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SRSG Press Briefing

(Compiled from local Arabic-language dailies – 22nd Jan. Khartoum) The Special Representative of the UN Secretary General said maintaining security in Darfur does not require international forces but requires the support and contribution of the big states who have the finance, equipment, planes and technical know-how. He emphasized that the transition to a UN operation is a matter that to be decided by the AU and the Security Council which has not yet decided on this issue. He said the GoS is not responsible for the obstacles facing the Abuja peace talks. However, he held the Sudan Liberation Movement (SLM) of Mini Minawi responsible for the problems facing the political talks. The SRSG explained that the period from now up to end of next month (February) is enough for reaching a framework peace agreement. He called on the international community to bear pressures on the rebel movements in order to negotiate with a good will. Pronk criticized the intervention of non-African countries in the issue of the presidency of the AU.

Pronk, at the press conference he held yesterday and which was attended by a big number of foreign journalists who arrived Khartoum to cover the African Summit, refuted reports accusing the GoS of failure in maintaining security in Darfur. He said, in his report to the Security Council, that the attacks are carried by the armed militias and the janjaweed which, he said, are not supported by the GoS. He added, “I have never said the GoS has failed in Darfur, I said our strategy as United Nations and Security Council has failed, the government has not disarmed the janjaweed”. The GoS, he explained, has no relationship with the janjaweed and does not support them. Since our arrival in Sudan and till now we have no evidence on the support of the GoS to the janjaweed. This said I would like to add that we are not responsible for the relationship between the GoS and the janjaweed, this is the work of the AU. Maintaining security in Darfur, said Pronk, is the responsibility of the GoS and the AU is monitoring this issue. The decision on transferring this responsibility from the AU to the UN is the right of the AU and should be based on a resolution from the Security Council.

Pronk stated that if the AU announces that it had failed in its mission then the UN is obliged to respond positively but based on a resolution from the Security Council which has not yet taken a decision on this issue. The Ministerial Council of the AU, Pronk explained, will meet in March to decide whether the AU mission will continue its work in Darfur or not.

Pronk revealed that he had made some contacts and consultations in Washington and Brussels to urge the leaders there to provide logistical and financial support, not military forces on the ground. He said he had told the NATO leaders that does not want NATO forces on an African soil but want their support. The Secretary General Kofi Annan himself said he would ask some countries to provide funds and equipment, he said.

Pronk explained the difficulty of getting troops saying that UN does not know from where to get such troops. The UN, he explained, has more than fourteen peacekeeping operations. He gave the example of UNMIS which has so far, after nineteen months from the date of signing the CPA, got only 5000 from the promised 10,000 troops. While the African Union, he said, was able to bring 7,500 troops to Darfur.

On Hameshkpreib, the SRSG Pronk said the security situation in the area is serious as the SLMA has not been redeployed and given that there are many armed civilians in the area. Pronk asked the Eastern Front to continue talks in Tripoli. He said the UN is monitoring the situation in Hameshkoreib and will send more military observers to the area.

Pronk: The Government is Negotiating Constructively in Abuja, No Government Tank

(*Sudan Vision* – 22nd Jan. **Khartoum**) The Government is interested in reaching a peace agreement in Abuja soon and is negotiating constructively, UN Secretary-General's Special Representative, Jan Pronk, told a press conference yesterday.

“My main concern at the moment is the rebel movements which have not made the choice between fighting and talking. I say this very clearly, the SLM/A faction led by Minni Arko Minawi has to make a choice, to be in Abuja not in Chad or Libya to talk in order to reach an agreement. If not, I think that the faction is not serious in terms of negotiations.” Mr. Pronk added that he had asked Brussels and Washington to put as much pressure as possible on the movements, in particular on Minawi's faction, to negotiate seriously and “not to bet on two horses. A military horse with finance from outside and a political horse both have to go for one aim.” On the Eastern Front, Mr. Jan Pronk said things are going in the right direction. “For the first time we are in Hamishkhoreib with military observers in the city.” A delegation went two days ago to Asmara for discussions with the Eastern Front and to inform that they have to talk in Tripoli because they have chosen Libya as a mediator.” The delegation came back with the optimistic feeling that the Eastern Front is willing to talk in a united approach and it is “not betting on the other horse, which is fighting.” Mr. Pronk added that during his last visit to Kassala he has met with Beja representatives who informed him that they will enter Hamishkhoreib after the SPLM withdrawal. He had advised them to be patient but they went along and moved in. The UN Special Representative refuted the allegations that Sudanese army has entered Hamishkhoreib with tanks, saying that the UN is there monitoring the situation very closely. On the implementation of CPA, Mr. Pronk said that the implementation process although difficult, is positive and has opened the gates for political parties' activities, even those opposing the Government like Dr. Turabi and Sadiq Al-Mahdi. He stressed on the need for more freedoms to press as one of the main ways forward. Mr. Pronk stressed that the processes are painful after decades of war but added that, “Peace is not a commodity that can be imported but has to be locally manufactured.”

AU Summit:

Minister of Foreign Affairs confident Sudan will get chairmanship of the AU

(*SMC* – 22nd Jan. **Khartoum**) The minister of foreign Affairs Dr. Lam Akol said that the success of the African union 6th summit materialize in its capability in settling of the issues which will be discussed by it.

Akol said in a special statement to the Sudanese media center that they are confident in getting the chairmanship of the African Union.

Khartoum Summit convenes today with significant presidential presence. Lam Akoul: 48 states participate.... Positive that we will win presidency

(*AlAyaam* – 22nd Jan. **Khartoum**) The African Union Summit commences sessions this morning amidst main presidential presence of 48 countries. Dr Lam Akoul the Minister of Foreign Affairs (MFA) reaffirmed that the Executive Convention had resolved not to incorporate local issues and Darfur issue in particular in the Summit agenda. The MFA posed positive that the AU presidency will revert to Sudan and disclosed that Sudan had received the support and espousal of the various African groups. He underscored that Sudan is more concerned with the success of the Summit than the AU presidency (source: British Embassy Press Summary Service).

Congo's Sassou Nguesso favoured as next AU chairman

(*Sudan Tribune* – 22nd Jan. **Brazaville**) Several heads of state have asked Congo President Denis Sassou Nguesso to take over the chairmanship of the African Union (AU) during an imminent summit in Khartoum, Congo's prime minister said Sunday.

"It's not impossible that President Sassou Nguesso succeeds Nigerian (President) Olusegun Obasanjo at the head of the AU because he is being courted by several of his counterparts asking him to take over the chairmanship," Isidore Mvouba told a news conference in Brazzaville.

Traditionally the president of the country hosting the continental bloc's ordinary summit takes over the chairmanship, but pressure has mounted, notably from human rights groups, not to bestow that honor on Sudanese President Omar al Beshir.

"President Sassou Nguesso is not asking to be elected, but his peers want him to succeed President Obasanjo," Mvouba said.

"The most influential heads of state think it would be good that the AU chairmanship goes to central Africa and in particular Denis Sassou Nguesso," the prime minister said. He did not name the African presidents in question.

Sudanese police raid human rights groups' meeting

(*AP/Sudan Tribune* – 22nd Jan. **Khartoum**) Sudanese police raided a human rights groups' meeting Sunday, briefly detaining participants and seizing documents and laptops, delegates said — on the eve of an African leaders' summit in the country the United States accuses of genocide.

National and international human rights groups had organized the meeting on the sidelines of the African Union summit. By tradition, Sudan's President Omar El-Bashir should named the next chairman of the 53-nation bloc during the two-day summit, which begins Monday in the Sudanese capital.

More than 50 African human rights and civil groups wrote African leaders on Jan. 16 to express concern at the prospect of Sudan leading the AU when it stands accused of fueling a conflict in its Western Darfur region that the United Nations has called the world's worst humanitarian crisis.

Among those detained were five European diplomats, correspondents for Reuters and for Radio-France Internationale and two members of a Zimbabwean non-governmental organization.

Plainclothes police officers stormed into the private building where the human rights meeting was taking place, searched participants and tried to take their mobile phones, British and Sudanese delegates said, speaking by phone to The Associated Press during the confrontation.

Police photographed and videotaped about 30 people attending the meeting, and refused to allow them to leave the building, the British delegate said, on condition of anonymity for fear of recrimination. Police told them the meeting was not authorized, participants said. Police released everyone after three hours, returning laptops and most of their documents.

"This kind of heavy-handed behavior shows why Sudan was not the right country to hold the summit and also shows the president of Sudan isn't the correct person to lead the African Union," Human Rights Watch spokesman Reed Brody said. Sudanese authorities said they could not immediately comment on the raid.

Military coup leader Omar el-Bashir, is accused of complicity in the Darfur conflict that has killed an estimated 180,000 people and displaced about 2 million others since 2003. On Sunday, in an interview with the official Sudan News Agency, he accused Washington of trying to block Sudan from assuming the AU chairmanship.

At a foreign ministers' meeting on Sunday, several countries challenged the AU Human Rights Commission's report, which was to be published at the summit, Djibouti's Foreign Minister Mohammed Ali Youssouf said.

It "caused much controversy among many countries which have violated human rights," and was being sent back to the commission after complaints that those accused had no chance to defend themselves, Youssouf said. He did not identify the countries that protested.

Rebels said on Sunday that they would boycott ongoing peace talks to protest the prospect of the Sudanese government assuming the AU chairmanship and becoming both a mediator and a participant in the talks.

Humanitarian workers say killings and rapes continue in Darfur. Former U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell accused el-Bashir's government of genocide, but the U.S. has not acted on threats to impose sanctions against Sudan, which is rich in oil.

Despite the dilemma, East African states support Sudan's bid to lead the African Union, Djibouti's minister said. So does Egypt, which wields influence over North African states.

Privately, several West African states have expressed opposition, and support for Congo to get the chair. But Sudan appeared in a strong position with no other contender declaring its interest in the job.

Only Chad has come out openly in opposition, since the violence in Darfur spilled over the border and President Idriss Deby accused Sudan of backing rebels seeking to overthrow his government. Sudan denies the charge and has called for talks.

In the south, Zimbabwe, facing criticism of its own human rights record, is expected to support Sudan.

Sudan releases rights delegates

(*Reuters/ST* – 22nd Jan. **Khartoum**) Sudanese authorities released around 50 delegates from local and international human rights groups after storming their meeting on the sidelines of an African Union summit on Sunday, delegates at the meeting said.

Activists said the security forces' action called into question Sudan's right to host the summit.

"They have now all been released," said Mudawi Ibrahim Adam, a Sudanese human rights activist who has previously been arrested by the government.

Osman Hummaida from the Sudanese Organisation Against Torture (SOAT) was inside the meeting. He said a group of security men entered and demanded to see the agenda and list of delegates.

"Everyone is being detained and we have been asked not to talk on the phone. We have not been told why we are being held," he had told Reuters. The meeting was to discuss closer cooperation with the AU on human rights issues.

Representatives of Amnesty International, Anti-Slavery International and the International Bar Association were among those being held, Hummaida said.

"They cannot be hosting a summit while they have this kind of conflict and they cannot be the chairperson of the African Union," Adam said.

The European Union ambassador in Khartoum, Kent Dagerfeld, told Reuters this was a step backwards for Sudan, where freedom of movement and press had improved recently.

Journalists were told by police and state security officers to leave the building, next door to the Ministry for Humanitarian Affairs, and one had his recording equipment seized, a Reuters witness said.

Sudan, facing accusations of human rights abuses, is hosting the summit for the first time and is trying to persuade African leaders to back its bid to be president of the 53-member body.

The action by the security forces took place hours after Sudan signed up to an AU peer review mechanism, designed to reinforce good governance in Africa.

Khartoum's bid to chair the AU has provoked criticism from rights groups, which say it would make a mockery of AU efforts to bring peace to Sudan's Darfur region.

It has also aroused disquiet among some African countries that want to improve the continent's image, with diplomats saying southern, western and central Africa had been working behind the scenes to ask Sudan to withdraw its candidacy.

One of Sudan's few opposition daily newspapers was originally banned from covering the meetings of African nations because it published an editorial saying President Omar Hassan al-Bashir should not become AU chairman.

The front page of the Citizen newspaper on Saturday was covered with a huge cartoon of a Sudanese with his lips locked shut under the headline: "Authorities told the Citizen no way to AU summit coverage."

Editor-in-chief Nhial Bol said he had since been given permission to attend the official opening on Monday. "But they told me the matter was not over and they'd deal with me when the summit finished," he said.

Darfur:

Arab League Commends the Role of AU in Darfur

(*SMC* - 22nd Jan. **Khartoum**) The Arab League has resolved to send delegations during the coming days to Khartoum for preparation of convocation of the Arab summit conference next month. League Secretary-General Amr Musa disclosed that he agreed in talks with Sudan's foreign minister to hold a meeting in Cairo in the wake of the African Union 6th summit.

Musa stressed that he will arrive in Khartoum once more during the coming weeks for the final arrangement of convocation of the Arab summit.

In the meantime Arab league secretary General called for supporting of the AU forces in Darfur pointing out that their task in keeping peace and security in the region considered good, adding that any support to these forces can realize good result in the ground.

Darfur rebels' merger puts talks at the crossroad - analyst

(*Sudan Tribune* – 22nd Jan. **Khartoum**) The merger of the two main rebel groups in war-torn Darfur could simplify peace talks but also rebels could harden their position in the talks and complicate peace process, analysts say.

The Sudan Liberation Movement Minawi Arkoi faction (SLM) and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) announced on Friday 20 January that they had agreed to join forces, establishing the Alliance of Revolutionary Forces of West Sudan.

African Union officials trying to mediate an end to the Darfur conflict have repeatedly urged unity among the rebels, saying this would facilitate peace negotiations with the government and expedite a solution.

The Sudanese government has also complained that by presenting conflicting demands at the negotiating table, the rebel groups and splinter factions were hampering efforts to end the conflict.

But SLM Abdelwahed al-Nour faction issued Saturday 21 January a press statement, saying it is not concerned by this merger. People from SLM-Nour faction said what is happened is an alliance between Zagawa ethnic groups in Darfur with the Zagawa regime in N'Djamena.

The AU, which has been leading the Darfur peace negotiations in the Nigerian capital Abuja, said it had not been officially informed about the rebel merger.

"The AU is yet to get any official document that the SLM and JEM have merged to form an alliance," AU spokesman at the Abuja talks, Nouredine Mezni, said on Saturday.

Sudanese deputy top negotiator Mohamed Youcef Abdullah reacted negatively saying such merger would complicate the current negotiations

Sudanese political analyst and Darfur expert Mohammed Mahjub Harun said: "It is positive and necessary."

The SLM and JEM said the "union will strengthen the solidarity, cohesion and unity of the people of Sudan in general and that of the west in particular."

It will also "further strengthen the position of the armed movements in (peace) negotiations" under way in Abuja, they said in a press statement.

Harun noted that with the rebel merger the government will face "a single group with one agenda".

More important, explained Sudanese political analyst Abdullah Adam Kheir, was the fact the Mani Arko Minawi, who has been engaged in a power struggle with SLM leader Abdul Wahid Mohammed Nur, was now on board.

In fact, the agreement uniting the two groups was signed on behalf of JEM by its leader, Ibrahim Khalil, and for the SLM by Minawi himself.

Nour has been on good terms with JEM before and since Minawi tried to unseat him from the leadership of the SLM last year and his faction signed a memorandum of understanding with JEM that Minawi had opposed.

"Minawi was out of the agreement," Kheir said.

"We have set up this union in the interests of the people of Darfur," Khalil told reporters after the signing of the deal.

Some have expressed concern that the rebels could use their newfound unity to harden positions at the negotiating table, especially because the alliance will significantly boost their fighting power, but Kheir disagreed.

"Unity among the rebel groups would serve the interest of peace. It will undoubtedly have a positive impact on the negotiations," Kheir said.

He added that in his opinion, the deal was more of a "political rather than military alliance."

Observers say this merger could reinforce the position of SLM-Nour because many Darfurians will see the two movements (JEM and SLM-Minawi) led by two Zagawas. Nour would play the card of diversity and good representation of different ethnic groups in the western Sudan.

NEPAD:

Sudan joins African Peer Review Mechanism

(*Sudan Tribune* – 22nd Jan. **Khartoum**) Sudan signed a document to join the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) which is affiliated to the New Partnership for Development in Africa (NEPAD).

By joining the APRM, the Sudan will be under its monitoring and will allow its mechanism to conduct the political, economic and environmental studies of the Sudan state.

Addressing the opening session of the Nepad mini-summit, the Sudanese president Omar al-Bashir, said the African continent was suffering from ethnic conflicts, narrow loyalties and ethnic sectarianism.

Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo, who presided over the ceremony in Khartoum, welcomed Sudan's joining of APRM and outlined the objectives of Nepad in giving impetus to development, good governance and democracy in Africa.

He described the APRM as a unique African instrument of learning the best practice and experiences of the African among themselves.

After signing the joining agreement, al-Bashir affirmed Sudan's adherence by the principles and duties of the APRM; saying that the government is now implementing the Comprehensive Peace Agreement successfully specially in regard to the division of power and wealth in all the states of the Sudan to guarantee the realization of development and stability, and is exerting great efforts to realize peace and security in Darfur.

APRM comprised the African heads of states and it is a political voluntary observatory mechanism within the umbrella of the AU and aimed at reviewing the governance in the African states in regard to the right application of democracy human rights, justice, development, and the existence of more transparency on the governance systems in the member states to enhance the political stability and socio- economic development and the realization of total integration in the African continent.

APRM membership include Algiers, Gabon, Kenyan, Iloilo, Malawi, Mali, Mauritius, Mozambique, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Sirilanka, Egypt, Ethiopia, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda,.

Leading Commentaries (from Sudan News-Feed, Public Affairs Office, US Embassy):

- “Warning! East Sudan” (editor warns of deteriorating security situation in East Sudan; calls on GOS to avoid replication of the Darfur scenario) (Al-Ayaam)*
- “AU Summit Should Put Pressure on Sudan to End Atrocities” (editor argues that the AU Summit should exert on the government to disband its militias, to correct its human rights record as soon as possible) (The Citizen)
- “Sudan is Up to the Standard of Responsibility” (editor defends Sudan’s right to AU Chairmanship, despite disputes; it is a “historical responsibility” that Sudan is ready to assume.) (Sudan Vision)
- “The AU and Darfur” (editor notes deficiencies of Darfur AU peacekeepers in terms of equipment and aerial capabilities, which UN troops could remedy; deplores Sudan’s “stunning” refusal of this solution, at the same time that it allows UN peacekeepers throughout the South) (Khartoum Monitor)