

Media stakeout, following Security Council meeting on the situation in South Sudan and Sudan/South Sudan

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Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen,

We just had a long series of consultations in the Security Council, during which several of us briefed the Council on the situation, both, in South Sudan and also between Sudan and South Sudan.

Haile Menkerios, who is, as you know, in Addis Ababa, briefed on the current situation of the talks mediated by IGAD [Intergovernmental Authority on Development] between the parties in the South Sudan crisis. As you know, there are two main issues agreed by the parties to be put on the agenda. One was about the cessation of hostilities. The other one is about the release of the political detainees who are detained in Juba. The efforts are still underway. Because the two issues are linked in the mind of at least one of the parties, so this is something to follow.

And then there was a double briefing on the situation in South Sudan proper by Special Representative Hilde Johnson and myself about, in particular, the issues of deployment, of the surge capacity authorised by the Security Council on the day before Christmas. And on that we are making very substantial progress. We have already some Formed Police Units who are already deployed and already operational. And more will come over the next days, with the goal of having the full 5,500 supplementary force fully operational in the next weeks. There is also the issue of equipment. I think as these people, both policemen and military come to join, they will take over the mainly static duties, which had been taken by a large part of the force in view of the influx of 60,000 IDPs [internally displaced persons] in various UN bases in Juba and elsewhere. That will

free the units that are already there to go in more proactive patrolling around the bases and beyond.

Because, of course the situation in terms of violations of human rights remains terribly critical. We don't have consolidated figures, but we do see that there are probably 250,000 IDPs now in the country and thousands of refugees in some neighbouring countries. And, as for the victims, so far, we are not able to provide a final figure. But we do know that it will be very substantially in excess of the figure of 1,000 that we know for sure about.

The priorities now for the UN are very clearly in this situation to focus on protection of civilians, on human rights, and on helping our humanitarian colleagues to access those populations in need. These are the three items on which UNMISS is really concentrating all its efforts on right now.

Question: When you came here last time you said you were not getting proper cooperation from the South Sudan Government on the troop contributing countries. Has that changed?

Thank you for raising that. Indeed, we had some worries that the Status of Forces Agreement of UNMISS was not completely respected, especially lately. And one particular item, but this is being addressed apparently, is the issue of authorization to fly to some of our bases, in particular Bor. But this is being corrected, and this has been taken up rather forcefully with the Government .

Question: No countries are being rejected now?

There were initially some comments which had us worried, because certainly caveats about nationality of peacekeepers are unacceptable. But the situation has improved in the sense that the messages have been more open. So there is still work to do. But, anyway, we are in a position of deploying those troops that we intended to deploy to South Sudan.

Question: Can you say with any greater specificity how much longer it will take for the full deployment to get there, and right now are your peacekeepers being limited to the bases only or are they able to move around?

In view of the fact that they have only limited equipment. Well, that is a limitation. You can't send them on long range patrols in vehicles they don't have yet. So this why we are concentrated in the first place of protection of UN bases and camps but as the strength and equipment advances then of course we will be able to push them into full blown duties. This is in the process.

Question: When will the full 5,500 troops get there?

I would say between four and eight weeks. But our goal is to go as quickly as possible and we are grateful to those countries who are helping us to do the transportation because that is no small feat

Now, someone asked about the SPLA? Clearly in the present situation we are treating all sides equally. We are denouncing violations by whomever they are made. We are not cooperating [militarily] with any side. Clearly, we are in a situation which has nothing to do with what existed previously.