Statement by Ambassador Susan E. Rice, U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations, on the Security Council's Trip to Southern Sudan

Susan E. Rice

U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations

U.S. Mission to the United Nations

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It was an honor to lead the portion of the trip in Southern Sudan. I would like to begin by thanking Special Representative Haile Menkerios and his team who, on very short notice, were able to welcome the Council and support our visit supremely well. I want to extend the same thanks to the Secretariat, the entire staff of UNMIS, and the UN security personnel, as well as the Government of South Sudan, for working hard to make this mission a success.

The purpose of our visit was to underscore that the UN Security Council is united in its desire to see Sudan’s referenda on self-determination carried out in accordance with the Comprehensive Peace Agreement. We delivered the message that the referenda should be held on time, that they should be credible, and that the results must be respected. We sought to assess the status of preparations for the referenda, as well as UNMIS’s performance in providing assistance for CPA implementation. We delivered the message that we expect UNMIS to have full and unhindered access, and emphasized the importance of addressing the humanitarian and development challenges facing Southern Sudan, regardless of the outcome of the referenda.

When we arrived in Juba on October 7, crowds lined the street outside the airport to welcome the Security Council as we drove to meet with South Sudan President’s Salva Kiir. During that meeting, President Salva Kiir told the Council that people are “gripped with fever” for the referendum. He said that expectations in the South are very high, and that people are focused on the referenda date of January 9, 2011. President Kiir also warned that he fears the North may be preparing for war and may be moving troops southwards. He stated that the South proposes a UN-administered buffer zone, spanning 10 miles to the north and south of the border, in which no troops would be present. President Kiir also shared his concerns about unresolved border demarcation, the delay in preparing for the referendum in Abyei, and the slow progress in the popular consultations process and in negotiations on post-referenda issues such as oil and wealth sharing. He assured the Council that if the Southern referendum is delayed, the South will not issue a unilateral declaration of independence but rather would conduct its own referendum in the South and in the diaspora communities abroad.

Later that evening of the 7th, we attended a reception hosted by the Government of South Sudan, during which we spoke with the Southern Sudan Referendum Bureau, which is composed of the chairman and four members. At the reception, we also met with a cross-section of members of civil society in the South, including the Archbishop of Juba, the Coalition for Civil Society Organizations in Juba, the South Sudan Islamic Council, and South Sudan Youth Forum, as well as women leaders. They spoke about the very tight timetable leading up to the referenda and relayed concern that the Abeyi Referendum Commission has not yet been formed. One person said that the North is, and I quote, “beating the drums of war.” They asked for international pressure and for referenda observers on the ground.

The next morning, the UN Security Council visited the Rajaf Police Training Center, where South Sudan is training a professional civilian police force. These police, which will help provide security during the referenda, demonstrated procedures for high risk arrests, VIP protection, and crowd control. Impressively, the South started this center from scratch, which demonstrated its commitment to institution building. There are now 5,400 new recruits, more than 300 of whom are women, with 6,000 more scheduled to begin basic training in November. Asked by some members of the Council about their motivation for joining the force, many of the recruits said, “for freedom” and “to secure their country.”

We had intended that the last leg of our trip in Southern Sudan would be a visit to the town of Wau in Western Bahr el Ghazal, to obtain a perspective on the experience of southern communities outside of Juba. We had planned to visit a school, a clinic, and meet with civil society. Unfortunately, the UN plane taking us there experienced mechanical difficulties just before take-off; that part was fortunate given the nature of the problem. We were very grateful, however, to the Russian helicopter contingent at Juba airport, which hosted us on its base and gave us a good understanding of how it lives and how it operates, while we were reconfiguring our program. And we are also grateful to UNMIS, which provided an additional extended briefing to us that afternoon. UNMIS reported that the Mission has increased its presences at the state and county levels and is working with local authorities to mitigate risks throughout the referenda process.

In conclusion, we found that Southerners are simultaneously very hopeful and very anxious. The message we repeatedly heard is that they are strongly committed to the January 9 referenda date, and they are yet concerned that this expectation may not be met. And there is some fear of a resumption of violent conflict. The international community and the Security Council must remain steadfast in support of full implementation of the CPA, including on-time, peaceful referenda, and for the results of the referenda to be respected by all parties.

Thank you, Mr. President.