UNMISS: Freedom of expression and safety of journalists is paramount

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United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS)

Media & Spokesperson Unit, Public Information Office

PRESS STATEMENT

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Freedom of expression and safety of journalists is paramount

South Sudan has now become a pilot country for the UN Plan of Action on the safety of journalists and the issue of impunity. The Plan of Action aims to create a free and safe environment for journalists and media workers. The Minister of Information and Broadcasting, Barnaba Benjamin Marial has committed to South Sudan becoming a pilot country.

"The United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) welcomes the Government's decision to increase the safety of journalists in the country and address the issue of impunity", says Special Representative of the Secretary General to South Sudan, Hilde F. Johnson.

South Sudan has dropped 12 places in a recent ranking and press index by Reporters without Borders, a ranking which is related partly to heavy handedness by security forces in dealing with journalists. The UN Plan of Action is important to increase the protection of freedom of expression in South Sudan.

UNMISS, UNESCO and OHCHR will work together with other UN agencies, national and international partners in supporting the development of an implementation plan for South Sudan. In this regard it is paramount that all UN staff can carry out their mandate freely and without interference, in accordance with the international obligations of the Governement of the Republic of South Sudan (GRSS).

It was in relation to inquiries involving a journalist that two UNMISS human rights staff were detained and interrogated for several hours in late January.

"As I have underlined in previous statements, this incident is a grave violation of the agreements the Government has signed and the privileges and immunities of United Nations personnel. As Head of Mission, I have raised this issue with highest levels of government, including the President, and relevant security agencies. For UNMISS and other UN agencies to be able to support the Government in upholding its commitments under the Action Plan for the safety of journalists, it is imperative that our mandate and diplomatic immunities are respected fully," says SRSG Hilde F. Johnson.

For further information or media enquiries please contact:

- A/Spokesperson-Kouider Zerrouk – zerrouk@un.org +211912396539
- Media Relations Officer - Shantal Persaud persaud@un.org
- +211 912 177 59

United Nations Mission in South Sudan - Public Information Office

http://www.unmiss.unmissions.org

UN House Juba 03, P.O. Box 29, Juba, South Sudan