

**NEAR VERBATIM TRANSCRIPT**

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**And Head of the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS)**

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**Press Conference, Juba South Sudan**

**Opening Remarks**

**SRSG HILDE F. JOHNSON: I want to provide you with three or four main messages today. The first message is, we are here to stay as a United Nations. As many have seen, the crisis of recent days since December 15 has led to significant insecurity around the country.**

**It started in Juba, but as we all know has spread, as we all know, to several other states. We have seen also foreign nationals leave the country, a number of non-critical, non-essential staff be evacuated by many aid agencies and missions.**

**On that account, our message is that the United Nations is here to stay. Our mandate is to remain and support and to be acting on a mandate of protecting civilians also under these circumstances, and maybe not least under these circumstances.**

**So when particularly the South Sudanese population are seeing our departure, our message to them is we are not abandoning you. We remain, we are undeterred and we will continue to implement our mandate.**

**Now, the presence of the United Nations in South Sudan is greater than ever.**

**Now, we are also providing shelter as part of our protection of civilians mandate to approximately 45,000 individuals, civilians, who have fled to our camps in seek of protection.**

**I want to make it very clear that, although non-critical staff of the United Nations have relocated to Entebbe in Uganda, we are also increasing our staff in critical security related areas and we are reinforcing the bases that need reinforcement.**

**This means that we are moving peacekeepers from locations that are less critical at this point in time to reinforce our bases in Juba, in Bor, in Bentiu, in Paryang.**

**This means that these redeployments that are now taking place will better be able to protect bases that are under threat at this point in time.**

**We have also in Juba been able to conduct military patrols around daytime last week to try to provide a protective environment, a better environment for civilians so that they can feel safer in town. And we have also commenced night patrols after coordination with the SPLA.**

**Now the main message in relation to protection of civilians is basically that the scale of the crisis is unprecedented for us as a United Nations in South Sudan. This means that our military resources are now without the, with the exception of the patrols in Juba, are fully engulfed and occupied with the protection of our bases and even that is not adequate everywhere, which is why we need to reinforce them.**

**We, therefore, have seen a scale of a crisis that implies, should we see increased insecurity and fighting happen and more civilians be on the way, and more civilians be under threat and attack, we will have problems with carrying out the mandate that we have been given by the Security Council.**

**We have, therefore, sent a strong message to New York that resources are needed to, for the mission to be able to face this situation. We have got positive feedback. We believe later today in New York there will be a Security Council meeting which will look at the proposals that have been tabled by the Secretary-General for reinforcements of this mission, the United Nations Mission in South Sudan.**

**This implies both troops but also aviation assets and force multipliers that can help us in protecting civilians.**

**So my first message, therefore, is we are here to stay as the United Nations and we would like to convey to all South Sudanese, in particular, that message. But to be able to implement our mandate we need resources and additional resources, which we hope now will come from the Security Council.**

**My second message is we are here to help and this is of course more the responsibility of the Humanitarian Coordinator, but as the head of the UN family, I also want to reiterate that humanitarian assistance now is underway for the 45,000 in the different locations around the country that UNMISS is protecting. We have been able to provide water on behalf of the mission and shelter and some limited medical assistance for those in need.**

**However, everyone remaining in a location like this over time will know that that is not adequate. We were hoping to see the environment improve so that people could return to their homes. As yet, many do not feel that they can do that and in many parts, several parts of the country, insecurity is still prevailing.**

**This means that we are handing over the responsibility for the humanitarian operation in the camp to our humanitarian colleagues. The status of that at this point in time is that WFP, the World Food Programme, is assisting with food distribution and the different clusters of the humanitarian agencies**

are now working to look at what can be done to increase humanitarian assistance to those in the camps.

My DSRSG, deputy RCHC, will provide, I think tomorrow, more information to the press about the humanitarian response and will also give more detail on the humanitarian needs outside the camps.

I will limit myself to what is directly relevant to the operations in the areas controlled by the mission.

We are also going to see a price tag of significance I think tomorrow. Toby Lanzer, the Humanitarian Coordinator will say more about that.

My third message is that this is a political crisis and it can only be resolved through political means. This crisis started as a political struggle within the ruling party of the country, the SPLM. And it can only be resolved through dialogue and through mediation.

There is no military solution to this conflict. The crisis is therefore not an ethnic conflict. I want to reiterate that it is a political struggle. There may be elements who seek to exploit the current crisis to pursue their own agendas, but this is fundamentally a power struggle.

It is very critical that we don't portray it as anything else. To resolve the political struggle and the crisis in the leadership – not in the leadership, between the two parties -- I am in touch with both sides on a regular basis. I have been throughout the crisis and we are also seeing a stronger engagement by the region, the IGAD countries, and they are engaging and I think, key leaders at the highest levels are now trying their level best to get the parties to a dialogue and to the negotiating table.

At the same time, we are calling, and we are repeatedly calling, for restraint, for calm and for holding back and for not allowing this violence to continue. This is particularly important as it can permeate into community motivated violence, which is in the South Sudanese context very, very dangerous.

We have seen the signs of this already and we do not want to see any development of this nature take hold in this country, and we have historical analogies fresh in our minds. We do not want that to happen in South Sudan.

So we encourage both sides now to be willing to come forward to the negotiating table with immediate effect, that the IGAD countries provide the basis for the talks and that we in this situation urge both sides to stop the violence and urge all other elements that might be exploiting this that we have seen in the past few days to stop. I have on that account and that's my fourth message, stopping the violence.

I have repeatedly called on all South Sudanese and all parties in the current situation to refrain from any community motivated violence.

We condemn in the strongest possible terms any violence and killings and certainly that of violence that actually fuels the crisis further along ethnic lines. At a time when unity among South Sudanese is needed more than ever, we really need to prevent any type of incitement of this nature.

At this juncture also, discipline, command and control in all security forces is of utmost importance and we are emphasizing in the strongest possible terms that accountability for any actions of violence, of killings of any nature needs to be faced with accountability and clear and strong and immediate action.

Finally, and this is my last introductory remark. In my country, this is Christmas Day, the 24 December. In other countries, tomorrow is Christmas Day, but for us it is Christmas Day. And as we know, the message of Christmas is the message of peace, of the Prince of Peace and for me it's important to call on everyone to be reminded that, at this particular time, we would like to urge both leaders, anyone that has influence of the current situation, as well as all South Sudanese citizens to contribute to this Christmas being a Christmas of peace and not of violence. So that's my last message. Thank you.

### Questions and Answers

**Q. Eye Radio:** Regarding the recent announcement of the UN Secretary-General to send an additional 5,000 peacekeepers to South Sudan, how soon do we expect them to arrive? And because the fighting is taking place in different parts, where will they be deployed?

**SRSB:** I think first and foremost, the Security Council needs to endorse or decide on the recommendation that has come from the Secretary-General, and the Secretary-General does not take these decisions, they are decisions of the Security Council. So, only when they have met will we be able both to look at deployments where they come from, the speed of deployment and their tasking. So it is premature to answer your question at this point in time, but as the Security Council is meeting today, we hope to be able to work on this as soon as possible. As we all know, time is of the essence, in the situation we are in and we need to move speedily.

**Q. CTV:** If the two parties continue fighting what will the UN do?

**SRSB:** I think I said from the onset this is a political struggle that can only be resolved through political means. So the main thing is to get the parties to the table and I am pleased to note a significant high-level effort is being made to make that happen. The second point I want to make is that should this prolong and we see continued fighting, the challenges of the mission with regards to protection of civilians will be significant, which is also why we have urged for more resources. Beyond the troops, we are also seeking force multipliers that will enable us to more speedily deter violence. And that is a very critical demand and requirement we have tabled, and we have, at least from what we can hear, received positive indications. We hope to see additional helicopters fly in from other locations in Africa to assist. If we are not seeing the violence stopping, then we need to start deploying these

types of means to assist in deterring violence and assisting from our side in that way to protect civilians.

**Q. NPR:** I have a question about accountability, how do you see the UN developing that?

**SRSB:** Accountability has to happen first and foremost with the violators, those who have been perpetrators of violence and of acts such as killings, such as rape, such as atrocities. And of course this implies first and foremost, as in international law, this is a national responsibility. They have to show that they hold their own perpetrators to account, in accordance with their own legislation. And I have registered that on two recent occasions, the President had come out very strongly in saying that they are now arresting people, they will hold them to account, and he has said there will be strict and strong disciplinary measures against them. I think that is what we want to see, we want to see that speedily implemented because it also has a deterrent impact. If we see people now being held accountable very quickly under the court of law, we will then see that people cannot get away with this and it is totally unacceptable and has to be condemned in the strongest possible terms.

**Q. Reuters:** Can you just elaborate on the security situation and what is the civilian causality in the country?

**SRSB:** At this point in time, we do not have a full overview of the civilian casualties. Also, during the violence in Juba, we had significant problems in having an account of the civilian casualties basically because we were under curfew and could not move into the towns. So it's quite likely that the numbers are much higher than initial calculations but we do not know. I think that what was said in different contexts, hundreds of lives probably were lost in that initial violence. Subsequently, as the violence spilled over into other areas such as Bor, such as Unity, such as other parts of Jonglei including Akobo where the mission was subject to an atrocious attack by armed youth and armed attackers, we do not have an overall figure. Our Human Rights Division is continuously investigating the different incidents that are happening and we are trying to get as much information as possible through interviewing survivors, through interviewing victims and through mapping incidents. It is far too early to say how many therefore that have been suffering casualties and that have been killed. But we are hoping to get a better picture all the time.

**Q. Citizen newspaper:** You have called on both sides to engage in dialogue. Is there a time frame?

**SRSB:** First, we all collectively need to try to get both sides to the table. That's the first job, to establish the dialogue. My answer to when is we don't have time, it has to happen as soon as possible. This is very urgent because of the unraveling situation on the ground where we are seeing a

combination of fighting but also of some of the violence taking turns in relation to the communities that we would not like to see. It can quickly get out of control so this is extremely urgent and I would urge both sides to come to the table tomorrow.

**Q. Eye Radio: What will happen if UNMISS compounds are attacked by soldiers of one ethnic community to avenge attacks by another ethnic group?**

**SRSB: Basically, what we saw in Akobo was an example where our peacekeepers were outnumbered and we had prepared for reinforcements for the dry season in this location. However, because it was still the rainy season, our capability to sustain and increase to a higher number of troops in that location was not there. That implied that we had few people and the attackers were 2,000. In a situation like that, any military person, even a civilian like me, would know you don't have a chance. If the motive is to overrun a base, you don't have a chance. Now of course, we are in a situation where we are seeing our troops defend our camps, meaning protect it, with numbers that are higher and that are actually meant for protection of our base and I have appealed to both sides that they need to respect UN premises. The United Nations is an independent, impartial actor that is here and mandated to protect civilians, that is here and mandated to support this country. We are entitled to be protected by both sides, whether it's a government actor or a non-state actor, and I have received positive responses in this regard. But it is absolutely fundamental that we are in a position to protect them physically. This is why we are reinforcing the most critical bases. Bor and Bentiu particularly are in need of reinforcements but also other bases. So we are moving troops then from other parts of the mission into these locations so we are in a position to protect civilians in a proper manner and we don't risk these situations as you are indicating.**