



United Nations Mission in South Sudan

Press Release

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Statement of the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General David Shearer

Briefing to the Security Council on South Sudan

Just six days ago, we marked the first anniversary of the signing of the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of Conflict in South Sudan.

At the official ceremony last year, I witnessed much jubilation and hope that the agreement signaled an end to war and the beginning of a new era of peace.

The citizens of South Sudan had high expectations.

Over the past year, their political leaders have met some, but certainly not all, of those expectations.

The recent visit of Dr. Riek Machar to Juba, at the invitation of President Salva Kiir, was an important development. The face-to-face meetings – which many of us believe are fundamental to moving forward – provided an opportunity to discuss critical unresolved parts of the peace agreement.

Publicly, the demeanor of the two men appeared conciliatory and they reportedly spent several hours in formal and informal discussions. These meetings need to continue.

Importantly, they recommitted to forming the Transitional Government – a positive step because it maintains the momentum of peace and bolsters confidence among South Sudanese.

The challenge remains, of course, to show tangible results.

Three key areas require progress.

First: the unification of security forces.

Of the 35 cantonment sites planned, 23 are now occupied by Opposition forces and ten by the Government. Troop registration has begun. Food, water and other resources are starting to be delivered.

However, many sites lack basic amenities and protection risks may arise in nearby villages if these shortfalls continue.

More fundamental differences also persist: The Opposition imagines a newly constituted security sector whereas the Government presumes Opposition troops subsumed into existing forces.



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A strategy for a unified security sector is required. UNMISS has contracted an experienced retired general from the region to help parties determine the future security policy including the size and shape of forces.

Secondly, the Independent Boundaries Commission was unable to reach consensus on the number of states and boundaries.

Resolution via a referendum, we believe, is implausible given the expense and time needed. Instead, political consensus is needed. The Kiir-Machar dialogue last week called for a committee to address this sensitive issue and we hope that is able to be resolved.

Third, the agreement provides for five vice-presidents, each leading a cluster of Cabinet portfolios. Two months out from a transitional government these still need to be determined.

Finally, non-signatories to the agreement, need to move from violent opposition to constructive participation.

One year on, peace is beginning to pay dividends for the citizens of South Sudan.

First, and critically, the ceasefire largely continues to hold. Political violence and subsequent displacement has decreased markedly.

Opposition members continue to move and work in Juba alongside government counterparts to implement key elements of the peace agreement.

There have been more than 130 different rapprochements held across the country which demonstrate confidence and commitment at the grassroots level.

The latest IPC report documents a slight improvement in food security. Five percent fewer people now face crisis or worse acute food insecurity compared to last year. This is directly attributed to peace.

Displaced families and refugees returning home mean more crops are being planted while improved security has enhanced access to markets and humanitarian access. According to FAO, cereal production has increased by 150,000 metric tonnes in one year; an indication of what peace can achieve.

Still, some 6.3 million people – 54 percent of the population – remain food insecure and have limited access to healthcare. Child malnutrition has also increased.

But we are seeing a change. The IPC severity map is, at least, becoming more orange and yellow, rather than red.

Humanitarian access is improving. Incidents are down 30 percent on last year and humanitarians are becoming emboldened to reach out to more remote areas.

Administrative impediments are still too frequent. UNMISS has been blocked by the Government from accessing areas where civilians and convoys require protection with 124 violations of the Status of Forces Agreement lodged this year.

The relative calm has enabled more displaced families to return home with IOM registering 594,000 returnees since the peace agreement was signed.

During the same period, 17,000 displaced people left UNMISS protection sites while 180,000 remain.

At the Council's request, we have reported back on future planning for the POC sites, detailing the challenges of prolonged displacement and the impediments to safe, voluntary and dignified return.

These impediments include perceptions of security; but more frequently the lack of health and education services in return areas; and concern about the fragility of the peace process.

The report's findings, drawn from wide consultations, has enabled a shared understanding of challenges and is forming the basis of actions going forward which are already being developed.

To reflect the changing security environment, UNMISS is rebalancing the deployment of uniformed peacekeepers, moving away from static protection at POC sites to increase confidence building patrols in areas where people will be returning to.

However, the Government must take the lead in creating safe and supported communities so displaced families and refugees have the confidence and ability to return. A South Sudan that is truly at peace will no longer need UN protection sites.

The formation of the Transitional Government provides an opportunity to lift our gaze from immediate challenges and look over the horizon towards elections that are expected at the end of the three-year transition.

Elections give the opportunity to resolve differences through democratic rather than violent means.

To make a fundamental shift from deals done between elites to a duty to deliver policies by a government elected by the people.

Holding free and fair elections is not just about preparing logistically but will require the creation of a political space where parties can form, can discuss policies and can campaign freely.

I say this, because there is mounting resentment amongst South Sudanese towards elites amassing wealth while people themselves remain some of the poorest in the world.

The government's budget is 46 percent higher than last year with no indication of how a \$496 million-dollar gap will be funded. There is also little transparency about where oil revenue is being spent.

The Ministry of Finance reduced health spending by 16% this year, handing almost the entire burden of health to external donors.

And reports of government expenditure have not been received since the first quarter of 2017/18.

Meanwhile the salaries of civil servants, including teachers, health workers and police officers, are often months late.

Criminality remains a serious problem with random attacks on civilians, most commonly by unpaid soldiers and former combatants.

The UN is also providing technical assistance to reform and rebuild the justice system, not just to tackle criminal acts, but to address the more pervasive issue of impunity.

Mobile courts staffed by South Sudanese judiciary, who have done an excellent job, have expanded beyond Bentiu and Malakal. In the next few weeks they will try hundreds of serious cases, including sexual and gender-based violence cases.

The bottom line is simply this.

While the situation for many South Sudanese citizens remains bleak, the last year of peace has kick-started a transformative process that is improving people's lives.

This could not have happened without the ceasefire or the confidence generated by the peace process. The country's leaders and international peace partners deserve credit for this.

Across the country I have personally witnessed former enemies, once committed to killing each other, sitting amicably across the table planning a future together.

If South Sudan's leaders ever needed inspiration to reconcile and work in the country's best interests, they can find it under trees and in tukuls where communities are coming together to build peace.

I promise you that UNMISS is working alongside them to lay strong foundations so that peace can be sustained. As always, our efforts are in partnership with the laudable efforts of IGAD and the African Union.

The peace process remains precarious, but progress is being made.

Maintaining momentum remains is the absolute key. And that depends very much on the continuing goodwill of the parties as well as the collective and unrelenting focus of international friends to support the formation of a transitional government.