



Fresh from a two-week trip to three peacekeeping operations, Under-Secretary-General for peacekeeping operations Hervé Ladsous shares his views on challenges facing the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID), and the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS).

On 1 July you were in Mali as MINUSMA - the latest UN peacekeeping operations - was being launched. What was the meaning of your presence there?

I went to Mali to witness the transfer of authority from AFISMA - the African-led peace operation - to MINUSMA, our new mission in Mali. MINUSMA will be operating in a complex environment. Its objective is to contribute to peace and stability.

The mission has two immediate priorities: support to the 28 July presidential elections, and support to the implementation of the Preliminary Agreement signed between the Government and two armed groups. This will happen as the mission establishes its presence in northern Mali, and continues the "re-hatting" of some 6,200 AFISMA troops to UN blue helmets.

MINUSMA is a challenging but exciting new addition to our work. We are looking for experienced, motivated and French-speaking personnel. I call on qualified candidates to join us.

You then visited Sudan and Darfur in particular, where the situation seems to deteriorate by the day. What is your assessment of the current developments there?

Well, the situation in many parts of Sudan is worrying. Tribal clashes are on the rise. Since January, 300,000 people have been displaced in Darfur, South Kordofan and Blue Nile States. In fact while I was visiting three peacekeepers were ambushed and injured. They had stood their ground. I went to see them at the hospital. Let me be clear: attacks on peacekeepers are unacceptable and the perpetrators must be brought to justice.

In Khartoum, I met with President Al-Bashir and other officials. Our discussions focused on the peace process in Darfur and Sudan's relations with its southern neighbor. My message then and now is that we are in Sudan to help. To do so, we must have the full cooperation of the Government, freedom of movement and improved access to reach those in need.

South Sudan was your last stop. You met with peacekeeping colleagues there. This was your second visit to South Sudan.

Indeed, I visited the capital Juba and Jonglei State from 5 to 7 July. I must note that, since independence two years ago, the country has moved forward on stabilization, notably in Unity and Upper Nile States, and the Government continues to function despite the oil shut down and the drastic reduction of its revenues. The humanitarian situation remains difficult, particularly with respect to food security. But except for Pibor and Akobo counties in Jonglei State, the number of IDPs is decreasing.

However, I am gravely disturbed by the mounting violence between the Lou Nuer and Murle in Pibor County. It is critical that national and local leaders urge all armed citizens to lay down their weapons immediately. In my meetings with President Kiir, Vice-President Machar and Cabinet Ministers, I voiced concern about the ongoing inter-communal violence, human rights violations and restrictions of humanitarian access. I also urged them to resolve peacefully their remaining disputes with Khartoum. The strained relations between South Sudan and Sudan, particularly over Abyei, border demarcation and oil exports, are hurtful to both countries.

Our peacekeepers in South Sudan are doing a splendid job, often under very difficult circumstances. Since October last year they have protected and probably saved up to 12,000 people under threat of violence, by welcoming them on their bases. They also lend critical support to police reform and training which has already resulted in a decline of crime levels in Juba. We must find ways to increase their mobility and reach, especially in remote or difficult to access areas. As you know, South Sudan is still a young nation. Change is coming – but it needs time and continued international support.