



UNMIS

Press Conference

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**Near-verbatim Transcript of the Press Conference by
Mr. DAVID GRESSLY, UNMIS Regional Coordinator for Southern Sudan
UNMIS Miraya FM Studios, Juba**

Radio Miraya presenter: Let me welcome you ladies and gentlemen who have come to this press conference. Of course, today we are glad to be here with you today at this press conference, which will be addressed by the UNMIS Regional Coordinator for Southern Sudan Mr. David Gressly.

Mr. Gressly will brief the media on the recent violence in the Greater Upper Nile region and other parts of Southern Sudan. He will also look at an update of the activities of the UN Mine Action Office in the region, as well as not forgetting the latest figures of Southern returning from Khartoum and elsewhere in North and lastly Mr. Gressly will give us a look back on the January 2011 referendum and future status for the UNMIS county support bases.

Let me welcome you, David Gressly.

David Gressly: Thank you very much and good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. Welcome back to Radio Miraya Studios here on the UNMIS compound in Juba.

First, I would like to bring to your attention a series of events that are being organized by our colleagues at the UN Mine Action Office that will commemorate the International Mine Awareness Day, which is next Monday April 4th. These events will take place in Juba, Yei and the Western Bahr El-Ghazal town of Raja, and one of the featured activities will be the destruction of a stockpile of landmines and unexploded ordnance belonging to the JIU (Joint Integrated Unit) based here in Juba. I'll speak at greater length about the demining activities of our Mine Action Office colleagues a bit later, but I just wanted to start off with that highlight.

The ongoing violence in the greater Upper Nile region continues to be a source of significant concern for the mission. Pockets of conflict involving at least four separate militia groups dot the maps of Jonglei, Upper Nile and Unity states, and the SPLA has launched offensives aimed at containing those groups. I have made five trips to the greater Upper Nile region this past month and have conducted a number of useful meetings with state and county officials, governors, et cetera as well as SPLA field commanders.

UNMIS headquarters issued a statement earlier this month expressing its growing concern over the consequences of these operations in Jonglei State and its impact it is having on civilian populations of the area. While the Government of Southern Sudan has a responsibility to address a security threat within its territory, we urge it to do so in accordance with international humanitarian law. I am pleased to report that we have gained access to many of those areas in northern Jonglei State where the movement of our personnel and humanitarian agencies had recently been curtailed by these ongoing operations.

I would also draw your attention to the continuing inter-communal violence occurring in the Western Equatoria State in the area of Mvolo. The fighting between Dinka Atuot and Beli tribesmen was triggered by the March 9 killing of a motorcycle passenger in an ambush at the Mvolo County boma of Bahr Grinty, and it has involved communities living on both sides of the border between the states of Lakes and Western Equatoria. Our military contingents from those two states have provided a strong response in the form of ongoing patrols that are being conducted out of the cities of Rumbek and Maridi into the area and in support of humanitarian relief efforts. UNMIS is also looking actively at mediation support options through the Government of Southern Sudan and the two state governments concerned.

The flow of returnees coming down from Northern Sudan has significantly reduced since we last met. As of a week ago, approximately 261,000 southerners had moved back to the country's ten southern states since the end of October last year. But after registering high levels during much of December and January of last year and this year, the weekly numbers have fallen sharply. By way of illustration, an estimated 2,016 returnees entered Southern Sudan during the week ending on Tuesday, March 22, a far cry from the 36,000 who came into the region during the week of 15 December or the 26,800 who came in the final week of January. The exhaustion of government funds for assisting returnees is believed to be one of the causes of the decline, and nearly all returns taking place currently are of a spontaneous nature.

One of the good success stories of this mission has been the outstanding demining work performed by our colleagues in the Mine Action Office, and I'd like to briefly recap their latest round of achievements and talk about their next project in Jonglei State. During the current demining season, they and their implementing partners have released over 5.6 million square meters of land in Southern Sudan. Just last week, the Norwegian People's Aid organization in collaboration with the Mine Action Office handed over 1.5 million square metres of released land on the site of Lainya Town in Central Equatoria State where they had been working since July 2009. This enables residents who were re-located five years ago at the start of the demining work to return to their previous residential and commercial locations.

The next big challenge awaiting the Mine Action Office is the clearance of freshly laid landmines in northern Jonglei State. One of the militia leaders who has taken up arms against the regional government has been laying mines in a pattern that makes them capable of taking out convoys of vehicles -- this would be the forces of George Athor -- and our Mine Action colleagues are headed up to Ayod later this week to begin their work this coming weekend. I am pleased to report that within Mine Action there is no shortage of those who want to come and carry out this task, which is one of the more ambitious projects that the office has taken on in some time.

And then maybe finally, just so to refer back to the referendum which was mentioned in the introduction, the balloting in mid-January went very smoothly, everybody's aware of that. And we'd like to congratulate once again the people of Southern Sudan for the successful conduct of the voting and thank all of the supporting partners for their contribution to the referendum process. One of the benefits of that process has been the establishment of 24 Referendum Support Bases to augment the current 15 existing Team Sites that existed prior to September of last year. Those facilities have now been re-named County Support Bases, and we are deploying UN Police advisers in those facilities on a rotating basis to work with their colleagues in the Southern Sudan Police Service. We expect that UNPOL presence to become permanent, and the support bases will provide a platform for other civilian staff to perform their work at the county level. We are quite pleased that we will have a permanent presence at the county level in many locations.

So with that, I think I will stop and open up press conference to your questions. Many thanks again for coming and for your interest and time. Thank you very much.

Radio Miraya: Thank you very much that was David Gressly the South Sudan Regional Coordinator for UNMIS and you have just heard what he had to say. I know come to give a chance to my colleagues who are here with me. I know you have very many issues that you have to find from David Gressly on these issues that he has just mentioned about. If you want to raise a point, make sure you give us your names, and the media house that you come from.

Q&A

Voice of America and Nile Fortune Magazine: After the referendum, we have seen many militias come up. Is the UNMIS going to increase their personnel so that they can be able to contain these rebellions in South Sudan?

David Gressly: On the first question, which I think came from the VOA, the background. Our force levels are actually mandated by the Security Council and we are at the maximum. The only way to increase that is for both parties, the Khartoum and Juba governments to agree to that. So to answer your question there is no increase anticipated at this time due to the violence that we see in the Greater Upper Nile area. However, I also need to say that the primary responsibility for containing that rests with the Government of Southern Sudan. We do have a monitoring role and a protection role, which relates to the second question and I will deal with that in more detail when I speak to the second question, but no, there is no anticipation of an increase of forces at this point in time to deal with that. We will work with our current configuration and our primary role is, as I said before, one of monitoring, but we also get out and have been able to get out to patrol some of the areas affected and that often has a deterrent effect for some of this violence.

Associated Press: Mr. Gressly, what is your reaction to the recent UN oversight offices report on the problems UNMIS has faced in implementing its chapter seven protection of civilians mandate? Thank you.

David Gressly: What the mission has learned over the years as it went through different phases is how to better deal with this particular issue. The original mandate was largely focused on the disengagement of forces and the implementation of the security arrangements of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement. So a great deal of the work was done to monitor the movement of SAF personnel from the South to the North and the SPLA conversely from the North to the South. Subsequent to that disengagement which was largely accomplished in 2008, a greater orientation to protection-of-civilian issues both inside southern Sudan and outside was made and there is a provision in the mandate for protection of civilians under imminent threat. A great deal of work has been done since 2009 to try to operationalise that and now we are in the process of putting that into place. So the criticism that was mentioned is understood. Action has been taken to correct that, some of that has already been put in place and others are being put in place as we move ahead. And I think as we look forward to post-July and a possible continuation of the mission after that, the lessons learned from this six and a half year experience here in Southern Sudan can be applied to a future mission.

Gurtong Trust: Mr. Gressly, following the UN Mine Action work on the ground, how many states, in Southern Sudan are now demined and maybe how many states are not yet demined. I mean, how much land has been demined and how much land remains undemined?

David Gressly: I have to say upfront I do not have all the statistics in front of me but I do not think there is any state free of landmines. However, considerable work has been done. I know that over 18,000 kilometres of road have been surveyed and then cleared of any mines that have been found. So the bulk of all of the roads in Southern Sudan have been cleared. What remains is a great deal of work to clear unexploded ordnance. The Mine Action Office has a database of all locations that contain that and they have made considerable progress. I do not remember off the top of my head the percentage, but I think it is well over 50 per cent of that is complete. And the third area is area clearance along the lines I described in my introductory remarks. Quite a bit of work is required in that, particularly in Central and Eastern Equatoria States where that does remain a problem. Other areas as well, recently the Malakal minefield was declared cleared, so that is a good step forward in that regard. So progress is being made, but as we complete the CPA period there will be ongoing issues of unexploded ordnance that will have to be dealt with. Also, the area clearance that I have mentioned and then as I mentioned before, the kind of new placement of land mines as we have seen in Northern Jonglei may become a problem as it is there. That also will have to be managed. Our Mine Action Office will continue to work with the commission here to help develop a long-term capacity to deal with these issues over the years to come. Thank you.

Bloomberg: There is a small discrepancy on this statement. It says that there is full access to areas in North Jonglei and it sounded like there were still some areas that UNMIS cannot access. If that is the case, why can't they get there?

David Gressly: The first question was from Matt Richmond, and he noticed that I had made a slight modification as I read this, which is very observant. We still have a couple of issues in terms of limiting access. Number one is the landmine issue that I just described, which is a physical barrier to get into some of the areas, so it is hard to say we have full access if you cannot go into an area that has landmines. And some of this is very sophisticated use of landmines, so we need to make sure that those are properly cleared. Secondly, there are areas, by far most areas are accessible, where we still periodically have problems with local SPLA commanders denying access to areas. So that is still an issue. We will work through each of those issues as we encounter them, but it would be incorrect to say that we have full access, so I did make that small modification as I spoke.

Citizen Newspaper: The intertribal conflict in Western Equatoria State that exists between the Beli tribesmen and the Dinka Atuot of Mvolo County. What is your position to ensure that the inter-tribal conflict that exists in Western Equatoria State is brought down because it is a reoccurring situation? Thank you.

David Gressly: On the inter-tribal issue, basically the issue between the Beli and the Yirol area, this is unfortunately a classic kind of problem here in Southern Sudan that I know both the government here in Juba and the states are quite concerned about. Our role of course is to support any efforts that the governments take at whatever level to try to resolve these. Clearly, as in many other cases, it was a local incident that triggered the larger problem, but there is obviously something behind that or such an incident would not trigger that. What is required is a clear mediation between the groups concerned in terms of who has access for grazing and so forth in which locations. These things need to be worked out to avoid this kind of bloodshed. And I think

that the reports I am getting today is that the situation there is for the moment less, it is calming down. I wouldn't say the situation is over...

Radio Miraya: Excuse me I just need to come in a bit and see the role of UMIS there. Because if you look at the community on the ground of course they are the victims. And with the presence of UNMIS on the ground, they expect UNMIS to rescue to situation. As well you are saying that probably your mandate does not allow you to go beyond that so with your partners what are you doing to see that this people are really got off from the situation?

David Gressly: I did not really say that. As I had mentioned earlier in my remarks, we have patrols coming from both our Sector I and Sector II groups, coming out of Rumbek and Maridi to patrol on the ground and, through their own patrolling and presence, to deter violence. But also our state coordinators are working with the governments in terms of supporting any of their efforts to mediate an end to this, and this is the solution. In all these circumstances, there needs to be a de-escalation of the violence, followed by a real discussion over why people are fighting. We have been supporting those kinds of efforts, so indeed our mandate does cover all of that, and it covers it from a military as well as from a civilian point of view. But once these things break out, it takes a little bit of time to bring them back under control. So we are working closely with the government on that, particularly at the two state levels and also at the county levels.

South Sudan Post Magazine: You've just highlighted some things here and one of them is the issue in Malakal. It is like this issue is weakening your activities and your effectiveness. What is your position on this?

David Gressly: If I understand the question correctly, it related to the issue of the raid that took place in Malakal on 12 March. Basically, this raid did come into town, UNMIS did deploy at that point in time. Our military was patrolling and also working with the governor's office as they stabilised this. The situation was fairly quickly brought under control. We do have concerns about what happened there and we do have Human Rights Officers who are, as always in these circumstances, investigating what really happened, trying to get the truth, because there are a lot of accusations of abuses that took place in the aftermath of that. So we will be sharing our findings with the government on that, so that if there is corrective action required, they will be in a position to do so. Since that time, we have worked to get access, which we have succeeded in doing, I did it personally, actually travelled to Owachi shortly after this. I think within a day or two I was there, and had meetings with the Government in Malakal and the Shilluk King as well as visiting IDPs (internally displaced persons) et cetera on the ground. So I think we have been very proactive. I understand we have just made another visit to the area, I think it was yesterday. So we are working to support the delivery of humanitarian assistance, et cetera. So what can be done is being done at this point in time to help stabilise the situation.

Radio Miraya: Let's cross over to Malakal. Upper Nile State Ministry of Information and Communication: The United Nations role to Sudan has been known to some extent that it protects the security situation in both South and North Sudan. (inaudible)... particularly the greater Upper Nile State and Region, so what is then the role of UN agency?

Radio Miraya translation: The second question is about returnees, that these people when they come in Upper Nile State they ended up finding themselves that is insecurity it has been a very very

fierce on this. What has been the plans of UNMIS in advance to see that these people are not affected. Were there some plans that you designed before?

Radio Miraya translation: Do you have some plans in advance to see that situations like these do not recur or repeat themselves:

David Gressly: What I will try to do is probably answer all three at the same time since they are essentially in a way very similar questions, so I think I can answer that in one response. What I would start off, the first thing to remember is that the primary responsibility for protection of civilians is the Government of Southern Sudan or the state government. I am happy that the Minister of Information is online. The primary responsibility is that of the various levels of government. Our role, speaking of UNMIS and there was also a question of agencies as well so I'll touch on that very briefly, is to support the government to carry out its primary responsibility for that. Now we can do that in a variety of ways, whether it is the training that we provide to the police, whether it is the human rights work that we do, whether it is some of the technical work, the political work that we do with different levels of government. We can also interpose our military forces when there is conflict, we can do patrolling, and we can provide protection to civilians in immediate threat. But the primary responsibility rests with the Government of Southern Sudan, with the state governments and other levels of government. So that has to be understood.

Secondly, what we need to highlight here is that the primary role of the mission, particularly on the military, was to monitor and verify the implementation of the security arrangements of the CPA. Reference was made to this internal oversight report. In fact, the primary role was the implementation of the CPA and oversight support for that. So the mission was always designed primarily for that, as opposed to interfering in the internal affairs of the government here. We can do so as a final resort when the state is unable to do so or unwilling to do so. In the cases that we are describing, in most of these cases, I'm trying to think of this as an exception, the government was actively involved in this, including when the attack took place on Malakal. We need to work within that context, and we have to work in a way that supports the government as it tries to improve its ability to protect civilians here in Southern Sudan. And this includes of course the behaviour of forces, as I made reference earlier. All security forces should adhere to certain principles in which they are engaging either against armed rebellion or against criminality or whatever. So we focus on all of those aspects, and that is in the broader sense of what we mean by protection of civilians. It is military, it is civilian, it is police. All of these components come together to help create a more conducive environment for security in Southern Sudan. This will take time, with our support and with the support of the international community, but it all has to be done to support the government to carry out its role, which is primary.

Radio Miraya: Over to Bahr el Ghazal. Radio Miraya Wau: We are very grateful to get with David Gressly today. With me here are journalists from Radio Wau and I will give them a chance to throw their questions to David Gressly and get their answers. Thank you so much.

South Sudan Radio Wau: The UN mandate is going to end in the coming April and there are some problems yet not solved, for example Abyei, border demarcation, oil and nationality. What is the role of UN towards these problems?

David Gressly: The first question related to the current UNMIS mandate, which correctly does expire in April. Frankly speaking, the mandate is linked to decisions by the Security Council in

consultation with the two parties. Without predicting what the Security Council and the parties will request, the expectation is that the mandate will be extended through the CPA implementation period, which as you know ends in July. So that would be an expectation, but of course that has to be done by the Security Council. That is really all I can say on that. Of course the issues that were raised of concern, the major outstanding CPA issues, Abyei and the border were the ones that were mentioned, of course there is also the popular consultations in Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile, those are still major outstanding items. UNMIS will continue to be fully engaged with other the partners, including the AU, to try to seek solutions before the end of the interim period to these major problems, major pending CPA issues.

There are, for example, going to be elections that UNMIS will support in Southern Kordofan, which if my memory serves me correctly begin on May 2. So we are still fully involved in this and expect to be so at least through the CPA period.

Radio Miraya translation: Many southerners who have been living in the North are now coming back to their respective areas. What is the role of UNMIS in seeing that they can also help in the situation where these people can be resided?

David Gressly: Primarily the answer to this is no. The UN agencies and particularly the UNDP does play a role in this locally, but it is of course not a UN responsibility. It is the responsibility of the local governments concerned to do this. But I do know UN agencies do support this effort, but it remains a government responsibility, not a UN responsibility, to ensure that it happens. My understanding in many cases is it does happen as these issues are resolved locally.

Radio Miraya translation: The same goes for the last question which has been asked by a lady. Some of them who have been workers especially in the North who are teachers. They want to work. They want to continue working here in the South, but the situation seems not to be good, not favouring them in terms of not getting employment. Do you have plans to support people who are in the working arena to see that also they proceed ahead?

David Gressly: Once again, this is not really an UNMIS area. While we are concerned about that, and I think it is an appropriate concern, the mission is more oriented towards the peace and security aspects and implementation of the CPA proper than this, which is more of a UN agency type of activity. Of course, UN agencies as well as bilaterals and others including the World Bank are working to help improve the economy locally so it will generate more employment opportunities. But given the history here in Southern Sudan, no one is surprised that that may take some time, given the legacy of war over the last five decades.

South Sudan Radio Wau: I am just asking about the recent clashes, which took place in Abyei. We have seen that the UN mission there was not effective on solving the issues between the partners of the CPA there in Abyei. Is it not the same mission, which is in Darfur and Abyei? Why are they not effectively stopping the clashes between the two partners of the CPA?

David Gressly: The fourth question related to the recent clashes in Abyei. One question was asked if it is the same mission as Darfur. In fact, Darfur is a separate mission. It is a hybrid mission with the African Union and the United Nations, so it's not the same. Our primary objective here is to support the two parties to continue to de-escalate the situation on the ground. The Kadugli Agreement that was negotiated some weeks ago is a framework for that. Our understanding is that

that is an interim solution until a final solution within the CPA implementation is finally achieved. So we will of course continue to support the implementation of the Kadugli Agreement and supportive of the larger CPA issue related to Abyei.

Radio Miraya Translation: In line with what you said that UNMIS and other UNDPs does not support the people who have been working in the North getting for them some residence and what have you. So he wants to find out, your role as UNMIS whether you support the government in another way so that these people are catered for. Do you have a role there?

David Gressly: There are several dimensions to this. Number one, this is primarily a responsibility of UN agencies. I do not represent the UN agencies here, so I will not speak very much on that. What I will say is that they do provide support, both along the governance line, which is what UNDP does in part, but also on the humanitarian side, and a great deal of work has been done by UN agencies on the humanitarian side to deliver humanitarian aid together with NGOs on the ground, whether it is food, non-food items and other things that are required for people to settle. So a lot of work has been done and credit needs to be given to them. I do not have the statistics in front of me, so I can't give you that but we can ask you to contact OCHA, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs who will give you the details of that kind of support. I can tell you from my own observation that support has been quite considerable.

Radio Miraya: Thank you very much. Southern Sudan Television: People complain a lot from the areas affected by the ongoing conflict, for example Abyei, that whenever a problem arises and they run to UN forces for rescue or for support, they are always chased away. So what's the role of UNMIS in this case?

David Gressly: On Abyei, I have to say I don't cover Abyei so I'll be very limited in what I say on that particular issue and refer you to our PIO people to give you more detail on that, particularly on the complaints that were there. UNMIS has a mandated responsibility to protect civilians in imminent danger where capable of doing so. How one applies that in a given situation can often be a subject of debate, therefore I feel uncomfortable dealing with an issue which I was not involved in. I'd suggest that that be dealt with separately, and if you would like to do so, our staff can arrange for that.

Sudan Radio Service: During your visit to Upper Nile, Jonglei and Unity states, you held discussions with the authorities there and SPLA officials on the ongoing rebellions in the three states. What exactly have you learned from those meetings?

David Gressly: I think this is a very important time here in Southern Sudanese history as we move forward towards independence on July 9. What we have learned of course is that there are significant humanitarian needs on the ground because of the ongoing operations against these different groups. There are large displacements, the landmines issue I've described already. However, large areas are accessible at this point in time as the fighting has actually moved out of the original areas. I have received assurances both from the governor in Jonglei as well as the senior commander on the ground, particularly during my visit in the Khorflus/Canal area, that the UN has access as do humanitarian organizations into the area. They were very forthcoming on that. Now we still encounter problems that we have to work through as I mentioned before. So what I would simply say is that there is still reason for concern because of limitations on the access as I have described it. There are people probably still at risk in areas that we have not yet gotten to. So much

work still remains to be done and will be done to try to overcome that. I think we'll have to see how this evolves over the next weeks as the government works to contain the violence in the area.

The Associated Press: There is a discrepancy in the statement again on the issue of how you described the rebellions. In your spoken remarks, you said "pockets of conflict," but in the statement it says "pockets of open rebellion," and I was just curious, given the latest remarks by George Athor that all of the rebellions have united under one movement, I was wondering whether you think this poses a greater threat than it previously has as we approach independence in July.

David Gressly: At this point, the issue really relates to the reintegration of forces and the incomplete process of re-integration of forces. I think that is the core issue here that has led to the fighting on the ground. That issue will ultimately have to be dealt with, and not all of those who have sought re-integration are involved in the conflict that we see now. Re-integration has gone ahead with some groups, others are on stand-by, it's a mixed picture so I'm not going to comment on any individual's description of this, but simply to say that each of these entities have their own characteristics and decision-making. And it's being dealt with differently by the government as they move forward on that.

We continue to work with the government to find ways to find an early resolution to this. We're open to talk to any of the parties and do so. And as we can find ways to help in this regard, we will continue to do so.

The Citizen: Mine is concerning the security situation. I learned that there are two generals of the SPLA who also defected, also they rebelled. What have you learned about that rebellion? Do you think that South Sudan really is facing a lot of problems?

Question from unidentified journalist: There have been some negotiations to see that these rebellions can be brought down. I wanted to know if Mr. Gressly sees mediation as a solution or if he sees military action as the only solution to ending these rebellions in South Sudan.?

David Gressly: The only general that I'm aware of that is in rebellion is General Athor. There may be rumours to the contrary, but that's all I can say on that. Rumours are rumours. On the issue of negotiations, it's always preferable to find a negotiated solution when that is feasible. We are always available to support those efforts when parties concerned are interested in that, and of course that remains true today. That's probably all I can say about this at this point in time.

Radio Miraya presenter: Thank you very much, David Gressly.

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