Near Verbatim Transcript
Media Briefing by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Mission in South Sudan, Mr. David Shearer

Wednesday, 20 November 2019

Good afternoon and thank you for being here.

Thank you also to our Radio Miraya listeners who are tuning in live to this press conference.

I’ll make some opening remarks about the peace process and then I’ll be happy to take your questions.

As we all know, the parties to the peace agreement recently decided to extend the pre-transitional period for a further 100 days.

According to the IGAD communique which makes the 100 days effective from 12 November, this means a transitional government should be formed by February 19.

In our discussions with stakeholders and communities around the country, the extension has eased anxiety – at least temporarily - because the ceasefire will be preserved, and the implementation of the agreement can continue.

But, at a grassroots level, some people are expressing disappointment, and even anger, at the further delay. They told us that they are frustrated by what they see as a failure to unite the country despite the promises made and they are beginning to feel disillusioned.

People we spoke to frequently raised the point that political wrangling, rather than what is in the best interests of the people, is dominating.

The citizens of South Sudan crave peace – durable peace.

Too many people continue to suffer.

7.2 million people need some kind of humanitarian assistance.

On top of this, at least 900,000 people have been affected by flooding which caused widespread destruction, washed away crops, destroyed homes and contaminated water supplies.

The UN and humanitarian partners have responded quickly in Jonglei, Upper Nile, Warrap, Northern Bahr El-Ghazal, Unity, Lakes, Central and Eastern Equatoria regions.
Food and relief items have been distributed to people in Maban. Water and health items have been transported to Pibor. Work to prevent waterborne disease is underway in all of the worst-hit areas.

The response is expected to cost more than 61 million dollars.

Donations from the UN, the European Union, Germany, Norway and the United Kingdom have met three-quarters of that funding needed already. We thank those donors for their generosity.

The water will subside. But the real issue that continues to face South Sudan is the need for peace.

Just a few days ago, I attended the AU Peace and Security Council meeting to discuss efforts to accelerate implementation of the Agreement.

The Peace and Security Commissioner has described the latest extension as the “last chance”. Other partners have said that clear benchmarks must be set and met over the 100 days.

We support IGAD’s efforts to establish a robust mechanism to ensure the parties meet those benchmarks.

There are several issues that we believe need particular attention.

First, and most importantly, the key ingredient is political will. If the parties want to fully implement the agreement and form a transitional government, they can, if that will exists.

Second, on the reunification of forces, we need substantial progress to give all parties trust and confidence coming into a transitional government. The progress made will be a measure of the parties’ commitment to peace.

In this regard, I welcome the security workshop hosted by IGAD over the past two days which has refreshed plans.

Third, on the issue of states and boundaries – this requires negotiation and a political settlement. The committee agreed upon by the President and Dr. Riek Machar a few weeks ago must be activated and move forward with open minds to reach consensus.

Fourth, the issue I hear people talking about most right now is the resources needed to implement the agreement.

We hear different figures from different sources about how much funding has actually been released.

Transparency is needed urgently – a point also made strongly by the African Union in its communiqué yesterday.

Essentially, a trust fund or something similar with independent oversight is needed.
That would then ensure greater accountability and provide reassurance that supplies purchased are reaching cantonment sites. We are hearing that a lack of food at some sites is leaving soldiers no choice but to leave and move elsewhere to meet their basic needs.

Finally, there is the ongoing challenge of the uncertain status of Dr. Riek Machar. This should not be difficult to fix. IGAD should lift all restrictions on his movement and the South Sudan Government should issue him a passport in the spirit of building trust and confidence.

One hundred days is not long.

The parties must step up. It can’t be ‘business as usual’ as a young civil society leader said to me the other day.

It is critical that the guarantors, Uganda and Sudan, continue to show strong leadership to keep the parties on task, as they did when they brought them together just prior to November 12.

As you have seen, IGAD countries and the international community have pledged support for them taking the initiative.

As I said earlier, full implementation of the agreement requires political will. It will happen if the leaders want it to happen.

Forming the transitional government is particularly important because it signals the beginning of preparations for elections.

Elections provide the opportunity to resolve differences through democratic rather than violent means. They give citizens the right to select their own leaders and hold them to account.

That will, however, require political space – the freedom for parties to campaign, organize and, even, criticize. That environment does not yet exist.

In conclusion, as I’ve said to you before, there is a palpable desire for peace in communities right across the country.

Yesterday, I was in Magwi where people are starting to return to their villages because of the ceasefire and ongoing peace process.

Their expectations are high.

South Sudanese I have met want to rebuild their lives and enjoy the prosperous future they fought so hard for when they won independence.

Those expectations must be met in 2020. The clock is ticking.

Thank you.
Q & A

VoA: What would be the role of UNMISS during those 100 days?

You have mentioned political will as being very crucial for the parties to achieve the desired results during the 100 days. Do you think that this will exist, given that the 14 months of the pre-transitional period expired without any tangible results?

For accountability purposes, how much resources or money did UNMISS put in the past fourteen months to help the peace process in South Sudan?

Special Representative of the Secretary-General David Shearer: It is a very, very long list if I started going through what UNMISS has been doing. Starting from some of the things that we have been doing, and some of you have covered these, neighbourhood meetings around Juba and elsewhere right across the country where we brought politicians together to talk to local populations. We are regularly getting 2,000 - 2,500 people along on each of those. There has been a number of those that we have carried on. We have brought community leaders, civil society groups, into Juba from right across the country, from at least ten or twelve places in the country, to meet leaders here. And the reason for that is because what we recognize is that, out there across the country, there is much more organization, I believe, in moving forward towards peace than there is here in Juba. What we wanted to do is to bring those voices and those people in here to meet with politicians and tell them what they have been doing and the sort of work and results that they have been getting at the local level.

In addition to that, we have provided an enormous amount of support for the various security committees, the strategic part, the expertise part of it. We have flown in people across the country to various meetings, we have run, and we will continue to run rapprochements right across the country. We have used our means of influencing in whatever way we can with the United Nations Security Council right down to village chiefs talking to them about peace, supporting the National Dialogue ... I could go on and on and on, and I don’t want to do so, and it is getting boring. But we are here, as our slogan says, we are Your Partner for Peace and we are doing everything that we possibly can to support the peace process. But ultimately, we can’t do it; it’s the parties that do it. We can only support it. And so, we support the IGAD, the support the African Union and, most of all, we support the parties themselves to move forward.

Political will is an intangible thing but without political will, without a real desire by the leaders of the various parties on all sides, we are not going to be able to move forward. And really, I think that over the last 100 days, the degree to which we move forward will be an indicator of how much political will there is. If you see nothing happening, it is that the political will is very low. So, it is very simple to see. I don’t believe that anything is impossible. I think that all is possible. I have seen remarkable things happen in South
Sudan where people believe something was possible and moved forward on it and if that feeling is there, then I really, truly believe that we will see peace.

In terms of accountability, UNMISS does not get funded to put an x amount of dollars into the peace process or the NPTC, etc. We don’t get that kind of money. What we have done is flown people all over the country and used our resources to try and help them. What we are saying, and this is what keeps on coming up time and time again when I meet people, particularly civil society, they would say what money has been distributed and where has it gone? And I think everybody deserves to know that and that is why we are asking for a transparent mechanism to enable to know where that money is going. And that is something that the African Union and now, I think, the IGAD now, is supporting as well.

**The Radio Community:** My question is in regard to the meeting between the parties and the UN Security Council when they came to Juba. They asked you about the support to facilitate logistical assistance to the mechanism and Riek Machar expressed concern that UNMISS is not doing enough compared to the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) when they did provide logistical support on the cantonment of forces and training of the unified forces. What level of support did UNMISS offer this time?

**SRSG Shearer:** As I said before, we have said that we would provide logistical support and we have done that. We have also provided expertise into the security committees and to the peace process. We have also had parties come in and meet – we call it a track-two process – they come in and meet in a small room and discuss things together out of the media limelight to be able to discuss things more easily. We have brought in facilitators, I cannot tell you how many, to meet with people and to give them ideas from South Africa and from other places. But when it comes to pure cantonment on the ground, we believe that this is a matter for the NPTC which is formed, established and itemized under the peace agreement. Our role in that respect is not part of the peace agreement. The parties have the resources. It is very much different from 2005 when you had a non-government effectively coming together. Now you have a government, now you have organized political parties, and they should be able to take that forward by themselves and we would certainly be there to support and help them on request or more than that as we go forward.

**The Dawn:** Failure to fully fund the security arrangements was cited as the main reason for the 100 days’ extension. And IGAD recently came out and put pressure on the government to release the remaining finances to conclude those critical tasks. I would like to know if the UNSC is also pressuring the government or the parties to avail the remaining funds to conclude these remaining tasks.
**SRSG Shearer:** Let’s just step back. Funding is very important because we now have around 67,000 SPLA-IO combatants, former soldiers and others in cantonment sites. We have nearly 10,000 government people who have been pulled into, not cantonment sites, but in barracks. All those soldiers have come in there expecting to be fed, expecting to have shelter, water and medical support and supplies. That is what the money is for. The money is to ensure that those cantonment sites, in particular, are funded and that the resources and supplies go to them.

I know we have had some real problems in the past few months from the rainy season but more particularly with the flooding. But, nevertheless, we are not seeing sufficient going into these cantonment sites and, as a result, we are seeing some soldiers and some people who are forming up there moving away and starting to go home again or going elsewhere.

That is what the money is for.

What do we need to see in terms of the funding?

1- As you rightly said, and as has been said by the African Union, the IGAD, the Security Council, the 100 million needs to be paid.

2- Make sure that the money that is being paid is being accounted for, so we know how much has gone to where.

That is the reason why a lot of people are uncertain about where the money is going to because we are hearing different numbers coming from different places. What we are saying is, let us have an independent, accountable mechanism so that we can reassure the people that those sites and those types of activities are being funded. If that is possible, then I think people will be more relaxed and know that everybody is trying their hardest to be able to move the process forward.

**Radio Miraya:** What would you as UNMISS propose for the parties to do different in order to achieve results in the next 100 days?

Secondly, I would like to ask how was this extension received by the South Sudanese communities at the protection of civilians’ sites?

**Special Representative of the Secretary-General Shearer:** In relation to your first point, I know this sounds simplistic but if I really wanted to wish for one thing that was quite different, it would be seeing the political will where each party sits back and goes: “How can I help to bring about peace in South Sudan?”. What the parties on the different sides of the table are trying to do is to maximise their own position. I would prefer them to say: “If we are going to have peace here, we are going to have to work together? How am I going to help bring about that peace? How am I going to go about bringing that change?”
That signals to me that if they were asked that – and I can tell you that out there and across the country there are people who are saying that - there are people who are willing to say: “We have been working together; how can we work better together? How can we meet together more often? How can we share resources? How could we do joint patrolling in various places? Which is happening in some places as well. That is what people out there are saying, and I would like to see a lot of the same attitude happen in Juba.

I don’t want to get into the technicalities of what we can do differently because I think that the technicalities in some ways look after themselves so long as you have the will and as long as leaders are looking at what’s happening and thinking: “How can I make South Sudan a peaceful, successful country; how can I play that part?” Not how can David Shearer maximise his position, how can I be more powerful, how can I get my hands on more of the levers of government but how can I make South Sudan a better place. That’s what I would like to see different.

**VoA:** Following the decision to extend for a further 100 days to implement the remaining tasks of the pre-transitional period, the UN and the US issued very contradictory statements. The US is very disappointed with the delay and the UN supports it, urging the parties should continue implementing that. Don’t you think such positions by the international community where you have two powerful institutions or international bodies having different positions will impact negatively on the way the parties will need to move forward? I mean there is no particular pressure on the parties or particular statement from each party on the role they are supposed to do to move forward. We are talking about no political will in a very generic manner. There is no exact pressure. Let us put for instance that it is the government that is supposed to do things and it should do it right. And if it is the other party, then they should do it right.

Beyond political will, what do the parties need to do to make the process move forward because they are looking at the conflict as a positional matter?

**Special Representative of the Secretary-General Shearer:** On your point about differences of opinion, obviously there are degrees of difference. I am not going to comment on the US position. All I can talk about is the UN position. As we spoke before, I think that was before the 12th of November that we were saying that the 12th of November is the time when the pre-transitional period will end, and we will move into the transitional government. Everybody, including the IGAD and the AU, were saying that they would abide by the date and move forward. The parties, who actually own the agreement at the end of the day, decided that they needed more time. On the one hand we can say, yes, we are disappointed and a lot of people across South Sudan and you
asked that question about what the people think, I think the greatest emotion that we felt was relief and growing disillusionment. Not hitting the deadline meant that there is growing disillusionment. Yes, we would much, much prefer to have had it on the 12th of November - everybody to be in a position where they were happy about having a transitional government. There was a feeling that there needed to be more progress on the ground.

I think that my own feeling, and certainly with the statements that came out, was that there was a lot of focus – and you guys wrote about it – there was a lot of focus on the date of the 12th of November and much less on what needed to be accomplished. As a result of that, we got a greater degree of concentration on a point rather than a whole bunch of things that needed to happen. So, I think now we have got an opportunity in the 100 days coming, to show that political will, so that by the 19th of February when the 100 days run out, we will be in a position to move forward.

SSBC: You mentioned that in a meeting you attended of the AU Peace and Security Council, they described the extension as the last chance. Meanwhile on the President’s statement upon arrival from Kampala where the extension was reached, he said there would be an assessment after 50 days that would determine whether the extension would be increased or decreased. That means that there is a likelihood that the 100 days would be increased.

In that case, what is the position, not only of UNMISS, but the UN in general towards another extension of the 100 days? Would there be some sort of action the UN would be taking towards the side that would be delaying the process?

SRSG Shearer: One of the important dates that I have not touched on but that you mentioned is Day 50. Half-way through the 100 days, there should be a review. Unfortunately, that falls on the 1st of January. It might need some flexibility around that because it is in the middle of a holiday. My feeling, and I think everybody's feeling is that we review and see how things are going. I cannot speak on behalf of the AU and what they have said but I think everybody believes and thinks that we might not have everything complete on the 100 days. What we are really looking for is to be in a position where things are moving forward sufficiently and where everybody goes, “Yes, this is working; this is moving!”

I have confidence that we can have a transitional government and we will continue to move forward and will continue to reunify the forces and do all the other things.

If you look at all the things that they need to do, the demobilization of who knows how many thousands of people, their reintegration, will all that happen in a hundred days? We know that is impossible. It has never happened in any other country in the world in 100
days. But a start is there, and the momentum is continuing and, if the momentum continues and the political will continues, then it is very possible that by the end of 100 days we will have enough momentum that we can move forward so that everybody would have confidence that this is turning a new page.

I think various comments from various people are not very different when you examine them in that light of momentum and moving forward.

**BBC Radio:** You know, South Sudanese are good at doing things at the last moment and there is a risk of another extension as my colleague alluded to. In your opinion, do you see any risk with regards to an extension?

**SRSG Shearer:** Risk of going into another extension has created disillusionment. And you start going into dangerous ground when you get disillusionment. Disillusionment gets to frustration. Frustration gets to anger. Anger gets to violence. And what we want to do, at all costs, is to maintain the ceasefire. I didn’t make the point in my opening statements, but I just wanted to say that the greatest achievement of the last year and a half has been the ceasefire, and the continuation of the ceasefire, so that 600,000 people have been able to move back. People have been able to start growing things in their own homes, and all the benefits that come with that.

Yes, the peace process has been characterized by last-minute dealings. The problem with last minute dealings is that people lose confidence because they think that nothing is going to happen and then suddenly two days before the end, something happens. But in the meantime, they have got so frustrated that often, if you are not careful, that frustration can bubble up and become anger and that anger can then lead to violence. So, you run the risk of not making progress in a way that gives people confidence that things are moving forward.

When things are moving forward, then we see Dr. Riek coming back; a transitional government being formed, then suddenly we are in a different ball park and are looking towards elections as opposed to anything else.

On that happy note, I would say thank you, Happy Christmas to you and Happy New Year.