



**UNMEE PUBLIC INFORMATION**

**MEDIA BRIEFING NOTES: 14 APRIL 2005**

**POLITICAL:**

On 8 April 05 the Special Representative of the Secretary-General Legwaila Joseph Legwaila met with the Charge d’Affaires of the Embassy of Norway to Eritrea, Mr. Aardal, and exchanged views on the peace process.

On the same day OIC Addis Ababa Leandre Bassole met with Dr. Alemu Tekeda, Ethiopian Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, at the latter's request. They exchanged views on the current situation in the peace process and on issues of common interest. He also met with Tadesse Tesfaye, the Principal Officer in the Department of Peacekeeping Operations in New York, who paid him a courtesy call. Mr. Mamadou Khan, the UN Liaison Officer for the African Union, accompanied Mr. Tadesse.

**MILITARY:**

**General Overview**

The general situation in the mission area remains militarily stable. There have been no significant changes in troop locations or dispositions. UNMEE conducted 633 ground and 18 air reconnaissance patrols throughout the Area of Responsibility (AOR).

In all sectors, UNMEE peacekeepers continued to provide medical assistance to the local population, along with supplies of bulk water to civilian communities in the Temporary Security Zone (TSZ) and the Adjacent Areas. Approximately 206,000 litres of water was supplied to the civilian communities during the past week, and around 1,267 persons received medical aid or treatment.

**Mine Action**

The Bangladesh Engineering Company cleared a total area of 15,565 square meters along the road from Adi Barre to Que Sharba and along the road from Shilalo to Barentu.

The Kenyan Engineering Company also cleared a total area of 28,175 square meters in the Sheshebit minefield.

MECHEM (the civilian contractor) cleared a total area of 13,745 square meters at the Sheshebit minefield and a total of 33.89 kilometers of track along the Deda Lala - Shambiko road.

### **MACC:**

A UXO accident was reported on 6 April. This accident occurred in the village of Habela near Shilalo (Sector West). An 18-year old man was working his farmland when he set off a UXO. The man suffered injuries and was immediately transported by an UNMEE helicopter to Barentu where he received treatment. The Regional Liaison Officer for Sector West is coordinating an investigation into the incident. A Preliminary Investigation Report will be released shortly and will be available from the UNMEE MACC Programme Manager Phil Lewis.

In a period of less than two weeks, four mine or UXO accidents were reported from Sector West. The UNMEE MACC continues to closely monitor the mine threat in Sector West. According to the UN Mine Threat Assessment Report of September 2004, the mine threat situation in Sector West is rated as high. This official document is currently being reviewed in light of this recent spate of incidents reported from Sector West.

The Planning Officer/Acting Programme Officer for Eritrea from the UN Mine Action Service (UNMAS – New York), Mr. Justin Brady, arrived in the Mission area on 9 April 2005. The purpose of his visit is to conduct a semi-annual overview of the UNMEE MACC programme and provide support to the Programme Manager as required. The Senior Portfolio Manager from the UN Office for Project Services (UNOPS), Mr. Michael Mersereau, will be arriving on Thursday evening, 13 April 2005. He too will be conducting a semi-annual review of the MACC programme.

### **Meetings And Visits**

On 13 April, Force Commander Major General Rajender Singh visited Sector Centre Headquarters in Adigrat, Camp Dunn and Team Site Senafe.

### **HUMAN RIGHTS:**

During the week the Chief Human Rights Officer Mamadi Diakite conducted the second phase of a needs assessment mission in Ethiopia, regarding the implementation of Technical Cooperation Projects between the Government of Ethiopia and the UNMEE Human Rights Office. Meetings were held with UNICEF, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA,) the ICRC, the National Human Rights Commission and local NGOs concerning future human rights training.

As a follow-up to a request by the Bure Military Observer Team Site, the Human Rights Officer in Sub – Sector East organized a one-day workshop on “Basic Human Rights and Humanitarian law” for all UNMOS at the Team Site. The workshop focused on basic human rights, the principles of humanitarian law, the Geneva Convention and Optional Protocols, cross border incidents and human rights implications.

### **Questions & Answers**

**Spokeswoman:** Before I take your questions, I am sorry Anthony is not here today, but he asked a question last week about the report by the Inter-Press Service, which gave a number of figures on sexual exploitation and abuse and in fact those figures are (global statistics) for

Peacekeeping Missions through out the world, (that is UN Peacekeeping Missions,) I confirmed that with our Desk Officer in New York. He (the Irin/Reuters correspondent) had also asked whether we had exact figures for UNMEE out of the numbers that were given. The Desk Officer was not sure whether figures for UNMEE were included; he assumes that (this is so) since this was a global set of figures.

***Q [from Addis Ababa]: You just spoke of the figures of complaints of sexual abuses worldwide. How many are about UNMEE? How many concern UNMEE?***

***Spokeswoman:*** From the global figures, we were not sure how many concerned UNMEE. What we have done is our own research. And as I mentioned last week, in terms of sexual abuse *per se*, we have had a few accusations, some of which are under investigation, others have been resolved--because there is a difference between sexual exploitation and sexual abuse. We have had very few accusations of sexual abuse, and those we have had, are being investigated. In terms of sexual exploitation,-- and I think some of the paternity cases come under that umbrella--we have had, as I mentioned last week, we have had three cases - one informally reported, two officially reported and those we have investigated, and in at least two cases reparation was made to the family, where young women on the Eritrean side accused, in all these cases, Military Observers, of fathering children. In two cases definitely reparation was given to the family. There are a couple of civilians as well involved in some of the cases in which paternity has been claimed, and again those have been investigated. Some of them are still being investigated. I can assure you the number is less than five. So in our Mission we have had very few cases. The incidence is low. That does not mean we are complacent at all. We have had a Focal Point for sexual abuse and sexual exploitation for some time but we will be now revisiting that matter. This morning we have even talked about setting up a Committee within the Mission to look at this, which would involve both civilian and military because we take it very seriously, as does New York. As all Peacekeeping Missions, we have been asked to look at our own situation – assess it and come up with practical solutions to prevent these incidences from escalating or happening at all. And as you know, in this Mission there is zero tolerance for sexual abuse and exploitation.

***Q [from Asmara]: Do you know if the four mine accidents reported in less than two weeks. concern the former IDPs from the Adi Keshi camp?***

***Spokeswoman:*** I don't know the answer to that. I will have to check with the MACC. I will ask Andrea (Media Relations Assistant) to check with the MACC and we will get back to you when we have done the transcript so that you will have the answer there. I was hoping that maybe Phil (referring to Phil Lewis the MACC Programme Manager) was going to come today because usually he comes from time to time. What I will probably do is ask him to come next week, because I am sure by then there will be an investigative report, and perhaps he can give us a little bit more in general about what is happening with mine incidents and accidents in Sector West.

***Q [from Asmara]: Eritrea has just released a statement saying once again that if the stalemate continues it would have to take appropriate action. Do you have any comment to make on their statement?***

***Spokeswoman:*** No, not other than what I said last week, which is Eritrea is a sovereign nation and can take, as any other member state action that falls under the Charter, under the specific conditions that are set out in Article 51. However, I think what we must be aware of

is that there is a Security Council Resolution (1586), which says clearly that they (both Parties) have been asked by the Council to refrain from any acts that will aggravate the situation at this point and time. Our hope is that this will happen. To be fair to (Eritrea) they are also saying that they will only resort to this, if no action is taken by the international community. So I think that leaves the onus on the international community to hear and heed that call. That is all I can say on that. The SRSG, as you know has also made an appeal to the international community to be more engaged in this process and I think since he met with you that has been very much the call that he has made to members of the international community, specifically those members with clout with both Ethiopia and Eritrea.

***Q [from Asmara]: Do you have any comments to make on the creation this week of an East African Peacekeeping Force?***

***Spokeswoman:*** As a Peacekeeping Force ourselves we welcome EASBRIG, which is part of the African continent and the African Union's efforts at ensuring peace and security on the continent. So, certainly I am sure the SRSG welcomes this development.

***Q [from Asmara]: Yesterday, April 13 was (a) special day for the Eritrean and Ethiopian people as we commemorated the third year of the EEBC decision. As you know that day was marked by hope for the people of the two countries, the hope for a lasting peace. What are UNMEE's major achievements or contributions to the practical demarcation process in the last three years or the last 36 months?***

***Spokeswoman:*** Well, as you know demarcation is the final phase of this process. UNMEE has completed one phase of its work, that is, it has created the conditions conducive for demarcation. That I would say is our major achievement in the past three years. We continue with the main part of our mandate, which is monitoring the Temporary Security Zone, which we have set up, which again was another achievement, if you look back at the past three years. The setting up of the Buffer Zone, we have created it, we have also ensured that it is secure and we have ensured that the integrity of the Temporary Security Zone is maintained. We continue under our mandate to monitor the redeployed positions of the troops and at the moment, like everyone else, we await the next phase in the process, which is demarcation. You are right yesterday was the third anniversary. We are now, as you know in a protracted stalemate. What we are hoping for now is an end to that stalemate so that we can move forward to the next phase of the process. We are not in control of the next phase of the process. The next phase of the process really is controlled by the EEBC and the two Parties, and that is, to demarcate the border. And like you, that is all we are waiting on and I think on the third anniversary more than ever we are hoping for an end to the stalemate and some movement forward, so that we can get on with the rest of the process.

***Q [from Addis Ababa]: I want to ask, while traveling on the Addis Ababa Bahirm-Dar road last week I saw so many military equipment being ferried to the border. Now, is the military build- up going on or it has subsided?***

***Spokeswoman:*** No as far as I understand the military build up came to an end in January. But I think that is a military question, so I am going to have the Chief- of- Staff answer that one.

***Chief of Staff:*** I think we have monitoring activities going on every other (day) in the area which we are mandated to cover. We have not seen such military activities in that area. If you

saw it on the road somewhere around Addis Ababa, probably that is a little far away from our mandated area.

**Q [from Asmara]: The establishment of the African Peacekeeping Force is it going to replace UNMEE? Is it a threat for UNMEE? [Laughter]**

**Spokeswoman:** Not at all, they are two separate entities. UNMEE has a completely different relationship. UNMEE comes directly from the UN. It is the UN Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea and of course takes its instructions from the UN Security Council. This organization has been setup; it is one of five stand-by brigades that are going to be set up as regional response within the AU and under the aegis of the peace and security body of the AU, so that they will be able to respond rapidly to (conflicts) as they happen on the Continent. And what the AU is also trying to do is to make sure that each region will have one of these stand-by forces and that they will be able to respond to events as they come up because of course everybody is very cognizant of Rwanda and wants to ensure that it does not happen again. I think in many ways this is complementary to the efforts that the UN is pursuing, and I know the Secretary-General has always welcomed initiatives at the regional level, so certainly this would be something that would complement rather than compete with the UN efforts. I think it is a very exciting venture in many ways. And the hope would be that we would be able to see (the AU) being able to respond in a shorter period of time to crises on the Continent.

**Q [from Addis Ababa]: I wanted to know whether you are satisfied with the pace of the de-mining process carried out by the responsible companies?**

**Spokeswoman:** Absolutely. I think de-mining especially in the Shilalo area has become even more imperative, because of the large number of returnees who have just gone back, and we want to make sure that they are safe. So we are very pleased, I would say, with the efforts at de-mining to date. They continue at the pace that they normally (operate) at. Don't forget that with the weather, they have just a (small) window of opportunity mainly in the mornings because when it is too hot - if you have ever seen a de-miner and the suit that he wears, the suit itself is so heavy that most of that work has to be done from early morning until noon and they do a great load of work under very hot and sweltering conditions in that area. So we are very pleased with our Kenyans, our Bangladeshis and the civilian contractor MECHEM.

**Chief of Staff:** De-mining is a difficult job and it requires expertise, so we are grateful for what they are doing. It's a slow process, but eventually adds a lot of value to the life of everyone else.

\*\*\*\*\*

**For further enquires please contact: Gail Bindley-Taylor-Sainte, Spokeswoman and Chief, Public Information Office Or UNMEE Headquarters Asmara, Telephone: 291-1-150411- extension 6017 or our tie-line in New York: 00-1-212-963-3779-Ext 6017 or UNMEE Headquarters Addis Ababa, telephone: 251-1-726895 extension 7045. UNMEE Website: <http://www.unmeeonline.org>**