



UNMIS

Press Conference

19 October 2010

**Near-verbatim Transcript of the Press Conference by
Mr. David Gressly the Regional Coordinator for Southern Sudan
United Nations in Sudan
UNMIS, Juba**

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen, and welcome back to the UNMIS compound here in Juba.

As you know, we have received two important delegations since the beginning of the month. First, a 15-member UN Security Council delegation visited Juba two weeks ago and met with the President of the Government of Southern Sudan Salva Kiir Mayardit, members of his cabinet, prominent representatives of Southern Sudanese civil society and senior officials of the Southern Sudan Police Service. It was by all accounts a successful visit, the Security Council members were satisfied that we are maximizing the use of resources in Southern Sudan. At the request of the Government of Southern Sudan, we are supporting the Southern Sudan Police Service personnel. The Security Council delegation members came away very favorably impressed by the quality of training offered at the Dr. John Garang Unified Police Training Academy, which is supported by UNDP, UNMIS and various international donors. This academy is an initiative of the Government of Southern Sudan, and the demonstrations that were put on for the Security Council went very well.

This delegation was followed a few days later by a high-level referenda monitoring panel that has just been appointed by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon last month. Led by its chairperson, the former president of Tanzania Benjamin Mkapa, the panel will function independently of UNMIS, and it's important to note that, though UNMIS will be in a position to provide the body with logistical and technical support as required. During their two-day stay in Juba the panel members got a very clear understanding of the environment they will be working in, and in a sense their role in the referenda process will signify the culmination of everything that we've been doing here in the country since the signature of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2005. We're going to work very hard to ensure a successful referendum that represents the will of the people of Southern Sudan, and we plan to do everything possible to help the Southern Sudan Referendum Commission and the Bureau here in Juba to achieve their objectives.

In the aftermath of last April's general election, both CPA parties asked the United Nations to play a more expansive role in the run-up to January 9. With that date now less than three months away, we are stepping up the logistical and technical support we have been providing to the Southern Sudan Referendum Commission and its Bureau. In addition, we are furnishing referendum security support to the Government of Southern Sudan and the Southern Sudan Police Service.

We have established a referendum support presence in all of Southern Sudan's ten states to work directly with the Southern Sudan Referendum Commission, to work with county-level

subcommittees, and the first County teams of UN Volunteers and UN Police advisers will be deployed to referenda support bases starting this Friday.

I'm pleased to report that this expanded UNMIS role in the referendum process has been very warmly welcomed by senior government officials whom I have seen in recent weeks. We plan to assist with the delivery of 120 tons of referendum-related equipment and materials over the next 11 weeks. Our aviation assets will undergo a substantial expansion to meet the challenge of reaching some of the more remote polling and registration centers that will be established between now and next January.

Our UN Police colleagues are moving ahead with referendum security training for thousands of Southern Sudan Police Service officers. These courses are designed to acquaint Southern Sudanese policemen and policewomen with the referendum legislation passed last December and help them identify election offenses and corrupt practices. Over 12,000 Southern Sudanese police personnel had completed these courses by late last week, and current plans call for the training of a minimum total of 16,500 by the start of next year. That would be in addition to the 10,600 officers who received similar training prior to last April's general election.

About 3,000 Southern Sudan police officers will join formed police units after they complete an intensive, six-week-long training program focused on crowd control, VIP protection, special weapons and tactics. Joint operations centers for the referendum will be established in selected counties and in the states and here at the regional level in Southern Sudan, which will be manned by Southern Sudanese police personnel and UN Police Advisers.

The Southern Sudan Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Commission launched a new statewide programme in Eastern Equatoria last week. It is the fourth programme of its kind to process ex-combatants in Southern Sudan, and over 8,000 former soldiers and women associated with armed forces have now been demobilized in the region since June of last year. The next DDR programme will be rolled out in Western Bahr El-Ghazal State next week. To date, the DDR programme overall has been slow to start in Southern Sudan, but its action plan has set a goal of demobilizing a total of 20,000 ex-combatants by year's end.

The 2010-11 mine action season began on 1 October and will last until the end of next June. The UN Mine Action Office has developed a flexible and responsive work plan, in coordination with the Southern Sudan Mine Action Authority, which will see the verification and clearance of an additional 730 kilometres of primary roads, the clearance of all known communities highly impacted by the presence of land mines as defined by the Landmine Impact Survey of Sudan, and 50 per cent of those with a medium and low impact.

The grave hazards that de-mining work entails for its practitioners were tragically demonstrated last Friday when Stephen Allen of the Mines Advisory Group died from wounds he sustained as he was working to clear a minefield near the Eastern Equatoria State town of Kapoeta. The Mines Advisory Group is an implementing partner of our UN Mine Action Office. A full investigation of the incident will be undertaken. Our thoughts and prayers are with his family and colleagues.

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

Q & A

Bloomberg News and Voice of America: Could you comment on recent reports that the UN may be deploying additional troops in buffer zones along the north/south border?

Gressly: We're constantly in the process of looking at what makes sense and what adjustments are there in terms of how we deploy our forces, and we are doing that as we speak. Anything we do in this regard would require the consent of the parties, we are in constant contact, we have standard mechanisms for that. Here in Juba is the headquarters of the Joint Monitoring Commission for the ceasefire zone. We have that at six other locations in the south. These mechanisms we will continue to use, we continue to work through the Ceasefire Political Committee to review these kinds of issues and basically, to answer your question, any such changes will be taken up with the parties and will be done with their consent.

Southern Eye (newspaper): If you look at the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme, people want to come back and even the government of Southern Sudan has gone to the north telling the people to come back and are in the process of bringing back the people. Some areas are not de-mined and people are suffering. What is your role in this respect?

Gressly: On the mine action side, a great deal of work has been done over the last years to open up all the major roads and to allow freedom of movement without fear of land mines in southern Sudan. There are some limited exceptions, and we have with us today a representative of our Mine Action Office who can give specific answers to that. Almost all the major roads are now open, so anybody wanting to travel into Southern Sudan, really there's not a major concern for that. But there are isolated areas where mines remain a problem, not so much on the roads but off the roads, which is why we talk about highly impacted areas where you have area land mines, unexploded ordnance that can also be dangerous. Stephen Allen, the person who was just killed a few days ago, was in the process of assisting in clearing an area of mines. An investigation is underway to try to determine exactly what happened. But he was in the danger zone because that's his job.

Miraya: And what happens to him in terms of compensation?

Gressly: There is a compensation program. Lance, do you want to say something about that?

LANCE MALIN, Chief of Operations for the UN Mine Action Office in Southern Sudan: All agencies have to have insurance. Stephen Allen worked for the Mines Advisory Group and they have a recognized insurance policy which will provide financial compensation to his wife and his family. However, nothing can ever compensate for the loss of a human being, so any financial contributions that they do get will just alleviate their pain rather than replace it.

Miraya: How many cases of such a nature have you handled?

MALIN: Me personally, 19 deaths and about 37 serious injuries in other parts of the world. Here in southern Sudan the number of accidents involved in mine action are very, very small compared with other countries because it's such a well-regulated and well-organized industry here. People are very careful, people look after each other and we try to be very, very safe. Consequently the number of accidents involved in de-mining are very, very small. We currently have in southern Sudan 33 teams working today as we speak, and the number of accidents since I've been here for the last months have been two that I know of.

Questions from journalists in Sector III, Malakal:

Q. What was the UN Security Council's main objective for visiting Sudan?

Gressly: This is the third Security Council visit since the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) was signed and they do this on a regular basis, first of all because Sudan is an important concern.

There are two UN peacekeeping missions inside Sudan, so it should be seen as a part of their regular monitoring of what's happening in the field and with the missions that they've endorsed and approved. They came here to look at the situation on the ground in southern Sudan, of course they asked questions about internal security, preparations for the referendum, just trying to get a feel for what is going on, which will help inform their decision-making as they go forward. From what we saw with the visit here, that went very well, they were very satisfied that they got the kind of information they wanted, not only from us or from the Government of Southern Sudan but from civil society and many others. They got a very good overview and a sense of where things are here in southern Sudan as we go towards the last months before the referendum.

Q. What are the guarantees that the referendum will take place?

Gressly: What's important to note is that the CPA was signed by the two parties, it includes the right to self-determination and defines a referendum process that needs to be put in place to carry that out. This agreement was witnessed by a large number of countries, the United Nations witnessed it, the African Union, the League of Arab States, and many countries who were quite interested in the negotiations and supportive of that also signed it. So there's a broad international support for the CPA, which has been reiterated in many meetings including most recently at the UN General Assembly in September of this year. It's also important to note that both parties have repeatedly said the referendum needs to take place on time. There's a very strong momentum at this time to move forward to the referendum, and a lot of work is underway to carry that out.

Q. What are the plans of the United Nations for the referendum?

Gressly: A key part of this is the UN mission, the UN Development Programme (UNDP), the International Office for Migration (IOM) for external voting outside of Sudan. All are quite heavily involved in the planning and support. We are here to support the parties, and we have been asked to support as the UN in four major areas. Number one, to provide technical support and the UNMIS Electoral Division together with UNDP and IOM have formed a common body called the United Nations Integrated Referendum and Electoral Division (UNIRED). We have a UNIRED representative who is overseeing the technical and logistical planning for supporting the referendum. We have a large mission support capability here in the south as well as other parts of Sudan to carry out the referendum. We have already 24 helicopters in southern Sudan which will be used to transport personnel, equipment, referendum material, etc. to make sure those materials get out to where they belong. We've also been asked to provide security support. I need to clarify that we're talking about support, not the security itself. The governments concerned are responsible for security, but we do have a large number of police advisers who are doing the training that I've described. They are deployed already in Juba and the states, and we'll be opening a number of offices in counties where they will also be deployed to assist and support at that level.

Miraya: What is the guarantee that there will be no interference with the UN's freedom of movement, that they'll be able to move safely without encountering some problems along the way?

Gressly: We have very good cooperation with the Government of Southern Sudan, they've given us the guarantees for that in writing. Sometimes there are misunderstandings, they are resolved locally but we get the full support from the Government of Southern Sudan to carry out our activities. So we're working to continue to move. If there is a misunderstanding we deal with it, so we don't see that as a fundamental problem.

Q. What are some of the challenges UNMIS is facing in implementing your referendum activities and ensure they go well?

Gressly: The main challenge is what everybody in southern Sudan faces, the logistical challenge. It's very difficult still to move around, even with some of the road construction and de-mining that have gone on, so logistics will be a major challenge and that's one of the major support elements that we will provide. The other challenge is that it's a very tight deadline to work with, and our UNIRED team is working very hard to find solutions together with the (Southern Sudan Referendum) Commission and Bureau to try to meet those deadlines. In the end, it is the Commission that leads on this, we provide support, we provide advice but the decisions remain those of the Sudanese as reflected by the Commission in Khartoum and the Bureau here in Juba.

Q. The National Congress Party has laid down five tough conditions that might prevent the referendum from taking place on time. What is the international community's role in seeing that these conditions are downplayed?

Gressly: It's important to go to the fundamental statements of both parties, which is that the referendum should be held and should be held on time. That's what we're working towards, that's what the Commission says it's working towards. We are making progress in its implementation. Registration should start in the near future. We have a colleague from UNIRED who can elaborate on the preparations and I'll give her an opportunity in a few moments to do so.

This is all being worked out as we speak, progress continues to be made.

MEAGHAN FITZGERALD, Officer-in-charge of UNIRED in Southern Sudan: We have a presence throughout Sudan. Particularly we have presence in the states and the counties and our team is made up of a team of advisers who are here to support the Referendum Commission by providing technical advice and logistical support that Mr. Gressly mentioned earlier as being necessary in order to move the massive amounts of materials that will need to be moved and the people who will need to be moved for this process.

Currently we are working with the Commission on their preparations and concept of operations and in their elaboration of the regulatory framework that is necessary to implement the referendum. We are also providing advice and assistance to their recruitment of staff and their training of those staff. We are also bringing in quite a large amount of materials that have been procured for the registration process that have been approved and requested by the Commission for delivery of these materials to the county level.

Questions from Sector II, Wau:

Q. Will UNMIS play a role to secure the movement of people from northern Sudan to southern Sudan?

Gressly: The mandate for UNMIS is quite clear. Primarily, it is a peacekeeping mission to assist the two parties in the implementation of the CPA, including the ceasefire arrangements, the security arrangements, disengagement of forces and so forth. But there are also additional provisions for the protection of civilians, for supporting humanitarian access. Where there is an issue of that nature, we have the ability to support both protection of civilian activities as well as supporting access to those in distress in a humanitarian crisis, which we have done in the past.

Currently, we don't see any significant issues along the lines described by the journalist in terms of movement here into southern Sudan. For the moment, that does not seem to be an issue, but it is something that is within the mandate that we can support such efforts.

Q. There have been a lot of delays with the referendum process in Abyei. What is the status of that process at present? Why are there continuing delays with border demarcation in that part of the country?

Gressly: This is a delayed process at this point in time, but the discussions about resolution are moving forward on the (Abyei Referendum) Commission. The border has been delineated, the Permanent Court of Arbitration did make a determination, which was accepted by both sides, about where the border is. The demarcation has not been completed yet, but the delineation and the marking of the border on maps has actually been done and accepted by both parties, so that is where we stand on that.

It is important of course that all of these provisions be carried forward and we continue to work with the parties to help where we can to move that forward.

Q. What is the status of the joint integrated units (JIU) in Abyei?

Gressly: Inside Abyei the only military presence is that of the JIUs, there is no Sudanese Armed Forces presence or Sudan People's Liberation Army presence inside the Abyei area. To the degree that military forces are required, they're provided by the JIUs. It is the joint integrated police who provide day-to-day law and order support and the JIUs that provide the military presence in the Abyei area. The fate of the JIUs, like many other issues, after the referendum is subject to many interpretations. Many discussions are going on between the two parties to explore how to deal with these kinds of issues post-referendum, that's very much what's happening now.

Q. If the result of the coming referendum is separation, what guarantees will there be for southern Sudanese citizens who are living in northern Sudan? We heard from the Minister of Information that no rights will be recognized for the southern Sudanese in the north (if the outcome of the vote is separation). What are the tools you are going to use to protect them?

Gressly: It's very much the same answer really for what happens after the referenda for those (southerners) who may be in Khartoum or (for northerners) here in the south for that matter. Citizenship issues are a major part of the discussions, and that will be the important part -- how those negotiations go forward. We know the parties are quite clear on what the issues are, they're looking for solutions to that so that people will know what their status will be regardless of the outcome of the referendum. Once again, we need to let that process go forward so that people have a clear picture as to what the situation will be (in the event of) unity or separation.

BBC and AFP: I know that the UNMIS role in the referendum is largely logistical and you'll be supporting the delivery of 120 tons of material. I just wanted to get your sense as to how optimistic and confident are you that the referendum can be done on time from the logistical point of view. Does UNMIS remain positive that it can be done?

Gressly: On the issue of support, it's not just logistics that we're providing. We're providing quite a bit of good quality technical support to the (Southern Sudan Referendum) Commission and the Bureau. A lot of the security stuff I've mentioned in terms of training, things of that nature, the police -- all are very important to a successful referendum. We're of course working at the state level with governors and state-level authorities on issues of inter-tribal and inter-communal violence that we've seen in the past. We've seen not so much of that this year, fortunately, but we're prepared to support in those areas as well.

But to answer your question on the logistics side, we remain confident within the time frames that have been so far discussed that we can deliver what is required. We do have the airlift capacity to

do this. However, the Commission does have to conclude on a number of decisions for this. I know that the procurement is already underway for the material, and I'll ask our UNIRED colleague to describe what the 120 tons actually represent. At the end of the day, we have two major pieces. There is the registration part that will start in the near future and then the polling itself. Some of this material we will use for the first and some of it for the second, but right now we feel we have a plan. When asked by the commission to carry it out, we will be in a position to do so, and of course they will be ultimately determining the timelines for this.

Southern Eye: What exactly do those 120 tons of referendum support materials consist of?

MEAGHAN FITZGERALD of UNIRED: The 120 tons that were mentioned in the statement comprises multiple types of materials. It ranges from office equipment and furniture for the state- and county-level offices to training materials for the registration, vehicles, motorbikes, the actual registration materials themselves in terms of the books and the kits. When we get closer to the referendum, they will also include the actual referendum polling materials as well. So it's a lot of materials.

DPA (German press agency): Why do you think the DDR programme has been going so slowly in southern Sudan?

Gressly: It's a complicated process in Sudan because we have two separate armed forces, we have other armed groups that joined in. A lot of joint policy decisions needed to be made, a lot of thinking had to be done, the issue of reintegration is difficult not just in southern Sudan but in general. So there were a number of factors that led to a slower than desired takeoff on this. But the numbers I gave you are starting to become significant. Eight thousand already, and trying to get to 20,000 by next year.

We suspect, however, that there will be a longer-term need for continued DDR even after the referendum period, so this is probably a long-term project.

Juba Post: Journalists in southern Sudan face a lot of challenges – lack of funds, problems in reaching rural areas. Do you have any plans to facilitate access for Southern Sudan journalists?

Gressly: We do provide transport support for various journalists, international and national journalists, to various locations. If you have an interest in participating in that or getting travel out, we do it all the time, just work with our public information officer here, and there may be an opportunity. We can't guarantee it for everybody every day, but there are opportunities, and you really just have to sit down and explain the rationale for the trip. If it seems to be something that makes sense in terms of our own mission and mandate, then we often accommodate.

Southern Eye: How sure are you that the referendum will take place on January 9?

Gressly: January 9 is the date that we're all working towards at this point in time. That's the assumption that we're going for at this time, the Commission has told us that's the date we should work for so we continue to work for that date.

ENDS
