

United Nation Missions in Sudan

Australian forces first served in the Sudan, under British Imperial command, during the 1880s. Positioned adjacent to the maritime trade route from Europe and North Africa to Australia, the security of the Sudan region is important for our national interest as well as for international humanitarian reasons. This century, the Australian Defence Force and the RAAF in particular has had an ongoing involvement with the Sudan region since 2005.

On 1 May 2005, Squadron Leader Ruth Elsley was appointed to command the Australian contingent which the Minister for Defence, Robert Hill, had announced on 20 April would deploy in support of the United Nations Mission in Sudan (UNMIS) to monitor implementation of a peace agreement between the Sudanese Government and a local rebel movement. Elsley, an air traffic control officer from No 44 Wing, joined UNMIS Headquarters at Khartoum on 7 May, as the Senior Staff Officer Aviation Safety.



Two members of her team also became UN staff officers. The other six personnel in the ADF contingent were spread throughout the country as military observers. After Elsley returned to Australia in November, her work as COMASC (Commander Australian Contingent) for Operation *Azure*—the first such appointment held by a woman—was recognised by award of the Conspicuous Service Cross in January 2007.

On 9 July 2011, the Republic of South Sudan gained its independence from Sudan, following a six-year peace process than began with the signing of a Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2005. Operation *Aslan*, the deployment of ADF personnel to the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS),

commenced on 23 September 2011 and since then RAAF personnel have been deployed as individuals in key headquarters positions, aviation and logistics support roles, as well as military liaison officers. Their experience working in one of the world's newest nations once again has reinforced the flexibility, endurance and compassion required of our people.

Some Personnel Observations

A view from the South:

"... I went to Sudan from November 08 to May 09. Sure, the position was Staff Officer Personnel with UNIMID which is the United Nations African Mission in Darfur.

In Darfur we went to Elfasher which was I don't want to use the term capital, but it was a principal town of the Northern section of Darfur, at the time it was broken up into three sections, the West, the South and the North area, so we were in the force Head Quarters element which was Elfasher.

To be honest the room was probably the safe haven of the whole place where you could go in and turn your air con on and sort of be oblivious to what was outside. The compound was an African Union compound.

So once you left the room the facilities were pretty much atrocious. The toilets nearby they never got cleaned, they were being shared with probably 500 African Union troops. We did have some toilets and showers near the working accommodation in J1 cell which is about 200 metres away, but that was restricted. I couldn't walk there by myself and have a shower and things like that. So we would go as a contingent nightly and walk over there and sort of have someone on the steps.

We would have had 15 different nations in the headquarters alone, so my job was preparing the personnel statistics, preparing the medico statistics, just linking in directly into represent J1 cell on the big issues and attending that with the Commander of the j1 cell who was a Colonel and briefing the General every day along with all the other J cells that were at the brief.

I mean, did you get any exposure to the terrible sort of situation in Darfur?

You didn't really need to go far at all to really visualize it. It was third world to the absolute maximum. It was at best, there was not much there essentially. Outside the compound quite often you'd only need to walk out to the compound to have it in your face with the refugees begging and just people on the street doing all of that type of thing. So that was there every single day, no clothes, no food, asking for money all the time..."

A view from the North:

"... I was off to Sudan in October 2009. The mission being with UNMS United Nations Mission in Sudan located in Khartoum so that's in North Sudan, so our mission's really a monitoring of the peace between the South and the North.

It's a peacekeeping mission and it's about monitoring the comprehensive peace agreement CPA. It was of the order of eight to ten thousand people associated with the UN over a very large country. You really didn't get to see too many UN people necessarily because they are spread over a vast distance and also diversity of locations and so on.

My task was to make sure that with the 40 odd aircraft flying in the mission that safety standards were met and if there was. We had a safety management system in place.

Three military aviation units were in place throughout the country and they operated of course their military procedure. The other assets there'd be Russian MI17s there'd be a Super Puma, the Canadian regional jet CRC, CRJ200 series, McDonald Douglas the 87 which is quite a mixture in terms of types of aircraft and we got up to 40 odd aircraft..."

A similar view:

"... I was deployed from the 10th of April until the 28th of October 2010.

You see, in the North they want to split for the simple reason is that although the oil is in the South, to get the oil out it's got to be pumped through the North, so they can always demand some sort of payment levy to get that through.

But all their fruit and veg comes from the South and all their fruit and veg comes from the Darfur region, so if the North were to split then they're now paying taxes on fruit and veg and the normal commodities that weren't previously happening. And they don't have any revenue making crops or anything like that in the North.

So I can understand why they want to keep the South. But again it's very hard to be a united country when you have Sharia law in the North and Christian in the South.

My job in working for the UN was as the Aviation Safety Staff Officer working in at the Head Quarters there in Khartoum. I was doing five one hour lectures a week to newly inducted people to United Military Observers when they come through to the UN Police, also to Air Liaison Officer courses.

The main role was to promote aviation safety amongst the United Nations fraternity. Unfortunately it's a hard job to do, particularly when you are fighting contractors who don't get paid if they don't fly..... therefore the pilots don't get to send money home, so although they will espouse that they are safety conscious, a lot of their actions would reveal otherwise.

Returning to the South:

"... I was with the United Nations Mission in Juba the Capital of South Sudan in 2012. My job was staff officer operations aviation. Dealing with the civilian side working to the Director of Mission Support. So we're not part of the military as such, you have Force Headquarters which is separate. We were staff officers within the civilian logistics component.

We had a compound. So we weren't on the base. Most people within the United Nations and some other contingents as well with the military are housed on the UN – the UN base. But certainly ours, along with Canadians and Norwegians, the Dutch, all had our own little house, so to speak.

Personal lessons, that I learnt, included patience and you know, standing back and just not – not getting tied up in the situation, as well or trying to solve everything. So it was just a matter of being able to deal with those high tempo issues and – and also then understanding that you've had the training and the background to be able to deal with that.

The society is a violent place, if you can get over that, but it's just – it's not unusual for you know, an argument to happen and then a gun be pulled and then – and it happened with a family feud up north where the families got into an argument and then 23 dead people later, it was all resolved.

I'd have to flag a caution with increased presence there from Australian military mainly from a health perspective. I mean, we had two people come down with typhoid – sorry, three people with typhoid, two cases of malaria just within our small contingent alone..."