, I should say, along the north-south border, and some militia activities, particularly in Unity and Warrap State, that are problematic. But many areas in the south remain relatively stable. That does not mean there is no violence, but they are relatively stable. I think that is important to keep in mind.

On the role of the UN in economic and social development, once again, there is no mandate for a new mission as we speak. My understanding is that it is likely to be a peace consolidation mission working with the new government in its transitional period. As you know, there would be an interim constitution and an interim transitional government, so working during that period, I think, would be the basic outline of that mission. It would look in many ways similar to what we have on the ground today, but refined for the needs specific to South Sudan and no longer linked to the CPA as its primary mandate. There would still be, of course, issues related to residual issues that will have to be somehow managed, but that would all have to be worked out. As in any such mission in this kind of situation, it is likely to be an integrated mission with the UN agencies also working together with that mission, and they would carry the brunt of the burden dealing with economic and social development. Their ability to carry out their work would be dependent on the funds that they raise for that purpose, though we expect that there would be a lot of goodwill for South Sudan in the post-July 9th period. So we expect that they are able to mobilise significant resources.

Question from Peter Kuot of the Star newspaper: With South Sudan bracing itself for independence, north and south Sudan would have to live like a divorced couple and it is not easy to bring together divorced couples to live as normal friends. What would be the role of the UN to help them establish economic and political relations?

My other question is on de-mining, especially the main road linking Sudan to Uganda. A portion of that area was heavily mined during the war, and I learnt that one member of the road construction company was killed by a landmine. There is a heavily mined bridge on the road to Jonglei State, and I see the de-mining exercise there is so slow. I see the days of UNMIS are numbered and I want to know whether those activities would continue.

Gressly: On the last question, we have expectations that those activities would continue after July 9th – it depends on the mandate given but we have an expectation. Maybe Lance would like to answer the detailed question about those specific locations.

Lance Malin of the United Nations Mine Action Office: On the road to Nimule that you are talking about, work is ongoing in support of the construction of the road projects down there. Unfortunately, road construction companies sometimes go in areas we haven't cleared yet, despite us telling them that they shouldn't go there. They get over-enthusiastic and that is when they do have accidents. And there have been one or two people that have been killed during the construction. But we have to get things into perspective: if you flash your mind back two weeks ago, there was a bus crash that killed 62 or 70 people. When you put that into perspective with the mine accidents and the de-mining, I think the most dangerous thing we do in terms of de-mining work is going to and from work. The number of people injured in road accidents would far outweigh the number of people injured in mine accidents.

So we have to get mines into perspective – they are a problem, but they are a problem compared to a number of other problems that South Sudan would have to deal with. But the mine action would continue as long as we have the support of the UN to continue to fund and support us.

Gressly: To add on to that, we have had some problems with re-mining in Jonglei and Unity State. So as soon as resources become available and weather permitting, we would move again to continue work in those areas to clear those areas that were re-mined this year as a result of militia activities. It is unfortunate because those areas had been clear up until a few months ago. The important thing -- and I would go back to the statistics I gave at the beginning -- while there may be areas yet to do, 18,000 is a lot of kilometres that have been cleared. I think that is the important thing to remember. Efforts would continue to clear not only roads but also area clearance, fields and so on that have been contaminated with mines and unexploded ordnance.

On the "divorced couple" question, that depends on the couple, and I think it depends on the requests of the governments concerned. There would be a continued interest by the UN in the relationship between the north and the south. I really cannot elaborate on that because I know there are a lot of discussions which are incomplete in terms of managing north-south relations after independence. But where we are asked to help in the future, I am sure the UN would step forward and provide that assistance.

Question from Miraya FM presenter Gabriel Shadar: I'd like to ask a question on the latest developments in Abyei with much criticism on the failure of the UN to protect the people there and on lack of timely humanitarian response and the deployment of the Ethiopian peacekeepers to the area, given that you have people from Abyei coming into your area of operation.

Gressly: Once again, I am not responsible for this area and would therefore only say one or two things. OCHA and other agencies coordinate the humanitarian response in those areas and are better placed to answer that, but what I have seen on the ground was, I thought, a very extensive response to those IDPs. It was very much a repeat of 2008, unfortunately. Ultimately what was required was a final political solution.

The parties have agreed that the Abyei Protocol is the appropriate way to resolve Abyei, and I think what is important now is not to look back in terms of capabilities that were on the ground in the past but what is going forward in the future. What we had in the past in Abyei were actually two companies of armed personnel. It is being replaced by an armoured brigade of over 4,000 personnel. That is a significant increase in personnel that is likely to make a fundamental difference in security in Abyei. So it is important to look forward in that regard.

But ultimately what is required is a political solution as the parties have agreed within the Abyei Protocol.

Question from Malakal: Would UNMIS provide direct assistance to the new nation, or would its assistance be in the form of development projects, especially given the levels of corruption?

Question from Miraya FM reporter in Wau: What is the role of UNMIS in ensuring the safety of civilians given the many rebel movements such as Peter Gatdet's?

Question from Wau: Couldn't the UN come in in the event the local authorities fail to ensure civilian protection?

Gressly: I wouldn't talk much on the first question because that is more for the UN agencies. What I would say in general terms is that a lot of the support provided at this point goes to projects on the ground, so that issue that was raised is not so much of a concern. But there is also a need to further develop the capacity of the different institutions at the GoSS level, at the state level, so that they can handle this kind of assistance through their own financial channels. So there would be a two-pronged approach to working both on direct project support as well as development of institutions.

On the question of the rebels and the mention of Peter Gatdet, once again, the primary responsibility is with the government, and it is the government in fact and the army that are responding directly to the threat of militia groups. We are placing a base – one of the bases that we had – in Mayom County, and we are looking to have a similar base in Gogrial East (County) so we would be quite proximate to the areas of concern identified by the caller and we would do something in other states as I described earlier. We are going to be closer to where things happen, we are going to be able to deploy forces where they are required. But we would have to do this based on the mandate that would ultimately be given by the Security Council – a mandate that has yet to be given – so it is impossible to give you a definitive answer today. But if we speak next week, that might be a different situation. But for now, those are the general descriptions of what I can provide.

Radio Miraya Presenter: I think we have exhausted all the questions. Thank you, David Gressly, for your last press conference here in Sudan. There is a saying that if you drink from the River Nile, you will come again. So we hope to see you here again in the near future and wish you all the best in Dakar, Senegal.

Thanks to all the colleagues here, Malakal and Wau and, for Radio Miraya, this was Gabriel Shadar.

ENDS
