



## NEAR VERBATIM TRANSCRIPT

12 December 2017

Near Verbatim Transcript of

### Media Briefing by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations and Head of the United Nations Mission in South Sudan

Mr. David Shearer

Juba Conference Room

UNMISS Tomping Site – Juba - 12 December 2017

#### Opening Remarks:

Good morning and thanks for joining me today for this press conference.

I'd like to talk to you first about UNMISS' road rehabilitation plan. Then I'll make a couple of quick comments about the High-Level Revitalization Forum before taking your questions.

A well-maintained and reliable road network is vital to economic development and growth. That is true for every country, but it's particularly important for an underdeveloped and conflict-affected nation like South Sudan.

Without roads, farmers can't get their goods to the market, traders can't do business. A few months ago, I visited Aweil, which is experiencing less conflict than elsewhere, but people are going hungry because food can't reach them.

That's partly because, in the most fertile places, like the Equatorias, ongoing fighting means that food can't be transported safely – or cheaply – to markets in the north. But it's also because of the appalling state of the roads.

South Sudan has only 215 km of tarmac roads. At independence, it inherited one of the worst transport infrastructures in the world. For example, the journey from Juba to Bentiu is 1000km but takes 14-20 days and is only possible in the dry season. On a well-maintained road, that journey would take a fraction of the time.

Fixing the roads helps improve security, like in the Equatorias, where UNMISS is able to push its peacekeeping patrols deeper and further to deter violence, and give people the confidence to go home.

A better transport network brings people together and helps build peace.

For example, the recent peace conferences that we have supported in Bor and Pibor would be much easier to hold if the participants are able to travel by road.

Over the past weeks the UNMISS, together with the World Food Programme and UNOPS, discussed priorities with the government on road rehabilitation.

As a result, our Bangladeshi, Chinese, Indian and South Korean peacekeeping engineers will embark on the Mission's most ambitious rehabilitation programme to date.

The aim – alongside the government, WFP and UNOPS – is to repair around 2,350 km of roads; that is around twice what was achieved last year.

We will target South Sudan's key routes, including Juba-Bor; Bor-Pibor, Yambio-Mundri; Rokon-Rumbek-Wau-Kuajok-Bentiu and Malakal-Melut. Some of these roads were repaired last year, but were damaged again during the rainy season.

Ongoing work on the 150km Juba-Yei road will be finished shortly.

WFP and UNOPS – if support is forthcoming from donors – will rehabilitate a number of other important roads. They will also carry out specialist – and more permanent – repairs on critical roads that UNMISS is working on.

The primary responsibility for maintaining the road network lies with the Government.

But UNMISS has stepped in to help because we all agree that a functioning road infrastructure is vital for economic development.

If the conflict ends, infrastructure such as roads will anchor peace by building prosperity.

I hope that at some point, in the not too distant future, a one-day journey to Bentiu may become a reality.

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I'd just like to touch on the issue of the IGAD-led High Level Revitalization forum before taking questions.

I travelled to Addis Ababa at the weekend to meet the IGAD special envoy for South Sudan, Ismail Wais, as well as opposition leaders to express UNMISS' support for the peace process.

The High Level Revitalization Forum is an important opportunity to bring people together so that we can make progress towards durable peace. We are encouraging all parties to actively participate in the process and conduct talks with an open mind. Peace cannot be achieved without compromise.

On a final note, I'd like to thank you all for the work that you do telling the story of South Sudan and its people and to wish you and all those listening on Radio Miraya a very happy holiday season and a peaceful New Year.

Now, I'm happy to take any questions.

Thank you.

### Q & A:

**Q:** *You mentioned that the process of revitalization is going on and you are going to contact the parties, taking into considerations your contact here and there, do you feel optimistic that peace is coming to South Sudan or still there are some obstacles facing the process?*

**Shearer:** Well I was in Addis Ababa last Friday and Saturday so I met with number of opposition groups there, I had met the day before with people here in the government and I also met with Ismail Wais who is the envoy who is leading the peace process on behalf of IGAD.

It is a long way to go, I don't think it's going to be easy but you cannot do this job and you cannot be here if you are not optimistic about the prospects for peace. I think everyone wants peace, I think as I said before, we need all the parties to be able to compromise to some degree to be able to achieve it but there is a meeting on Sunday the 17th where the foreign ministers of IGAD will get together and then, after that, there is going to be four or five day's discussion with all of the various parties coming together.

It is the first time it happened in some time and we will see how the process goes but I always remain optimistic that peace is nearby and I certainly hope so. I believe that the people of South Sudan definitely deserve it after more than four years of conflict

**Q:** *The question is as revitalization is taking place in December, we don't know whether it is coincidence or it was arranged. This is the fourth year since the war broke out. What message do you have for the people of South Sudan?*

**Shearer:** My message is that four years is too long to be enduring conflict, to be enduring displacement, to be enduring hunger and for people to be suffering. We need all the parties to the conflict to be able to sit down and work out a proper peace plan and to move forward with peace. This country, I believe, has got enormous potential and the ability to be one of the most prosperous countries in Africa but it needs the chance to achieve that through peace. So my plea to everybody is to enter those talks and discussions with a commitment to peace and to be able to move on. Is four years almost a day, and therefore we need to be able to put four years behind us, move forward, and have another four years of peace rather than four years of conflict

**Q:** *I just want you to clarify something on the road rehabilitation plan. When do we expect this project to start and funding maybe how much do you expect for the construction of this roads?*

**Shearer:** The first thing is that we have already started. So the four engineering contingent that you see there are already on these roads, so they are already working on them. We didn't want to waste any time. As soon as the rainy season finished it was important that we were able to get on the roads and start working. We have begun working.

As I said the Juba to Yei road is nearly complete, we have to do some quite big engineering on two of the bridges on that road but now traffic should be able to move back and forth much more freely and much more quickly. The other roads we will continue on with the World Food Programme and the UNOPs. They are contingent on funding and they have put a proposal before donors we are absolutely supporting that funding of those organisations so that they can get on and start working.

But, with regards to UNMISS work, because the engineering contingent are already there, they have already started work the only thing we sat down with the government to do was to coordinate what they will be doing and what we will be doing, what they see as a priority, and so we can respond to the government priorities and also to make sure that the murram that we need is accessible wherever the construction is taking place. We don't want to do a temporary repair, they are all going to be temporary roads because we haven't got fully tarmac roads, but at least get murram down and make them last longer

**Q:** *you mention that it is not going to be easy at the revitalization process, I just wondering why you think is going to be difficult and the second question is the First Vice President said the mandate is supposed to be revised, is likely to be taken to 2011? Also I was wondering what is the difference between the UN mandate in 2011 and now>*

**Shearer:** Just on your first question, look no peace talks are every easy, they are always difficult. They bring different groups together with different aspirations with different scenarios on how they think peace should come and how conflict should end. We need to be able to sit down and make sure those groups are able to reconcile on the different visions. So is not going to be easy because of the number of the people who are coming together in Addis Ababa next week. The agenda has still to be properly finalized so there is lot of work to be done; I think if people come with right attitude I think there is possibility of getting real results but it depends on the people who are sitting there.

In terms of the mandate, as some of you know we had a strategic review coming to look at UNMISS work last week. They have returned to New York and now they are preparing a report that will go the Secretary-General who will then forward it to the Security Council and it's up to the Security Council to determine what the UNMIS mandate is. We don't determine our own mandate, the Security Council does that.

This review we hope will fit into and provide them some basis to an understanding of the situation here and to be able to renew the mandate. What the First Vice President was saying was that, in 2011, the UNMISS mandate was much more about development, infrastructure and capacity building. With the onset of the war in 2013, it changed to a much more of a role of protection and building peace. What we would like to do, of course, is to move back to the original mandate but that's dependent on peace coming and I think that's how the Security Council will see it. But again let's say it's they who make the decision not me, I am the recipient of the resolution not the creator of them.

**Q:** *Still South Sudan is witnessing conflict and being secretive in some areas. Can you give us the humanitarian situation/ status?*

**Shearer:** The humanitarian situation is still grim. The number of people who were displaced remains the same, according to the humanitarian agencies. 1.8 million people are displaced and 2 million people have left the country. The estimate around food security has been done by a combined team of FAO, WFP and UNICEF. They believe that, although the harvest conditions were quite good this year, the amount of food harvested was down, that means that people are still going to be needing additional food supplies through the WFP. One of the reasons that we are focusing on the roads so heavily is that WFP wants to be able to be pre-position more food for next year and it's much easier to do that by road, than by doing it by air drops , and a lot cheaper. So what we are trying to do is to extend the season by which people are able to use the roads by an additional month so that we are able to move more food into those areas where we think people are going to be facing food insecurity. So the humanitarian situation still remains grim. The sooner peace comes, the more we are going to be able to get people back to their own farms, and into their own land, and that will ease the humanitarian situation.

**Q:** *You have mentioned Aweil, that they are experiencing less conflict, but then people are going hungry. I guess when there is less conflict it means that it can be possible for the food to reach to the people. Why do you think it is hard for the food to reach people there and yet there's less conflict?*

**Shearer:** There is less conflict there, but the problem is that South Sudan, like every other country in the world, relies on transport from where food is grown to get to the places where food is less grown and in South Sudan the Equatorias is the place that is the food-basket. So food needs to be able to travel up the road to places like Aweil, and unfortunately the amount of food which is being transported up there hasn't been sufficient, so therefore, as a result, prices go up. When prices go up, people are not able to afford as much food as they did , that's when they start running short of food. The idea of, and one of the key reasons for us looking at roads, is that if we can make that transport easier then more food will be there with greater supply. It means the prices will come down therefore more people can afford to eat. The other issue that's going to

happen is if the WFP can open a road through into Sudan which will enable relief food to come through there. So that's a bonus, but ultimately what we want to see is that South Sudan is a productive fertile country that should be able to feed its own people, and therefore we need a good transport network to take it from here, the places food is grown, to the places where food is needed

**Q:** *You are aware of the clash on Wednesday and it ended on Friday and over 50 people are believed to have died in Western Lake states? Then also I need to follow the clash in Jonglei that was between the Murle and the Dinkas. My question is, is the UN concerned about the violence that is in the periphery outside the main conflict that is taking place in South Sudan. Lives are being lost, people are dying, so I would like to know what kind of position you have on this, and probably maybe what you are doing because the Jonglei/Murle, you helped at least, the Vice President bring about peace, I would like to know what you are really working on?*

**Shearer:** First, just to say that the attacks in both places Jonglei and the like are appalling. Innocent people lost their lives. It wasn't a clash between armed people, it was armed people effectively killing innocent people to a large extent. With regards to Jonglei, as you said, we have been involved with the First Vice President, the Governors and various other elders on the ground and they are trying to create an environment where the differences between the Murle and the Dinka were settling down. This surprise at Duk-Padek was a shock to us and a calculated attack on innocent people, we are absolutely appalled by that. We straight away sent a patrol the following day, we followed up with an assessment of humanitarian needs, and we talked about what we needed to do in terms of humanitarian support. But what we are really concerned about most of all, and what we are talking to all of the parties about, is the need to prevent revenge attacks, because as soon as we have revenge attacks it's a cycle of violence that essentially won't stop. In the Lakes area, the following day, we sent out patrols into the area. UNMISS can't be in every village across South Sudan, this is unfortunate. So we responded as quickly as we possibly could, we have been talking to the various communities out there right now. For a while, there were roadblocks on the main road between Rumbek and Wau, we have been able to manage to clear those so that the transport is able to continue, and we are having ongoing discussions with the different communities to try and reduce the violence. The sad thing is that a lot of these problems are long-standing; they have been going on for years, but when you mix automatic weapons into this violence and a cycle of revenge killing, then you get a recipe for ongoing violence for a long time. And the number of people being killed in these sorts of attacks is now exceeding the political conflict certainly over the last few weeks, so we really do need to see it stop. Ultimately, it is the responsibility of the Government and the Governors and everybody else, but we will do whatever we can to try and help to support peaceful efforts.

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