



United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS)

Media Relations and Spokesperson Unit
Communications & Public Information Office

NEAR VERBATIM TRANSCRIPT

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Press Conference on Arrival of Regional Protection Forces into Juba, South Sudan

Opening remarks by David Shearer UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General in South Sudan

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Good morning and welcome to the RWANBATT compound here at Tomping.

A number of you have reported over the weekend that the first company of Rwandan soldiers has arrived in Juba as part of the Regional Protection Force deployment. I'm joined by Brigadier General Jean Mupenzi of Rwanda, who is the Commander of the RPF. With me too is Brigadier General Kindu Tegegn of Ethiopia, who is the UNMISS Sector-South Commander. I wanted to bring you together and provide a short update on where we are with the RPF.

A Nepalese High Readiness company and over 100 Bangladeshi engineers have arrived into the Mission area. The arrival of these contingents as well as the Rwandan Company of peacekeepers marks the beginning of the phased deployment of the RPF that will eventually number up to 4000 troops.

The remaining Rwandan peacekeepers who are part of the main battalion will be arriving in the next few weeks –the paperwork is being processed by the South Sudan Government – and the arrival of Ethiopian troops is imminent.

I'd like to reiterate very clearly that the RPF is not a separate UN peacekeeping force like the rest of UNMISS, the 4,000 RPF peacekeepers when they finally arrive, will be ultimately under the command of the UNMISS Force Commander, Lieutenant General Frank Kamanzu. And, as the Head of UNMISS, I bear ultimate responsibility for all the peacekeeping operations in South Sudan.

The RPF troops will be based in Juba and will operate if necessary, in the surrounding areas...as per the mandate authorized by the UN Security Council. It will carry out its functions in cooperation with the government as also expressed by the Security Council resolution. The RPF's arrival does mean that the existing UNMISS troops already based in Juba, can, as needed, be redeployed to different locations across South Sudan – to protect civilians, support humanitarian assistance and to monitor and report on human rights

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abuses. UNMISS is always and consistently assessing its priorities; having additional troops means we can carry out more tasks related to our mandate, to protect civilians and support the building of a durable peace.

For example, it will enable us to put more patrols along insecure roads where there have been attacks on civilian convoys – such as on the Juba-Nimule and Juba-Bor road. On that note, I'd like to take this opportunity to offer my condolences to the family and friends of those people who were killed on the Juba-Nimule Road last week and to condemn in the strongest terms possible the attacks against innocent civilians.

All our peacekeepers strive to be robust, nimble and proactive in the duties that they carry out. But as we know fighting persists and insecurity for civilians remains a constant and real challenge.

Extra peacekeepers means we can better help protect the people of South Sudan and help build that durable peace that we are looking for.

Thank you

Questions and Answers

Radio Miraya: *There has been this contentious issue of the airport. The Government has sometimes back rejecting the issue of the RPF having control over the airport. Has it been resolved?*

SRSG: Yes, there was never any thought of controlling the airport. The airport is the sovereign territory of the Government of South Sudan. The issue for us is, with the cooperation of the South Sudanese military and police doing joint patrols – it is something we have been talking with the authorities about and we hope will take place. There is absolutely no designs or plans of any kind to take control of the airport. Quite the opposite: the airport is the sovereign right and sovereign property of the Government of South Sudan.

Asahi Shinbun: *I want to know what mechanism have you developed for the RPF to use on the Juba-Nimule road. I was in the bus in the last attack and there was an escort. If somebody else is going to take up the role to try to protect, what is the best way they are going to protect this long road with a bunch of forests and grass? That is my question.*

SRSG: First, I am sorry that you had to go through that situation.

We already have some patrols going up and down the Nimule road and on the Juba-Bor road. These are two vital lifelines for South Sudan. The deployment of the RPF means simply that we have additional troops at our disposal that can make more frequent patrols along that road in addition to the possibility of escorting some vehicles along the road as well. We hope that that presence will make the road safer and enable the free movement of people along that road without any problems.

The big issue that I want to make clear today is that the RPF, obviously, is going to be based in and around Juba. The freedom for other forces to be able to move out is therefore available to us and we can move to hotspots that require more in the way of protection.

VoA News: *Just two questions: other than the Bangladeshi force that has arrived already, you did mention the Rwandese forces. Have they arrived? If any, how many of these troops [of the RPF] is UNMISS now having?*

My other question is with regards the deployment of the RPF. It has so far taken months since the deployment of this RPF started and so far we have less than a thousand or even 500 that have so far been deployed here. Citizens are eager to also understand why this delay?

SRSG: First of all, UNMISS is about 12,000 troops currently in the country. That is going to be expanded with the full deployment of the RPF by an extra 4,000. There was a High Readiness Company that is here –

companies are normally about 150. The bulk of the Bangladeshis are here and the RPF is here. This RPF company has to be deployed first before the remainder of the battalion could come.

Yes there has been delays. The deployment of any peacekeeping force requires cooperation of both the government and obviously the Troop Contributing Countries and the work of the UN Headquarters in making sure that all the process is followed. We have liked it to have been quicker. We have been persistent with pushing the Government along with trying to overcome some of the bureaucratic hurdles that have been in our way over the last while. But we feel with the signing of an additional piece of land for some of the RPF who will be coming in and the arrival today of one of the main battalions of the RPF, that this will now move quicker. We are very hopeful that will be the case.

CCTV: *I would like to know specifically on the Rwandese Battalion or the troops that have come, how many have come so far, how many are yet to come and by when do we expect all of them to be here?*

SRSG: There is a company here which is a little under about 150 currently – that is the normal way that we proceed with deployment. We have a company that is effectively and initiative company that comes and sets everything up. We are lucky here because we already have here a Rwandan compound here so they are able to fit in pretty fast. That means there is another 600 plus to arrive and that will be coming very quickly now because these people are already in place.

As I said in my opening remarks, the paperwork is now with the Government and we are hopeful that we will be able to move forward and that will happen quickly.

Al-Arabiya TV: *For how long is the RPF going to stay in the country as you know the peace agreement ends next October?*

The second question is that is the RPF going to be part of UNMISS forces and under the same command or are you going to locate some area to them?

SRSG: The RPF, as you know, like all our peacekeeping forces is determined by a UN Security Council mandate. So it is very much up to the Security Council how long they stay here. For the time they are deployed, obviously, what we would like to be able to do is to see them through for the next year or whatever but that is very much up to the Security Council.

I think once the forces get on the ground and are seen to be doing a good job – and am sure they will – the Security Council will likely renew their mandate.

On the second part of your question about the command, the command of the RPF comes first of all under my authority, under the Force Commander and then under the RPF Brigadier behind me, General Jean Mupenzi.

While it is separate in the sense of the mandate and its delivery here is separate, it remains under one command which is the UNMISS command. So it will be commanded by the Brigadier-General that ultimately comes under the Force Commander who ultimately comes under me. So it is part of UNMISS. It is not a separate standalone force.

African News TV: *It has been a year since the Government signed the agreement for the RPF to come into the country. In another way, someone can say it is too late to serve the people of South Sudan because people have been killed with no arrival of the RPF. It is seen that they are coming for their interest at this moment. How can you refute that case?*

SRSG: First of all, the deployment currently in South Sudan is around about 12,000 troops. Those troops have been doing, I believe, a very, very significant and important job in protecting the lives of people. So yes, there have been deaths in South Sudan because of the conflict. They are peacekeeping forces. They have been protecting people and I have absolutely no doubt that without the presence of the current forces that we have

in position thousands of people would not be alive ... tens of thousands of people would not be alive. So I think they have done a very, very good job.

The RPF is an addition to that. It will enable us, as I said before, to help protect civilians and build a durable peace in South Sudan. That's what UNMISS is mandated to do in South Sudan. It will give us an extra ability to protect people. But let's not forget what the UNMISS troops on the ground have already been doing. And while they haven't been able to stop all the violence against civilians, I have absolutely no doubt that without the presence of those forces in South Sudan today, tens of thousands of people would not be alive today. So let's also be grateful and thankful for the presence of the forces that are here.

Thank you very much everybody. We will now take a stroll around to the force that's here.

Thank you.

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