



United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS)

Media & Spokesperson Unit
Communications & Public Information Office

PRESS BRIEFING

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Near verbatim transcript

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Ladies and gentlemen, media and dear radio listeners, good morning, and welcome to our weekly press briefing brought to you live by Radio Miraya.

Today our special guest is **Mrs. Mumtaz Mia, the UNAIDS Program advisor**. UNAIDS is the joint [United Nations](#) Programme on HIV and AIDS. The program is the main advocate for an accelerated, comprehensive and coordinated **global action on the HIV/AIDS epidemic**. Yesterday 1st March was **the Zero Discrimination Day**, the annual worldwide day **promoting diversity and recognizing that everyone counts**. Mumtaz will tell you more about the discrimination against, and the stigmatization of HIV positive individuals.

Mrs. Mumtaz is accompanied by Mr. Lole Laila Lole, the **Chairperson of the South Sudan Network of People living with HIV** and Ms. Evelyn Letio, **Chairperson of the National Empowerment of Positive Women United (NEPWU)**.

Also, heads up for next week, we will celebrate **Women's Day** which takes place on the 8th. Mrs. Izeduwa Derex-Briggs, the **Country representative of UN Women**, will come and speak among other things of early child marriage.

But first allow me a few words on last week's visits:

UN Chief and Deputy Chief OCHA visit South Sudan

UNSG: On 25 February, the meeting with President Kiir was an opportunity for UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to stress one more time the importance of implementing the peace agreement as a matter of priority. He also welcomed the Government's commitment to implement the transitional security arrangements for Juba in accordance with the earlier proposal of the Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission (JMEC). The Secretary General reiterated the UN's commitment to protection of civilians, and urged the Government to allow unfettered access to UN personnel and humanitarian partners.

Readout of the Secretary-General's meeting with H.E. Salva Kiir Mayardit, President of the Republic of South Sudan

<http://bit.ly/1QHUYFm>

UN chief visits South Sudan

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On Friday 26, the next day, the **UN Assistant Secretary General for Humanitarian affairs** Mrs. Kyung-Wha Kang led a humanitarian delegation to the **Protection of Civilians site in Malakal**, to see first-hand the extent of the damage caused by the previous week's violence. She met with affected communities and government officials, and also called on all parties to the conflict in South Sudan to **protect civilians, and grant safe and unhindered humanitarian access** to aid agencies in the young nation.

Freedom of Movement: Michael Makuei, the Government spokesperson

In this respect, the Mission welcomes the announcement of Minister Michael Makuei, spokesperson of the Government, following the Council of Ministers last Friday, and stating that the government will take measures against anyone found obstructing the movement of humanitarian convoys.

Funding and humanitarian needs

As a stern reminder, the **South Sudan Humanitarian Response Plan for 2016 is only 6.5 per cent funded**, including the USD21 million with the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) allocation announced by the Secretary-General, leaving a **gap of nearly USD 1.21 billion**.

About **USD 220 million is urgently needed** to ensure that vital supplies are procured and delivered **during the dry season**, before most of the country becomes unreachable by road.

On Malakal

Update from 27 February: The UNMISS base is currently sheltering **a total of 40,115 civilians**: 30,085 civilians Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) at the UNMISS base, and 10,030 in the PoC site, according to the latest headcount during a general food distribution in the site on 27 February. **Approximately 5,000 civilians fled to Malakal Town** also according to a headcount conducted during a general food distribution in town from 28-29 February.

UNMISS regularly meets with the Peace and Security Council of the IDPs' leadership in the Malakal PoC site to garner their perspectives, needs and intention. While UNMISS has reiterated its commitment to protect civilians, the Peace and Security Council was also briefed on the set of actions taken by UNMISS to further strengthen the security measures in place for the PoC site. The new security plan, the details of which I will not disclose, has been adopted by the IDP/Peace and Security Council, while the IDP/Peace and Security Council indicated its readiness to relocate back to their initial dwellings and shelters as soon as humanly practicable

UNMISS and humanitarian partners continue to respond to **issues of water, health and sanitation**. The United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) has been on the ground and has just declared the **destroyed site as free of landmines and unexploded ordnance**. Partners and humanitarian stakeholders are now **clearing debris and planning** an assessment regarding shelters destroyed by the fire.

UNMISS has also engaged civilian and military authorities in Malakal regarding access to Wau Shilluk.

Let me now turn to HIV and the looming AIDS crisis in South Sudan

Before I give the floor to our guests, let me introduce the topic of Zero Discrimination Day by a few facts and figures relating to HIV in South Sudan, while Mumtaz will further tell you about discrimination, stigmatization and being ostracized.

South Sudan has an HIV prevalence **among adults aged 15-49 years of 2.7%, meaning every 3 in 100 adults are living with HIV**. The numbers are **bigger** in some geographic sites such as **across the**

Equatorial region. For example, **Ezo** recorded the highest prevalence of **14%**, **Yambio** recorded **8.4%** and **Juba** recorded **4.7%**. This was revealed **in a 2012 study**, and they are worrying figures. If HIV is not addressed today, the country will be dealing with a **huge epidemic in 10 years' time**, in the same levels as in Southern Africa. This will have a devastating **impact on the development of the country**.

The current conflict does not help. People living with HIV who were already on treatment are **missing their treatment due to displacement and insecurity**. This is very worrying especially with the recent crisis in **Western Equatoria, which has the highest number of people living with HIV on treatment**. If treatment is disrupted, people will fall sick and may even die. It is impossible to have figures in the north of the country but the war, displacement and atrocities related to the conflict such **as rape** will have a long term impact on populations affected by the conflict. Stigma and discrimination fuels the HIV epidemic. This is the topic of our briefing today and we will hear more about this from our guest...

Mrs. Mumtaz Mia, UNAIDS advisor

Zero Discrimination Day is a chance to **celebrate diversity and to reject discrimination**.

More than 66 years after the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, discrimination still scars our societies. It provokes prejudice, limits the life chances of millions of people and may cause abuse and violence.

Whole communities suffer when discrimination goes unchallenged. Limiting the chances of girls and young women to get a proper education harms not only individual life chances but prevents societies benefiting from a deeper pool of talent. Discriminating against people on the basis of their race creates individual suffering and weakens social cohesion. **Stigmatizing people living with HIV discourages people from getting tested and receiving life-saving health care and treatment.**

In many countries of the world, female literacy rates still lag far behind those for men. This is the case in South Sudan. Globally, more than 10% of women and 23% of men living with a disability reported not returning to seek health care because they were treated badly during a previous visit. **People with disabilities are stigmatized in South Sudan.**

In the words of the UNAIDS Executive Director, Mr. Michel Sidibe: "Stigma and discrimination damage people and fragment societies – people should never have to suffer in fear and darkness. In 2016, transform and stand out for zero discrimination."

Today, we will focus on **stigma and discrimination against people living with HIV**. UNAIDS and WFP supported the networks of people living with HIV and the South Sudan HIV/AIDS Commission to conduct a stigma index and vulnerability study. The aim of the study was to explore the types and manifestations of HIV-related stigma and discrimination in the country.

Just to highlight some of the manifestations of stigma and discrimination against people living with HIV as reported by respondents, as experienced in the last 12 months.

- **52% experienced judgmental attitudes and shaming;**
- **23% were excluded from social events, including family, religious or community gatherings;**
- **30% experienced physical abuse;**
- **18% experienced loss of job or source of income;**
- **15% had to change jobs or were refused promotion;**

- **14% were prevented from attending education institutions.**

Feelings of self-stigma such as feeling shame and self-blame for acquiring HIV was also reported by 57% of the respondents.

Institutional discrimination was also reported as follows:

- **Coerced into medical procedures (22%),**
- **Denial of health/life insurance (16%),**
- **Detained, quarantined, isolated or separated because of HIV status (12%)**
- **Arrested or taken to court on charge related to HIV status (9%).**

There are many ways we can counter discrimination and encourage tolerance and compassion: speaking up when something is wrong; raising awareness; supporting people who have been discriminated against; and promoting the benefits of diversity. We can all commit to this and ‘stand out’ against stigma and discrimination.

I will close my speech with a call to all of us here and our listeners to commit to ending stigma and discrimination against people living with HIV in South Sudan. **HIV does not discriminate, why should we?** Quoting my boss, Mr. Michel Sidibe, at launching this campaign last year, said: *“Committing to making our world free of stigma and discrimination is not an option, it’s a duty”*
Before we go into the questions and answers session, I would like to give our guests, Mr. Lole and Ms. Evelyn to say a few words about their organizations.

Mr. Lole: The South Sudan Network of people living with HIV (SSNeP+) was established in 2007 as an umbrella organization that represents and coordinates the interests and activities of 33 member associations and groups across the country, **comprising of almost 10,000 people living with HIV.** SSNeP+’s mandate is to support positive living, encourage equity regardless of gender and ethnicity, partnership and transparency. On this Zero Discrimination Day, we **call upon all citizens of South Sudan to commit to standing out against stigma and discrimination.** Stigma hurts individuals, communities and nations. We must not discriminate one another if we want to develop as a nation.

Ms. Evelyn Letio: National Empowerment of Positive Women United (NEPWU) was established in July 2013 to address the special needs affecting women and girls living with and affected by HIV. NEPWU has so far about **944 members** across 9 registered associations in 4 states and continues to grow.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Question, Justin Lynch (Freelancer): Could you please elaborate on the government statement to allow access for humanitarian assistance?

Ariane Quentier, UNMISS spokesperson (AQ): According to the Government spokesperson and Information Minister Michael Makuei, following the Council of Ministers last Friday, and here I quote the minister: “the government will take stern measures against anyone found obstructing the movement of humanitarian convoys.” This statement followed the call made to the government by both the UN Secretary General and the Assistant Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs during their visit last week to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid. The UN need to access areas to support people in need, and we need that now ahead of the rainy season, not in six months.

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Question, Justin Lynch (Freelancer): Why CTSAMM (Ceasefire and Transitional Security Arrangements Monitoring Mechanism) is not reporting publicly on these violations of Freedom of Movement (FoM)? Is there a model being used to report to the public on this issue of UNMISS lack of access?

AQ: CTSAMM is the body responsible for monitoring and reporting on ceasefire violations directly related to the implementation of peace agreement. CTSAMM is not meant monitor violations of the Status of Force Agreement ensuring FoM, which has been signed between UNMISS and the Government. We have our internal system, we are monitoring FoM violations, and we have repeatedly called the government to respect FoM.

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Question, Justin Lynch (Freelancer): But why isn't the UN reporting to the public? Is it possible to get any concrete figures on the latest SOFA violations being reported by the UN?

AQ: Security, operational and humanitarian issues remain UNMISS priority. Violations have taken place by all sides and everywhere in the country. UNMISS said it loudly. UNMISS does not have anything to hide and again, the UN senior management, both in South Sudan and in New-York, have repeatedly stated the need of access for humanitarian aid delivery. This was reiterated to the government but also publicly a number of times to the media. FoM is a major issue. And no we are not publishing numbers. We are monitoring, we are engaging with local and national authorities in the framework of our priorities which are operational, security and support to the delivery of humanitarian assistance to people in need.

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Question, Waake Simon Wudu (Voice of America): UNMISS reported lately that it couldn't access Western Equatoria because of the instability of the area. What is the situation now?

AQ: CTSAMM spent some time in Mundri last week to investigate ceasefire violations. As you may know, UNMISS has a Temporary Operating Base (TOB) in Mundri and we are able to patrol in some parts of the region. We are engaging with the authorities to have additional access, something I will not comment any further.

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Question, Waakhe Simon Wudu (Voice of America): Is the lack of FoM committed by other parties? What are the main areas where this is an issue of concern?

AQ: We have reports of restrictions of movement from all parties and in all parts of the country although, I am not aware of issues of access within the last days.

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Question, Adol Majur (The Stance): My question is to Mumtaz and Lole. As you mentioned, South Sudan has the highest rate of illiteracy in the world. So what are the programs you put in place to reach the population and raise awareness among the communities in remote places?

Mumtaz Mia, UNAIDS Program advisor (MM): The South Sudanese population is much dispersed and therefore difficult to reach. Today, we can only reach **6 percent of the people who need treatment**. In order to inform the population, **we work with local organizations, civil society and NGOs** by providing materials. Back in **2010, a study revealed that only 27 percent of the population in the**

country had some knowledge about HIV. Another challenge is the **minimum healthcare** in South Sudan but indeed, the biggest one remains improving knowledge and raising awareness.

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Question, Adol Majur (The Stance): You said that courts in South Sudan can condemn persons tested positive for having sexual relations? How do you explain that to the population?

MM: There is no legislation for taking to court a person who is HIV positive.

Lole Laila Lole, Chairperson of the South Sudan Network of People living with HIV - SSNeP+ (LLL):

There is **no policy saying that people being positive are criminals**. Of course, if the transmission of the virus through sexual intercourse is done purposely, that's a different story but when the person doesn't know his status, there is no law to render a judgment.

Evelyn Letio, Chairperson of the National Empowerment of Positive Women United - NEPWU (EL):

There is no ground for taking someone to court for being HIV positive. If the court decides that the person should get tested, this is again a discrimination because you cannot force someone to be tested, it is not compulsory. Allow me to add that **70% of the infected population are women and children**. I will tell you the story of Maria to illustrate this fact (see attached). This story shows that **infected women are victims of double discrimination, as women but also as HIV positive**. Stigmas and **discrimination destroy our lives, prevent us from accessing treatment and force us to remain silent** and that's the biggest problem. If we don't speak up, HIV will continue to grow.

AQ: **HIV is a ticking bomb**, especially **because of the ongoing conflict**. This will be a **major issue in 10 years** and it could **become a huge epidemic if not addressed now**. That is the reason why it is very important to raise awareness. This could be the next catastrophe when peace comes and I am very happy to use this forum as a platform to raise this issue.

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Question, Richard Sultan (The Dawn): My first question is for UNMISS. Coming back to the lack of funding, are you confident you will get more funding ahead of the rainy season? The second question is to Evelyn Letio, did your association provide legal backup to defend Maria's case? And finally to Mumtaz, there is no policy to take HIV victims to court. What about if it is a case of rape?

AQ: We have 6,5% of the entire humanitarian funding needed for 2016 available so far. We are still hoping to get more funds, including for the delivery of humanitarian assistance before the rains come. In this respect, USD 220 million are urgently needed. Our biggest hope is peace for all these issues not to be issues anymore.

MM: Gender based sexual violence is a big issue; legislation is needed to protect the victims. UNAIDS is cooperating with the Ministry of Gender together with UN agencies, civil society and NGOs on **the Child Act and Family Act** but these policies are hard to implement because of the current conflict.

AQ: With the ongoing conflict **rape is unfortunately a far too common occurrence and a major vehicle for the spread of the disease**.

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Question, Emmanuel Tombe (M.B.C TV): What are the financial resources needed to combat HIV?

MM: I don't have specific figures with me but I would be happy to communicate them to you later. There is a **national HIV response plan for 2013-2017** but this budget is only **30% funded**. The Global Fund provides USD 40 million over a period of two and half years, and the government has allocated USD 22 million per year, this also includes the contribution from UN agencies.

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Question, Samir Bol (The Mail): Due to the economic situation, people cannot afford to buy condoms. What are the other means of protection available?

MM: The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) provides free condoms in South Sudan, through the Ministry of Health, health facilities and other NGOs. Thanks to the International Organization for Migrations (IOM), the distribution is also possible in Malakal and Bentiu.

EL: The South Sudan AIDS Commission is also distributing condoms, and so do we. The problem in South Sudan is that men do not want to use condoms.

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Question, Michael Mayor (Sout El-Shaab Arabic Newspaper): Regarding the peace process, SPLM-IO does not want to come back to the country unless their troops are being transported to Juba. Is the UN putting a system in place to bring back opposition forces to the country? And on Malakal incident, is there an investigation being conducted?

AQ: AS per the peace agreement, UNMISS is assisting and supporting the peace process at the request of the Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission (JMEC). So far, no request has been received. Regarding the Malakal incident, of course, there is an internal review in process but I will not comment on it since it is ongoing.

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Question, Justin Lynch (Freelancer): Do you have an updated death toll for Malakal? There were some reports that SPLA soldiers were involved in the clashes. Do you have more information on that? Do you have a timeline for when the report will be released?

AQ: According to Médecins sans Frontières (MSF), the latest death toll was 18 dead plus, six more bodies found in the days following the clashes. Regarding men wearing SPLA uniform, the language used by the UN Security Council is very clear. There is "credible evidence that man wearing SPLA uniforms have entered the compound." We are currently clarifying the issue with the local and national authorities. I have no timeline on the publication of our review and I do not know if it will be made public. We are in the process of putting elements together and you will understand that I cannot comment further on this ongoing review.

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Question, Adol Majur (The Stance): The government said that UNMISS failed to act quickly causing death of civilians in Malakal. How do you justify that? Why do such incidents always happen in South Sudan and not in other countries?

AQ: First of all, let me remind you and all listeners that it is the primary responsibility of the national authorities and law enforcement agencies to protect their population. If there was peace in this country, people would be protected by the authorities, and would not have to seek shelter and protection with UNMISS. Let me also remind you that the case of South Sudan is unique. What UNMISS did when opening its gates in December 2013 is unprecedented. With the conflict, up 200,000 people flocked to our bases. This was unprecedented, in scope and scale. Civilians feared for their lives, and were seeking physical protection. It is something UNMISS is proud of, having saved 200,000 lives. UNMISS also prevented more deaths from happening at the onset of the conflict. But

it has been a challenge to protect civilians on UN bases, usually on flat ground next to airports, with poor drainage and lack of sewage system, hence prone to floods and stagnant waters with the associated water-borne diseases, the worst of which is cholera.

[END of BRIEFING]