

TELEPHONE PRESS CONFERENCE CALL WITH USUN AMBASSADOR SAMANTHA  
POWER AND ASSISTANT SECRETARY FOR AFRICAN AFFAIRS LINDA THOMAS-  
GREENFIELD

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**MS. DAWSON:** Greetings to everyone from the U.S. Department of State's Africa Regional Media Hub. I would like to welcome our callers who have dialed in from across Africa and Europe. Today, we are joined by U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Samantha Power and Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Linda Thomas-Greenfield. Ambassador Power is speaking to us from New York and Assistant Secretary Thomas-Greenfield is speaking to us from Washington, D.C.

We will begin with remarks from Ambassador Power. We will then open it up to your questions. To ask a question, please press \*1 on your phone to join the question queue. Today's call is on the record and will last approximately 25 minutes. And with that, I will turn it over to Ambassador Power.

**AMBASSADOR POWER:** Good morning, or I guess afternoon since most of you are joining the call from Europe and Africa. I'm here in New York and very glad to have a chance to speak with you about my recent trip to the Central African Republic. I'm very pleased also to be doing this call with Linda Thomas-Greenfield. The Ambassador and I recently traveled together to the CAR, Nigeria, and to Chad. Again, though, I'll focus my opening comments on the Central African Republic, and I'm sure in the question-and-answer, we will mix it up on a whole range of issues.

All of us in the U.S. Government have been deeply disturbed by the ongoing reports of brutality and killing in the country. In an effort to bring security, we work closely with my Security Council colleagues to get authorization for the international force currently on the ground to use all necessary measures to prevent atrocities and to stabilize the country. Before I give you a taste of our trip, I want to thank the African Union and French troops who have put their troops' lives on the line to bravely step up to try to help protect civilians and support the stabilization mission.

The U.S. Government is very supportive of the French and AU military operations, and President Obama has allocated \$100 million for security support, including equipment and training. We've also airlifted Burundian troops into the CAR and we will soon do the same, and in fact have already begun lifting the equipment of Rwandan troops.

There are three points I'd like to make quickly about the situation in CAR, and I'll give you a little bit of – a few examples from my visit that highlight, I think, the importance of these points. First, the primary focus of CAR's transitional government has to be establishing security and persuading armed groups to lay down their weapons. During my visit, I emphasized to the transitional leaders – the then president and then prime minister as well as the head of the

transitional council – their responsibility in protecting civilians and using their influence to stop the violence. I also urged them to pursue full implementation of the N’Djamena Declaration and roadmap which call for elections no later than February 2015.

Second point is on the growing humanitarian crisis in CAR which demands the world’s continued attention. The United States has provided nearly \$40 million in humanitarian assistance in 2013 to support the protection of civilians and to help displaced persons. I can tell you from this firsthand experience how urgently this funding will be needed. There are nearly one million internally displaced persons in the country, and more than half the population are in need of humanitarian assistance, some 2.6 million. When we hear about IDPs in camps, I think we have a mental image of an NGO or UN-administered site with tents where water and food are distributed. At the Bangui Airport on my visit, it was clear that that was not the case. There were then 40,000 people, and that number is now up to 100,000, so that’s just over the course of the last several weeks- literally watching the airplanes land from right next to the runway behind a thin layer of barbed wire.

When we walk through part of the IDP camp and talk to staff from the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, they highlighted the fact that there were very few services at that time, if any, operating in the airport camp – none of the kinds of traditional services one generally sees at camps had come into existence. As a result, there was open sewage and a degree of deprivations and despair that was really very, very striking and quite heartbreaking. And this is just one part of the greater humanitarian crisis. And this is only what we are able to see. There’s so much of the country that we have not had access to.

This brings me, then, to my third and final point, which is that we are seeing a cycle of retribution and violence that is extremely alarming. It is a cycle that needs to be broken immediately. We met with one woman whose husband had been stabbed to death in front of her, his body then doused with gasoline and set on fire just in front of her very eyes. NGOs report machete wounds, gunshot wounds to very, very young children. Most of the patients who were turning up at hospitals, at least on the basis of the hospital administrators and NGOs that we have spoken to, are turning up with knife, machete, and gunshot wounds.

Those who survive the violence are crying out for justice, and unfortunately, in not seeing justice be done and continuing to see these armed groups on the loose and not themselves held accountable for any atrocities that they carry out, we heard from people who are very tempted to try to take matters into their own hands, and this is one of the reasons that more people over the last few months have joined onto armed groups, this desire for vengeance.

So it is imperative that the transitional government demonstrate that there are consequences for committing human rights abuse. In the Security Council, we strengthened the UN mission’s ability to monitor human rights abuses and we supported the Secretary General’s call for a commission of inquiry, which is being established. We’re hopeful that this will help the transitional authorities identify perpetrators of atrocities, and then of course bring them to justice.

On the reconciliation side, it’s very important that religious leaders and others be brought together in the cause of conflict mitigation, peace building, et cetera, and we are trying to support

efforts to use local radio to amplify peace messages and dispel rumors, because a lot of what is going on now is occurring in a climate of acute mistrust.

Obviously, the strength of the French and African Union mission is really important, and that's why I started by saying the United States is doing what we can to ensure that these troops deploy as quickly as possible. They are working to try to obtain the trust of the local population, they're getting out of the cities and out into more remote areas. It's a huge part of their mission, and it's very important that they get up to their authorized strength as quickly as possible. And again, that they robustly enforce the mandate that the Security Council has given them to protect civilians.

Before I take your questions, I want to just say a few words very quickly about South Sudan since I know it's on many of your minds. We in the United States are deeply disturbed by the political upheaval, the ongoing violence and atrocities and the humanitarian crisis. Here at the UN, we've worked very hard to strengthen the UN mission in South Sudan. The U.S. drafted a resolution that successfully passed in the Security Council condemning the violence and the human rights violations, calling for an immediate cessation of hostilities, and of course endorsing the Secretary General's recommendation to increase the UN mission's troop and police levels.

We have made some progress working with partners to identify and support the deployment of an additional 5,500 troops that have been authorized. We also have five U.S. military officers providing headquarter support to UNMIS in Juba. We are expanding information sharing and looking at what more we can do to help UNMIS fulfill its mandate to protect civilians.

You all know that civilians have congregated at UN bases, and we really want to commend the UN for allowing civilians to shelter there, but now that IDPs have done that and have made the choice to gravitate toward UN bases, it is absolutely critical that the parties not harass or attack civilians anywhere, of course, but also that they not go near the UN bases, but moreover that the parties facilitate humanitarian access. So we're – you see some attacks that are occurring on those civilians when they go, when they leave the bases, they go for water – we've seen access obstructed. This must cease immediately, and again, those responsible for attacks of this nature have to be held accountable.

So as President Obama has said, it's time for South Sudan's leaders to show courage and actual leadership to reaffirm their commitment to peace, to unity, and to the future that the people of South Sudan have so long deserved, and of course, the future that their governments – their government promised them at independence.

With that, I think Ambassador Thomas-Greenfield and I are happy to take your questions.

**MS. DAWSON:** Thank you, Ambassador Power. We will now open it up to questions. As a reminder, to ask a question, please press \*1 on your phone. We would like to alert everyone that Ambassador Power will need to depart the call a few minutes early. We will announce when that happens.

Our first question will go to John Allen with AllAfrica.com.

**QUESTION:** Thank you very much. Ambassador, given the potential for retribution and violence that you've spoken of and given the lack of any central authority in the country and any kind of sense of power of a central government, is the mandate of the French and AU troops sufficient? Is that kind of a mission sufficient? And has the world really put in enough serious effort to rescue the situation, given that complete lack of any kind of central authority, the recently deposed president having not even been able to control his own troops or the – troops of his faction of the forces that are fighting there? Thank you.

**AMBASSADOR POWER:** No, thank you very much for the question. I think you put your finger on the question that we certainly are asking ourselves, and I think that the French and the Africans themselves are asking as well, as to whether the mission that is deployed will prove sufficient to the really daunting task that has been put before it.

Let me just break it – sort of to segregate your question a little bit, I think the mandate is sufficient. There's no question. It is the most robust mandate that we can give, I think, out of the Security Council. It is Chapter 7, all necessary measures. The challenge, of course, is getting, I think, a sufficient number of troops in there quickly. The French, again, should be, I think, commended for their deployment. They have been extremely helpful in controlling the airport, thus making it possible for humanitarian assistance to land, for other nongovernmental organizations to deploy, et cetera. And so I think that deployment is very helpful.

Initially, the African Union, as you may recall, authorized 3,600 troops. That was back in advance of the December 5<sup>th</sup> Security Council resolution. When there was a spike in violence that began on December 5<sup>th</sup>, the African Union went back to the drawing board and said, "You know what? 3,600 isn't going to be enough. 6,000."

What we are doing now is just trying to make sure that that 6,000 deploy when the Rwandans, the Rwandans are going to deploy, I think, within a couple weeks. It's a more complicated task than you would expect, the kind of deployment of these troops. But that'll be an additional 800 troops. Rwandan troops in peacekeeping missions generally are very strong performers, and in light of their own history, I think, quite aggressive in enforcement of the civilian protection mandate.

As I mentioned, we helped also deploy nearly 800 Burundian troops as well, and so we're getting toward that 6,000 number, but there's still a pretty significant gap. So I think the first question is how do you get up to the 6,000 alongside the 1,600 French. Then at that point, I think we would also be asking ourselves whether the troops-to-task ratio is the right one. As you may know, the Security Council has also authorized the Secretary General to begin planning in the event a UN peacekeeping operation is needed. And it may well be that, again, as the situation evolves, that the Secretary General, the African Union, and others come to the Security Council and say we need to expand the pool of troop contributors from whom we can draw for this mission, because in Africa, given especially the overstretch brought about by Mali, the – of course, the AMISOM mission in Somalia, now the expansion of the mission in South Sudan, African countries are being asked to do an awful lot right now to help enforce these mandates and help protect civilians on the continent. And so that moment may come, but again, our focus right now is

building up the force to its authorized strength. I think you're seeing the force congeal more and more each day, but it is not the case that the militia themselves are deterred yet by what they've seen.

You're seeing, again, these cycles of retribution and this longing for vengeance drive atrocities on an ongoing basis. Again, it's been a calmer week this week in the wake of the resignation of the transitional prime minister and president. But even as I say that, there are atrocities being committed, people being displaced, et cetera. So we are definitely in an active review constantly to see what more can we do to try to shore the gap between what we put on – put in play up to this point and then what might be needed to truly calm tensions there.

**QUESTION:** Thank you.

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY THOMAS-GREENFIELD:** Can I add something? This is Linda Thomas-Greenfield. On the political front, we're working very closely with the regional leaders to push forward efforts to create a more effective transitional government. And as the two leaders resigned over the weekend, we have been engaging with the regional leaders as well as the acting president to ensure that they have an open, transparent process which will choose leaders who can carry the country forward to elections no later than February 2015.

**MS. DAWSON:** Thank you. As a reminder to our callers, if you have a question, please press \*1 on your phone or you may send an email to [afmediahub@state.gov](mailto:afmediahub@state.gov). We currently have one questioner in the question queue. The next question goes to Slate Afrique.

**QUESTION:** Yeah, thank you. My name is Raoul Mbog, for Slate Afrique in Paris. My question is addressed to Assistant Secretary Linda Thomas. Assistant Secretary, since your visit to Bangui last December, you said what the U.S. Government had said before, that responsible of atrocities in CAR will be accountable for that. According to you, how do we get to that and would it be easy, according the complexity of the situation there? Thank you.

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY THOMAS-GREENFIELD:** Yes. Thank you very much for that question, and what we are doing is working with the UN so that – and the French to ensure that the security situation is comfortable enough that we can get human rights monitors and others in the field so that they can start documenting the atrocities that are being committed and start making preparations so that we can hold those who have committed those atrocities accountable. So this is something that is very, very high on our agenda and something that we will be working closely with the UN to ensure.

**AMBASSADOR POWER:** And just to underscore, there is a commission of inquiry. We're helping staff that up, making sure that we have some of the top experts on that. There's also been a national commission of inquiry announced, but it's got a very limited mandate. It's a little bit politicized, I think, from the beginning. And so if that's going to play a productive role, it's going to have to be seen to be even-handed in covering all atrocities.

Often this is how accountability processes start. You start, as Linda said, with human rights monitors who document some of what's gone on, then the fact that the Security Council move

quickly to author a commission of inquiry is very important. Often, the commission of inquiry then will come back with recommendations as to what the next steps will be in the way of accountability, reconciliation, et cetera.

It's no secret that there's not much of a justice system in the Central Africa Republic, so national capacity is not that great. So that's going to be a challenge, as your question suggests, going forward.

**MS. DAWSON:** Our next question goes to BBC World.

**QUESTION:** Okay. You were speaking about the troops ratio. The question is, in your calculations you don't seem to take into account the possible deployment of about 1,000 European troops, which is going to be discussed next Monday here in Brussels by the EU foreign ministers.

**AMBASSADOR POWER:** Is that the question, sir?

**QUESTION:** Yeah, that's the question.

**AMBASSADOR POWER:** Okay, okay. Thank you. No, you're – I – nobody in my position wants to get ahead of the decision-making process in any government, and I know that those conversations are underway, that several European countries have stepped up. All I can say is that that would be a tremendous contribution, and I think the French and MISCA are quite flexible in terms of the roles that those European forces and police might be able to play. By that, I mean if there was a possibility of them securing the airport, that could then free up French troops to deploy elsewhere in Bangui or elsewhere in the country. So I think that would be a tremendous contribution. And again, I think as has been underscored by what we've said on this call and everything you read in the press every day and all of the statements from NGOs and UN agencies on the ground, the situation remains critical. It is very, very urgent.

And so in addition to hoping that the Europeans move forward along the lines that it looks like may happen, we would also underscore the urgency of those deployments and hope that they could be done speedily. And that's one of the reasons, again, that we've been involved in lifting the Rwandans and Burundians, is it just – it ends up being quite a cumbersome and sometimes lengthy process. And so anything that any of us can do to expedite those – the decision making and expedite the deployment, we stand ready to do.

**MS. DAWSON:** Thank you, everybody. Ambassador Power has to depart the call now, and we will turn over to Ambassador Greenfield. Thank you. Our next question goes to the African Press Agency.

(Caller disconnected.)

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY THOMAS-GREENFIELD:** That didn't work.

**MS. DAWSON:** Okay. We'll go to another questioner, then. We'll go to NRC Handelsblad.

**QUESTION:** Yes, good afternoon. My name is Wim Brummelman. My question is regarding the atrocities and the documentation of that. Is the United States in favor of involvement of the International Criminal Court in The Hague?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY THOMAS-GREENFIELD:** Again, this is not something that we want to prejudge. If a decision is made to move in that direction, we would support that position. But we have to – I think prudence would require that we wait until we see what is recommended.

**MS. DAWSON:** Thank you. Our next question goes to Radio Bilal.

**QUESTION:** Good evening. My name is Hamza. I'm from Kampala, Uganda. I would like to – there have been reports about the Chadian forces colluding with the ex-Seleka to terrorize the people. So I want to understand from you: Is this an issue that you followed up when you were in Central African Republic recently?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY THOMAS-GREENFIELD:** We have heard some of these issues, and we're deeply concerned by reports of possible misconduct on the part of some of the Chadian troops who may have – who are participating in the peacekeeping mission. But as you know, what has happened – the Chadian Government recalled 30 of its peacekeepers to N'Djamena for disciplinary actions back in September. And we urged the Government of Chad to promptly conduct a thorough investigation into all of the credible reports of such abuse.

I have to say that Chad has played a significant role in the mediations and the peacekeeping efforts in the region, and we look forward to their continued partnership in this regard. I – it is my hope that this was a one-off and that we won't see these kinds of situations happen again.

**MS. DAWSON:** Our next question goes to *La Repubblica*.

**QUESTION:** Hi. This is Alix Van Buren from Rome, Italy, *La Repubblica*. And I wanted to follow up on the question of a possible U.S. deployment of troops there to buffer up the French and the Europeans.

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY THOMAS-GREENFIELD:** There are no plans for the U.S. Government to deploy troops to CAR. We have troops who have been on the ground to support the deployment and our airlift troops from Burundi as well as from Rwanda. And in addition, we have contributed about \$100 million to the entire peacekeeping operation in terms of providing support and airlift and equipment for the troops. But we have no plans to actually send U.S. troops.

**MS. DAWSON:** Thank you. That concludes today's call. I want to thank Ambassador Power and Assistant Secretary Thomas-Greenfield for joining us, and thank all of our callers for participating. If you have any questions about today's call or if you would like to join our call tomorrow morning at 8 a.m. South Africa time with U.S. Special Envoy to the Great Lakes Region and Democratic Republic of the Congo Russell Feingold, please contact the Africa Regional Media Hub at [afmediahub@state.gov](mailto:afmediahub@state.gov). Thank you.

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