



UNMIS

Press Conference

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Near-verbatim Transcript of the Press Conference by
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UNMIS HQ, Khartoum

Spokesperson, OiC, Kouider Zerrouk: Good morning, ladies and gentlemen and welcome to UNMIS.

We have with us today Mr. Georg Charpentier, the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General and the UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator here in Sudan. He will brief you on returns to the south and the contingency planning.

Without further ado, I leave the floor to the DSRSG who would give you his opening remarks and we would take your questions afterwards.

DSRSG/HC/RC Georg Charpentier: Ladies and Gentlemen, good morning

I would like to welcome the Sudanese and international media today here at UNMIS. I have met and interacted with many of you since I assumed the position of Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary General and Resident Humanitarian Coordinator in Sudan and I would like to take this opportunity to assure you that such interaction will take place regularly in order to keep you informed of our activities in the areas of humanitarian, recovery and development work in Sudan.

Today, I would like to brief you about two particular issues, notably returns to the South and humanitarian contingency planning.

On the issue of returns, the UN and its partners, in collaboration with national and state authorities, have enhanced returns monitoring of departures in the north, as well as key in transit hubs and return areas. The Southern Sudan Relief and Rehabilitation Commission has reported 18, 213 state-organized returns to Unity with buses continuing to arrive.

The first return convoys to the Abyei Area organized by the Abyei Area Administration have now departed, from Blue Nile and Sennar on 19 November and from Khartoum on 20 November with an estimated total of approximately 2000 returnees.

At Kosti, situated in White Nile State, our partners have detected 5,307 spontaneous returns in the month of November – equivalent to roughly double the average total for the same period in previous years.

The Humanitarian Country Team has so far been able to respond adequately to these returns, in support to Government efforts, through implementation of the inter-agency contingency plan and thanks to pre-positioning of core pipelines.

The HCT is providing targeted assistance in areas of return – focusing on the usual return package but also on livelihoods and services to promote and support reintegration in order to avoid creating new conditions of dependency or new IDP camps.

We should not put people who are self-reliant into a situation of dependency.

The Humanitarian Country Team has welcomed the commitment of the authorities in the North and in the South to a phased approach to returns, in line with the absorptive capacity in return areas, and de-linked from any political consideration tied to the referenda.

Recent statements by senior Government officials in the North and the South on the status of both Northerners and Southerners following the end of the CPA period have been encouraging and should continue in order to reassure Southerners in the North and Northerners in the South.

As regards contingency planning, peacekeeping missions, UN agencies and humanitarian partners are working closely together to ensure coordinated support for any uncertainty related to the outstanding benchmarks of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, including the upcoming referenda.

To ensure timely support, supplies in key life-saving sectors, including health, nutrition, water, and food are being procured and pre-positioned in several places and in line with potential needs.

In order that humanitarian partners are able to deliver assistance to people in need, the Government, in both the North and South, has been called upon to ensure unhindered humanitarian access to vulnerable populations.

A call for donor support has been made in this respect for \$63 million which is an advance on the 2011 Humanitarian Action Plan. Some donors have already responded in terms of pledges, but further action is necessary to turn these pledges into concrete funding, and to reach the amount requested to fully cover the humanitarian contingency plan as early as possible.

Thank you very much for your attention during this, I hope not too long statement, but I wanted to share some basic facts on these two elements and I would now respond to your questions. Thank you.

Q & A

AFP: Looking closely, there are about 25,000 organised returns to the south. Does the UN have estimates on the number of un-organised returns? Some people suggest that much more people have moved to the south but we can not keep exact track of the numbers.

DSRSG/HC/RC Georg Charpentier: Actually, we are capturing some of the spontaneous returns especially in the challenging points which I mentioned – some 5,000 spontaneous returns during the month of November. But we are not systematically able to record spontaneous returns. We are obviously aware that there are a number of spontaneous returns along with the organised returns and, of course, that compels that issue even more that we have to be very vigilant in making sure that the areas of return are able to support the reintegration of these returnees and that we are properly advising them on the process of returns and not provoking reciprocal massive returns at this stage.

Reuters: What do you think is the main driving factor for these returns? Have you had any indications that other southern states are going to be following the example of Unity State in organising returns? What is the maximum number that the UN can cope with?

Georg Charpentier: During the whole CPA period there have been constant returns of southerners residing out outside the south to the south. The underlying reasons for many of them are the same: they want to go back to their regions of origin. Now, ahead of the referendum, these returns have been somehow accelerated by a feeling of uncertainty by many of the southerners in the north and also northerners in the south. Their uncertainties are mostly related to the post-referendum situation. That is why we have stressed the importance of informing properly all these people about the rights they have, eligibility criteria for the referendum and so on, and to encourage the authorities in both the north and the south, to ensure – as they have done now and then – to reassure the southerners in the north and the northerners in the south that whatever the outcome of the referendum, their rights and their choice would be respected and that they would be able to move freely and in a protected manner. But the main reason now is certainly some level of uncertainty among the people.

Other states are also organising themselves for returns. I think this is, if I understand correctly, a responsibility that has been delegated at state level in the south that they organise returns of their people directly to the states.

It is very difficult to talk about minimum and maximum numbers. What I can say is that the current rhythm of returns is manageable, as I said in my opening remarks, and in our contingency plan we are geared up to higher levels of returns but our message has been very clear: we have to avoid creating a situation of dependency; we have to avoid creating IDP and transit camps. Once we set up a big IDP camp of 20 – 30,000 people, we more than often get stuck with it for a number of years after that and you create unnecessary dependency among the population. In order not to get to that kind of situation, the numbers should remain at a reasonable level.

SRS: The repatriation committee from Abyei complain that authorities in the Red Sea and Northern Kordofan states are preventing them from going back and in some instances, authorities are said to have requested a letter too allow the IDPs passage. In such situations what would be the UN's message to the authorities in such situations?

Georg Charpentier: Our message has been very clear and consistent from the beginning and that is to de-link the return process to the south and Abyei from any political agenda, especially de-linking it from the timeline of the referendum. For Abyei I think it is a special case but for the southerners in the north, legally they can register and vote in the north so their returns should be linked to their own family and individual needs. They may have children in schools, jobs or property here. They would have to take time to settle them if they want to return to the south. They have to take proper time and be given proper conditions to decide and move if they so want but they should not be pushed by a political agenda.

University of Juba: You mentioned that humanitarian agencies do not want to put the returnees in a situation of dependency. If we take the case of the people who returned to Bentiu particularly in the course of the last two weeks, reports say that they were just dumped in the area and left to cater for themselves. Can you tell us what exactly you have done to ensure that people are no longer dependent and that they [*indiscernible*]?

Georg Charpentier: Some of the returnees in Bentiu have actually not been able to continue to their counties of origin in Unity State mainly because road access to those counties was so bad that they were not able to go. So they had been temporarily placed in a number of schools and are being supported by WFP and other agencies in very transitional displacement status. They are waiting for the roads to their counties to be opened and they would proceed as planned. Usually people do not stay more than two days in Bentiu and in these transit centres but some of them have had to stay more than two days because of problems of road access to their counties.

Akhir Lahza: The humanitarian situation is a major challenge for returns to the south. Have you received any guarantees of protection to the returnees from the Government of Southern Sudan?

Georg Charpentier: Indeed that has been clearly part of our concerns in the messages that we are sending out. The Government of Southern Sudan has been very forthcoming at these issues from the longer-term perspective and we have been working on a return programme that stretches over a longer period of time and that in principle takes into consideration the absorbing capacity of the regions where returnees are going back to. Yes there is a good awareness of the challenges of getting a large number of returnees into southern Sudan and that is why we have continued to insist that we have to make sure that the emotions and politics do not overtake the rationale of providing best possible conditions to the returnees and putting them, in that case, in a dire situation and creating humanitarian challenges to the south that is avoidable today.

BBC Arabic: You of a request for \$63 million from the donor community. Do you think this amount is enough given possibilities of more returns and given your plans to ensure the returnees do not become dependent on assistance? There are reports that some southern returnees are coming back north. Can you confirm these reports?

Georg Charpentier: The amount of money that we had requested from the donors to fund the emergency is an advance from the total financial needs that we had expressed for 2011. Basically we told the donors that if some of the money that we are requesting for the 2011 Humanitarian Action Plan can be given in November or December as an advance to the tune of \$63 million, this would enable agencies and partners to preposition more food and non-food items in order to respond to unplanned needs.

We believe that this money would help us now if the situation remains under control. If there are no further disruptions linked to the political process, then we would just have this timely advance on the needs for 2011. If there are major disruptions then we would be able to respond immediately but at the same time we would have to, some point maybe in February or March next year, call for additional funding from the donors.

AFP: Is the \$63 million based on a worse-case scenario situation? You noted that you monitor some returns in transit points like Kosti, Blue Nile and Sennar. I was wondering if you have any information about southerners living for instance in Darfur coming back to the south.

Georg Charpentier: Of course. Contingency planning from a humanitarian perspective is always based on a worst-case scenario because if you want to have maximum preparedness to the possible outcome of a process, you plan for the maximum worst-case scenario. That does not mean that we believe that the worst-case scenario is the most likely scenario.

On the transit points, we are monitoring transit in a few places. We are getting some information from colleagues and authorities there but not systematically from Darfur.

Kouider Zerrouk: Thank you very much for your briefing and the questions and thank you all for coming. The opening remarks of the transcript are available for you to pick on your way out and the transcript will be sent out to you later today.

Thank you very much.

ENDS
