



Media & Spokesperson Unit, Public Information Office

## **PRESS CONFERENCE**

### **United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS)**

17 July 2012

#### **Near Verbatim Transcript of Press Encounter hosting United Nations Special Representative of the Secretary-General for South Sudan, Ms. Hilde F. Johnson UNMISS - Yambio**

**Q:** Why have you chosen this particular time for your first visit to Western Equatoria State?

**SRSG Hilde Johnson:** Well, the ambition of me as SRSG was to cover all states in South Sudan and to be able to visit each and every one of them. Western Equatoria was on the map for the last forty-five months but we haven't been able to find the right time. It is not a particular moment – it is just I needed to cover Western Equatoria.

It is of course one of the most peaceful states. I have, for obvious reasons, visited both Jonglei and Unity more than I have visited Western Equatoria because of the mandate of the Mission – the protection of civilians' mandate. We are in a state which has been, thankfully, rather peaceful the last few years.

**Q:** As you have held a number of meetings, what message do you leave behind - especially for the people of Western Equatoria State?

**SRSG Johnson:** The message is the following: The Mission is here for you. We are now here with the Rwandese battalion. The battalion is deploying and patrolling in a number of areas that were previously affected by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). They are going to be in Tombura, Yambio and Ezo and they will take action if civilians are under threat.

We are taking away from this visit also a strong willingness to cooperate with the different forces here – whether it is the African Union regional force that is now building up, the SPLA, the Uganda Peoples' Defence Forces (UPDF) or the American advisors. I think all of us are keen to see that move forward.

Secondly, this is one of the most peaceful states in South Sudan and I am hopeful that we can see what is as a potential being the breadbasket of the country really become so, so that a surplus can be produced in Western Equatoria State that can be distributed and exported to the rest of the country.

**Q:** The AU force has been deployed as well as the American troops but people complain that they have not yet seen any change.

**SRSG Johnson:** The AU has not yet fully deployed – it is important to know that. It is the UPDF that has a battalion and American advisors are supporting. It is not American troops, it is American advisors. And they are mainly on the other side of the border where the LRA is. It is only the administrative arrangements that are here and the main locations are actually in the Central African Republic.

Then of course there are South Sudanese troops that have just come in and then still remaining are the ones from the Democratic Republic of Congo and the ones from the Central African Republic.

All of these troops will not be here but will be spread in locations where it is more likely that the LRA will operate.

That is the reason why people are not seeing a tangible presence by the AU on site here.

**Q:** I understand that the state has been affected by the LRA also with people being displaced. What is the UN going to do to help return these displaced back to their homes?

**SRSJ Johnson:** My understanding is that there are displaced now from the other side of the border that need to be returning home. I understand that there are humanitarian agencies assisting with that. The Red Cross, particularly, are trying to trace their families.

We are not seeing the number of displaced that we saw in the past on the South Sudanese side. That is the difference that is happening. Basically, more of the displacements are happening in the Central Africa Republic at this point in time.

In terms of the overall message with regards this trip from my side, is that the programme here has included meeting the Governor, his Cabinet that now also includes other political parties which we think is very important for inclusiveness. We have met with civil society, youth organisations and faith-based communities. We have also been able to meet with the African Union regional force as well as with the UPDF and the American advisors.

It has been a full programme. I am really happy about this day and I will most certainly return quite soon because this was a much shorter programme than I originally planned.

I also met UN staff, of course, which is another story.

**Q:** Building democracy is one of the components of UNMISS. You met the civil society and the political leaders. Can you tell us, if you may, what you shared with them that could be for public consumption?

**SRSJ Johnson:** We discussed the importance that the basic democratic foundations of the new and independent country are strengthened and the role that the political parties' act and the electoral act play in that.

There were of course discussions about the political parties' act that was passed to parliament, but I think, generally, it was welcomed that the Governor now has created an inclusive government with representation from the different parties and also at the national level.

Generally, it was a positive assessment of the situation.

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