



UNMIS

Office of the Spokesperson***Press Release No. 36/06*****The UN hails the successful Completion of Community–Driven Disarmament in Akobo, Jonglei State**

Khartoum-Juba-Malakal, 22 August 2006: A high level delegation from the United Nations Mission in Sudan (UNMIS), headed by the Principal Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Sudan, Mr. Tayé-Brook Zerihoun, together with senior representatives of the United Nations Country Team for Southern Sudan, attended a ceremony on 21 August in Akobo County, Jonglei State, to celebrate the successful completion of the recent community-driven voluntary disarmament exercise which took place during the period from 14 to 30 July 2006. Around 1250 weapons were handed-in by the community in this voluntarily disarmament programme.

The ceremony was also attended by high officials from the Government of Southern Sudan (GoSS) and the local authorities, including Mr. John Luck Gok, Minister of Sport, Youth and Culture of the GoSS and the Deputy Governor of the Jonglei State.

In his speech, the Minister of Sport, Youth and Culture expressed his appreciation of the UN and UNMIS support for the disarmament programme. He commended the people and county of Akobo for the success of the first voluntarily and peaceful disarmament exercise. He reiterated the GoSS commitment to exert all efforts in order to ensure that the disarmament programme is carried out peacefully out throughout Jonglei State. He indicated that the GOSS plans to integrate the disarmed youth in the civil society by providing them different employment opportunities. He announced that some of them could enroll in vocational training centres to be opened in Akobo town, and others could, if they chose, join the police or SPLA forces.

In his address, PDSRSG Tayé Zerihoun hailed the Akobo disarmament exercise as a success story that should set the standards for the conduct of the disarmament programme throughout Southern Sudan. He indicated in this regard that the key to the success of the Akobo disarmament exercise resides in the fact that it was a disarmament-of-civilians-led-by-civilians, carried out voluntarily. The synergy of efforts of all concerned and the effective partnership between the national and international actors in the preparation and conduct of the exercise equally contributed to its success.

UNMIS and other UN actors, in particular UNDP, intend to follow-up on the Akobo disarmament programme and will participate in furthering community benefits, including through humanitarian quick impact projects requested by the Akobo community.

Background Note to the Media on Civilian Disarmament in Akobo

Background

1- Sixteen months after the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) between the SPLM/A and the GOS, the interim period continues to be fraught with challenges and difficulties. One area of considerable concern for both the now GoSS and civilians in South Sudan has been the issue of civilian disarmament. Ongoing insecurity and the initiation of a coercive disarmament campaign in parts of Jonglei state have led to significant loss of life during the first four months of 2006.

2-The UN was invited by the Commissioner of Akobo County to join and support his arms registration process as a confidence building measure, before SPLA forces begin their disarmament drive in that area. This provided a narrow window of opportunity to assist the County Commissioner and the community in conducting a voluntary disarmament exercise through rapid registration and verification of surrendered weapons.

3- In an effort to examine alternative approaches to arms control, an early and rapid engagement was proposed as a way to become involved in the disarmament process, through a UN presence and material support which allowed for a transformation of the dynamics surrounding forced disarmament. The engagement was designed to demonstrate UN willingness to support the GoSS as well as community security needs and its aim to open space for more substantial and earlier involvement in the civilian disarmament process.

Akobo Disarmament Celebration

4- The community of Akobo County in Jonglei State held a ceremony on 21 August, 2006 to celebrate the recent community voluntary disarmament exercise which took place during the period from 14 – 30 July, 2006. Around 1250 weapons were handed-in by the community during this period.

5- This historic community-driven disarmament initiative has been a collaborative effort of the Civil Administration of Akobo County, the Government of South Sudan, the SPLA, South Sudan Police, Traditional Authorities, Civilian Arms Registrars, Communities, South Sudan DDR Commission, UNDP, UNDDR, UNMIS Military Observers, UN Police, UNMIS Force Protection, Nile Hope Development Forum and the Presbyterian Relief and Development Agency. It is a disarmament-of-civilians-led-by-civilians in South Sudan, successfully carried out voluntarily, without bloodshed, and non-coercively.

6- The UN DDR Unit comprising both UNMIS and UNDP components has been actively engaged in the process from the start. It has demonstrated the UN united mission in action, with civilian and military components working together with and in support of the local authorities. It has had high visibility with the UN flag flying on the locally acquired boats up and down the Akobo River facilitating the registration and collection of weapons.



For the first time since the beginning of the war, a barge carrying fuel reached Akobo from Malakal.

7- Disarmament took place in 10 sites throughout Akobo County at Akobo town, Wanding, Wachuman, Wuthpiny, Kier, Tirgol, Old Akobo, Meer, Burmath and Chiban.



Weapons Collection Center at Akobo

8- Several registrars were assigned to each disarmament site and were responsible for coordinating and implementing the disarmament process. They were trained to properly register, check and store weapons and ammunition by UN DDR staff. Weapon and ammunition type and serial numbers were recorded, as well as the name and affiliation (payam, clan, etc.) of those who submitted the weapons. Weapons and ammunition were stored in tukuls and put under guard until they were transported to Akobo. Registrars tasked mobilizers to spread word of the disarmament initiative throughout the communities. In the town of Akobo, a large tent served as the

disarmament centre headquarters, and weapons and ammunition were stored under lock and key in a guarded building.

9- As planned, a minimum of 10 SPLA soldiers were stationed at each site and were responsible for security. They were supported by an additional 10-20 armed civilians who are under the direction of the SPLA.

10- The disarmament initiative appears to be having a very positive impact on communities by proving to them that the international community is present and prepared to support them in their peace building efforts. The team visits to the disarmament sites have made the local population realize that this disarmament initiative is both serious, and supported. Word of the UN's presence has spread quickly throughout Akobo County, and it is hoped that this will lead to a more comprehensive disarmament. Those interviewed at the disarmament sites confirmed that the simple presence of UN staff – and in particular the TCC force protection – was sending positive shockwaves through the communities.

11- The importance of this disarmament initiative was reiterated to the registrars and mobilizers, and they were asked to ensure this message was widely disseminated. This initiative presented the Akobo community with an opportunity for peaceful, voluntary disarmament which they have taken energetically.

12- The follow up involves further community benefits through humanitarian quick impact projects and a full program of development under the UNDP DDR community security support program.

13- Several Quick Impact Proposals (QUIP's) from Akobo have been received by UNMIS and they are under review by the Sector III QUIPS committee. These proposals include rehabilitation of Akobo hospital, Rehabilitation of primary school, programs for youth, rehabilitation of county prison, etc.

14- UN DDR and the SSDDRC are in the process of contracting PACT, an International NGO based in Southern Sudan, as the key implementing partner for its Community Security Support Program. PACT will work with a number of local actors, including local authorities, community-based organizations, local institutions, military and grass-roots representatives, to promote various interventions prioritized by the communities to address arms control and reconciliation initiatives.

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