



**UNMEE PUBLIC INFORMATION**

**MEDIA BRIEFING NOTES: 5 MAY 2005**

**POLITICAL:**

On 3 May 2005, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Legwaila Joseph Legwaila, accompanied by the UNMEE Deputy Force Commander, Brigadier General Abraham Wambugu, met with the Eritrean Foreign Minister Ali Said Abdella. They exchanged views on the current situation in the peace process.

On 29 April, the Special Representative of the Secretary General met with the UN Under Secretary General, Lakhdar Brahimi, who arrived in Addis Ababa on a three day working visit. They exchanged views on, among other issues, the developments in the Ethiopia-Eritrea peace process.

On the same day, the SRSR Legwaila received his counterpart in Sudan, Jan Pronk, who paid a one-day visit to Addis Ababa. They discussed matters relating to the Ethiopia-Eritrea peace process, as well as those issues pertaining to the peace process in Sudan.

**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 610 ground and 22 air reconnaissance patrols throughout the Area of Responsibility (AOR).

In all the Mission 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 197,000 litres of water were supplied to the civilian communities during the past week.

**Mine Action**

The Bangladesh Engineering Company, working in Sector West, probed an area of 10,950 square meters in Mai Ambessa and 5,565 square meters in Adi Ibrahim. Seven mortar bombs were found.

The Kenya Humanitarian De-mining Company, working in Sector West, probed manually a total area of 58,471 square metres in the Sheshebit minefield.

The MECHEM (civilian contractor) continued its de-mining operations and manually cleared an area of 7,723 square meters in Sheshebit, 6,447 square meters in Shilalo and 15.6 kilometers along the road from Dedelala to Shambiko.

### **Medevac**

On 29 April, a 13-year-old boy of Ogana village near Barentu was injured in a UXO explosion and was evacuated to Asmara Hospital, where he is receiving treatment. The condition of the boy is reported to be stable.

### **MACC:**

The MACC Programme Manager Phil Lewis and Programme/Training Officer Andrea Poelling participated in the UN Mine Action Service (UNMAS) "Programme Manager's Meeting", which was held in Nairobi, Kenya, from 2 to 4 May 2005.

### **Meetings And Visits**

On 4 April, the SRSB Legwaila Joseph Legwaila accompanied by Deputy Force Commander Brigadier General Abraham Wambugu, met with the Heads of UN Agencies at the UNICEF Conference Hall in Asmara.

From 2 to 4 May, the Force Commander Major General Rajender Singh was in Addis Ababa on an official tour. During his tour, the Force Commander met with the Commissioner for Coordination with the UN Peacekeeping Mission in Ethiopia Major-General Yohannes Gebremeskel on 3 May 2005.

On 30 April, the Force Commander Major General Rajender Singh visited the Tsorena's Team Site and viewed the construction of the Check Dam in the area.

### **HUMAN RIGHTS:**

On 3 and 4 May, UNMEE Chief Human Rights Mamadi Diakite conducted a field visit to Sector West. He visited Badme and Shilalo where he focused on the internally displaced person's (IDPs) recent return to the area.

### **Questions & Answers**

***Question (Asmara): Can I ask about the incident, which probably took place at the beginning of last week in which the body of Eritrean militia soldier was found close to the border?***

***Officer-in-Charge:*** We can confirm that there was an incident that took place on the 26 of April and this happened in the Fawlina area, in the Mereb River bank area. One person was killed. The [UNMEE Forces] investigations followed immediately after that when the Jorbatt Team Site members were advised [of the incident]. There was a Militia Commander, who came to advise them [UNMO's at Team site] of that particular incident and as usual, with UNMEE, they immediately went on to conduct the investigation but you will realize that due to the terrain being rather rough they took, at least two and half hours to get to the place

where the incident took place. They actually had to complete the rest of the trip on foot in order to access that particular area. Those are the details that we have at this point in time.

***Question (Asmara): Who actually discovered the body?***

***Chief of Staff:*** Just like it has been said by Musi, the Militia reported to Jorbatt Platoon on 26<sup>th</sup> at about 3 pm that the incident had occurred at about 12 pm in the area of Mereb or Gash river. Jorbatt Platoon contacted the Officer Commanding, who in turn contacted the Team Site Shambiko to do the investigation and within a short time they managed to mobilize themselves and proceeded to the scene of the incident.

***Q [from Asmara]: How do people know that it took place at 12 pm? Does it mean that there were people present when the incident took place?***

***Chief of Staff:*** There were three people when the incident took place and as I have said, one was killed and two managed to escape. Those who managed to escape are the ones who went to the Jorbatt Platoon and reported that it [the incident] had happened. But that area is rugged and not safe, so it takes time to move from one place to the other, but they [the Militia] managed to get to the Platoon to report the incident. The Platoon then initiated the investigation by calling the team site and the Officer Commanding to get to the scene to conduct the investigation

***Q [from Asmara]: Do you know who [did] was doing the shooting?***

***Chief of Staff:*** From the evidence given by the eyewitnesses and the Militia, people crossed allegedly from the Ethiopian side and they shot at one of the Militia who was a little far away from where the other two were. They shot him in the foot and again in the thigh. He managed to crawl for some distance and eventually when they [the shooters] came close to him, eventually shot him in the head. The others escaped and that's how they managed to report the incident.

***Q [from Asmara]: So just to confirm, who crossed? You said that people crossed from the Ethiopian side. Do you have any details on who that was, how many?***

***Chief of Staff:*** We don't have the exact figures, but from what the eyewitnesses said and from what the Militia said, which is not what we say, it's that the people allegedly crossed from the other side.

***Q [from Asmara]: Were they wearing a uniform?***

***Chief of Staff:*** From the interviews that were given by a 60-year-old person and a 45-year-old person and the two people who escaped, it seems that the people were wearing green fatigues.

***Q [from Asmara]: What does that mean? Are they part of a well-recognized uniform or...?***

***Officer-in-Charge:*** I think that we can safely say that from the information we have, which has been corroborated by the witnesses that the Chief of Staff referred to, it's clear that they had green fatigues. We cannot as UNMEE say to which side that kind of uniform belongs.

**Q [from Asmara]:** *How many people was it?*

**Officer-in-Charge:** Who did what?

**Q [from Asmara]:** *Who were wearing green uniforms. There were several people who crossed into Eritrea, they were armed and they were wearing green fatigues. On the Eritrean side there were 3 Eritrean militiamen plus a 60-year-old witness and a 45-year-old witness. Is that correct?*

**Officer-in-Charge:** The operative word there is evidence from witnesses. We were not witnesses. UNMEE was not witness to the particular incident, so we are totally reliant on information we got from those particular witnesses and the operative word that I would like to underscore is several, so there is not a specific figure that we can give at this point in time, but what we can add on is that this information is always shared with the parties [Ethiopia and Eritrea]. The Ethiopian Government at this point has denied any involvement and the investigation is ongoing.

**Q [from Asmara]:** *There was a platoon of Jordanian soldiers that arrived on the scene?*

**Chief of Staff:** No. What I have said is that they contacted the Team Site and they got to the scene at around 4 pm. I have told you that the area is a bit difficult in terms of communication, whether [you are accessing it] on foot or whether by vehicle, but they [UNMOs at Team Site Shambiko] reacted immediately.

**Q [from Asmara]:** *Who arrived on the site?*

**Chief of Staff:** The UNMOs [UN Military Observers] and the Jorbatt soldiers from the Platoon of the Jordanian soldiers.

**Q [from Asmara]:** *One UNMO?*

**Chief of Staff:** No. UNMOs from Team Site Shambiko.

**Q [from Addis Ababa]:** *My question is that lately; we heard that there is an army deployment and power shift on the Eritrean side. There is a tense situation in the Western Sector of the Ethio-Eritrea border that we call Setit and Humera (area). Are you concerned about that? Or do you have some information about that?*

**Chief of Staff:** We continue with our [UNMEE] mandate. We have not witnessed any kind of troop movement in the TSZ in the area of Humera and if we had, we would be very direct and tell you, but as we keep on patrolling and as we keep on with our vigilance, we have not seen that on both sides.

**Q [from Asmara]:** *You said that the shooting took place at 12 pm, I was just wondering if it is possible to confirm that this was roughly the time and secondly does it seem like a strange time for an attack to take place?*

**Chief of Staff:** Does an attack have to happen at a specific time?

**Q [from Asmara]:** *It seems to me that if you have to make an attack you usually do at dawn or dusk.*

**Chief of Staff:** This [incident] was reported to us by the Militia that it happened at around 12 pm and we took their word.

**Officer-in-Charge:** I think we might just need to clarify the definition. It was not an attack but a shooting incident.

**Q [from Asmara]:** *I am reading in the briefing notes that the SRSG met with Eritrean Foreign Minister Said Abdella. When was the last time they met?*

**Officer-in-Charge:** In November 04

**Q [from Asmara]:** *Is it possible to get a figure of how many reports of incursions there were in April?*

**Officer-in-Charge:** Where?

**Q [from Asmara]:** *In the TSZ. Crossing from Ethiopia to Eritrea and vice versa.*

**Officer-in-Charge:** We can check that information for you and get back to you. [Confirm that] You need the figures for the month of April?

**Q [from Asmara]:** *I take whatever I can get.*

[The Chief Of Staff later confirmed that the UNMEE Military have reports of only three shooting incidents for April 2005. The referred to incidents occurred on the 9 and 11 April 2005 in the Humerra area and one on the 26 April in Fawlina as reported in our Press briefing transcripts. These are 'shooting incidents' as opposed to 'incursions.']

**Chief of Staff:** I wanted to clarify something on the issue of military fatigues. I want to emphasize that this is the version that was given to us by the Militia and the 60 and 45 year old eyewitnesses who were interviewed. This is their version.

**Q [from Asmara]:** *But you did see the body?*

**Chief of Staff:** Yes.

**Q [from Addis Ababa]:** *I have a question regarding the killings of four Militia, a couple of weeks ago. You said that you were investigating the matter. Have you finalized your investigation?*

**Officer-in-Charge:** Which killing are you referring to?

**Q [from Addis Ababa]:** *A couple of weeks ago there was a shooting incident inside the Temporary Security Zone.*

**Officer-in-Charge:** We had two incidents that were reported in Humera. One on the 9<sup>th</sup> of April and the other one on the 11<sup>th</sup>. I just wanted to confirm that these are the incidents that you are referring to.

**Q [from Addis Ababa]:** *The eleventh of April...*

**Musi:** The one on the eleventh?

**Q [from Addis Ababa]:** *Yes.*

**Officer-in-Charge:** There were three people killed in that particular incident in Humera and two of them escaped. Our understanding is that the one who was wounded is still at the Humera Police Station. I don't know if we can get confirmation from Chief of Staff whether that investigation has been exhausted.

**Chief of Staff:** We did. The first incident was on the 9<sup>th</sup>, but it was reported on the 11<sup>th</sup>. One was killed and buried in a shallow grave, one was captured and the other one, who was alleged to have been carrying a gun, disappeared. That happened on the Eritrean side again. That version was given to us by the Militia. On the 11<sup>th</sup> it was alleged again that five people came in, two apparently armed with weapons and again the Militia managed to kill three and two escaped and that is as far as we got to [with the investigation].

**[The Chief of Staff later indicated that based on UNMEE Forces' investigations, he would like to reiterate that the Ethiopian authorities have denied any involvement in all these incidents addressed in this briefing. The Ethiopian authorities have also denied knowledge of these incidents]**

**Officer-in-Charge:** I would like to encourage my colleagues there [in Addis Ababa] to talk to Margaret and get a Transcript of the Press Briefing from 2 weeks back, it has most of the details pertaining to those two particular [shooting] incidents.

**Q [from Asmara]:** *Such kind of incidents and incursions from the Ethiopian side are increasing. According to the briefing, I see that there were meetings concerning the peace process. Has the SRS or UNMEE addressed these issues with the Ethiopian Government so that the peace process could continue smoothly?*

**Officer-in-Charge:** The Head of Mission continues to engage both parties at all levels and uses all the chances he gets [to discuss these issues]. What we can say is that yes, these incidents have taken place in the TSZ since it was established. It is a 1000-kilometer buffer zone, so incidents do happen. The Mission is obviously always concerned about loss of life, but we continue to underscore [the fact] that we try as much as possible to share the findings [of investigations] with the two parties, so that both parties are aware of these developments. I believe that the discussion you are asking me about, the SRS meeting with the Eritrean Foreign Affairs Minister that was a private meeting. He [SRS Legwaila] engages them in all these developments in the peace process and developments within the TSZ.

**Q [from Asmara]:** *As we understand all the incursions and incidents are from the Ethiopian side, so does the SRS or UNMEE address the issue with the Ethiopian Government?*

**Officer-in-Charge:** The SRSG would discuss all sorts of issues that pertain to the Mandate of this particular Mission and that includes all those incidents that we are talking about. Wherever he gets the chance to engage the parties, be it in Ethiopia or in Eritrea. I would like to believe that he has taken advantage of these meetings to raise these issues.

**Q [from Asmara]:** *Is it correct to say that there is clearly a rise in reported incidents in the last few weeks compared to the beginning of this year and the end of last year?*

**Officer-in-Charge:** I think that we should wait until we get the report we have requested for and only then can we say whether there was an escalation of those kinds of incidents or not. I would like to reiterate the fact that when there is loss of life UNMEE is always concerned and we will continue with our investigation until we get to the bottom of the matter. We will continue to raise our concerns with both parties in different fora. It's not only the Head of Mission who raises these issues, there are different levels of interaction with the military at the SMCCs [Sector Military Coordination Commission], we have our MCCs [Military Coordination Commissions], which we [UNMEE] hold with both parties. We don't always have to wait for the Head of Mission. The SRSG complements those activities at all times.

**Q [from Asmara]:** *During the last 2-3 weeks there has been an increase in incidents around the border, can we say that war is imminent?*

**Officer-in-Charge:** I don't believe that it is for UNMEE to declare that war is imminent. Words about incursions will always circulate. We as UNMEE always prefer to work with facts on the ground and the fact on the ground is that based on the operations and on the activities that are there the situation in the TSZ remains militarily stable.

**Q [from Asmara]:** *Is it a fact that all the incursions from Ethiopia are into Eritrea?*

**Officer-in-Charge:** Let's wait for the report you have requested for and see how that flows and then [based on that information], we can make a determination.

**Q [from Asmara]:** *How is the relationship between UNMEE and the Eritrean Government? Is it still smooth?*

**Officer-in-Charge:** It has always been cordial with both parties. Not only with Eritrea, but Ethiopia as well. We haven't seen any deviation from that position.

**Q [from Asmara]:** *I have heard that there has been some restriction of movement. Is there any agenda behind that?*

**Officer-in-Charge:** I cannot define the Eritrean Government's agenda, but I can just comment on the restriction of movement that you are referring to. Yes, there were incidents over the past weekend involving UNMEE personnel and UNMEE vehicles. We have engaged the [Eritrean] authorities on the matter. They have vehemently denied giving any directive to the effect that there is any kind of curfew, any type of restriction to UNMEE personnel and vehicles and we abide by that. We will continue to engage them if the same situation does turn up again, but they have assured us that there was no official directive given to restrict UNMEE in any way.

**Q [from Asmara]: Have UNMEE's vehicles been ceased by the Eritrean authorities?**

**Officer-in-Charge:** There were no vehicles ceased. There were 3 vehicles and in this case the people were just asked to come to the local police station for a short time and after that they were released after some questioning.

**Q [from Asmara]: Was a reason given?**

**Officer-in-Charge:** No official reason was given.

**Q [from Asmara]: So, these were two incidents.**

**Officer-in-Charge:** I will double check with you in terms of numbers.

**Q [from Asmara]: And both during the weekend**

**Officer-in-Charge:** This occurred during this past weekend, but I would like to reiterate that the Government [of Eritrea] has assured us that there was never an official directive to that effect and we have no reason to doubt them.

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