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UNMISS SRSG IN PIBOR URGES RENEWED PEACE DRIVE AND STRESSES HUMANITARIAN NEEDS

On Saturday 7 January, the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General (SRSG) to South Sudan, Hilde F. Johnson, visited Pibor town and Fartait village in Jonglei State following the recent attacks by the Lou Nuer Youth. The SRSG was accompanied by UNMISS Force Commander, General Moses Obi and the Ambassadors of the United States, Susan Page, of France, Christian Bader, and the UK Charge d'Affaires, Brian Jones. In Pibor, they met with the County Commissioner of Pibor, Joshua Kenyi, and with SPLA Commander Brigadier Peter Rauch.

The SRSG subsequently welcomed the Commissioner's remarks that previously circulated casualty figures were unverified and required thorough assessment. More time was needed to establish the facts. "This concurs with our preliminary assessment on Friday and available baseline information of the affected area. Neither this information nor the findings of my visit of today, show any evidence that can support the figures that were reported by some media," she said.

SRSG Johnson also visited a temporary clinic set up by UNMISS peacekeepers where seven wounded civilians are being treated, and met with residents and returnees in Pibor and IDPs in Fartait village.

"We have to see this cycle of violence stop. The people of Jonglei State from all sides have suffered enough. The safety and security of all must now come first. This means a committed, coordinated and cooperative drive by all concerned to achieve peace and stability." She commended the government for deploying additional security forces to the area - despite the logistical challenges, and stressed the need for more forces to be deployed in the buffer zones between the two communities.

But the most critical factor is peace between the two communities. Noting that the situation in Jonglei State constitutes a major test for the newly independent South Sudan, SRSG Johnson called on the government to take immediate steps to establish its peace team and move forward with urgency, working with Church leaders, the communities and civil society. "Only in this way can further violence be averted and new humanitarian crises be prevented," she commented.

As a result of the recent fighting, an estimated 60,000 people among the 90,000 affected people in the area are in desperate need of urgent humanitarian assistance. "A humanitarian crisis is on the way unless action is taken very soon. I am extremely concerned," SRSG Hilde F. Johnson said after meeting with local authorities and IDPs and returnees in the area. The UN humanitarian community is launching a major humanitarian emergency operation in Pibor where food distribution has already started. Efforts are also being made to access other more remote areas. The SRSG urged the international community to respond generously.

The SRSG also commended the decision by the Government to investigate the events in Jonglei, get clarity on the facts and establish accountability. "This is a very positive step," she said. UNMISS has dispatched its own Human Rights Team to the area to investigate human rights violations and to verify the recent media reports about casualty numbers.

At the conclusion of her visit, the SRSG said "UNMISS stands ready to support the Government of South Sudan in their efforts to establish peace and stability. Within our capacity, we will continue to support the peace process and reinforce our presence in key areas to protect civilians. We will maintain daily air and land patrols to deter potential violence. But it is ultimately the Government's responsibility to restore peace and stability and protect its civilians from violence."
