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Below is a near verbatim transcript of the press conference hosting Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Radhika Coomaraswamy, and Deputy Executive Director of UNICEF, Ms. Rima Salah, held on 2 February 2007 at UNMIS Press Briefing Room, Khartoum.

Spokesperson Radhia: Good afternoon everybody and thank you for joining us at this press conference hosting Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, and hosting also Ms. Rima Salah who is the Deputy Executive Director of the United Nations Children Fund. She came with the Special Representative during her visit to Sudan.

We already announced to you the visit of the Special Representative in a press release on the eve of her coming to Sudan. We broadly told you what kind of activities she would be undertaking. We already sent out to you the personal resume of the Special Representative and we have further documentation that would help you to have the full picture about the SRSG-CAAC, her mandate and so on.

We do have the resolution of the General Assembly that establishes the mandate of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict; and we do also have the resolution of the General Assembly that reconfirmed the mandate and the nomination of the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict. And we do also have for you the Resolution 1612 of the Security Council adopted in 2005 on children in armed conflict. All that is given to you for background information.

Without further ado, I would leave the floor to the Special Representative.

SRSG-CAAC: Thank you very much. I am the SRSG on Children and Armed Conflict and I am supposed to be independent on this issue, trying to facilitate and to do political advocacy on some of the issues for the United Nations System.

Let me begin by saying the main my reason of my visit, with Rima Salah, the Deputy Executive Director of UNICEF, who kindly agreed to accompany me on this visit, is, because as you know in the month of August 2006, the Security Council Working Group looked at a report on Children and Armed Conflict in Sudan and, as a result of that report, there were some conclusions and recommendations made by the Security Council Working Group and

one of that was that I visit Sudan to ascertain what is occurring, try to get commitments and to report back to the Security Council Working Group in a few months' time.

As you know, this is all under Security Council Resolution 1612 which sets up an extensive monitoring and reporting system with regards children and armed conflict, especially child soldiers. So this is the framework within which these reports were initially written.

The concerns that were there in the United Nations report and the concerns that bring me here are basically three initial issues. The first is the issue of child recruitment which is of course the issue of the highest importance for the Security Council. Also secondly the issue of sexual violence and exploitation of the issue of the Girl-child which was an issue raised in the context of the Sudan in the report and the third is the protection of humanitarian workers which is of concern not only to the Security Council but also to the Secretary-General.

I visited during my trip Khartoum, Juba and Darfur. I met with the ministers of defence, foreign affairs and humanitarian affairs as well as other senior government officials. I have met with the signatories and the non-signatories to the Darfur agreement, the SPLM and I have met with women, youths and representatives from the communities in Juba and in Darfur. I thought I would begin with some general conclusions to this visit and then go on to some specific commitments that had been made by parties during this visit.

The first is that we saw very clearly in Juba and in Darfur that this war has affected everybody and that there is in these societies the social fabric has been destroyed and so has social control including the rule of law and, as a result, there is impunity and a measure of non-accountability. This poses serious problems in these conflict regions.

The second conclusion coming really from the first is that there is a huge security vacuum in Darfur. So the issue of women, child recruitment and violence against humanitarian actors is something that deeply concerns us. It is absolutely necessary that this security vacuum be filled as soon as possible especially if peace does not come. How to do so of course is for the political organs of the UN and the government of Sudan but we feel it is essential.

Thirdly; in Juba we found that there was a great deal of optimism among the people but an issue of reintegration of child soldiers and development of communities was crucial as well as the development of a culture of peace. These issues were foremost in the minds of people we met both in government and in the community.

Finally, I must say that there is recognition in Sudan, we found at the official levels, of the problems of child recruitment and sexual violence. They have agreed to frameworks and they have agreed to commitments. However, we are concerned that there is not enough implementation and that the results are not showing on the ground and we urge them to do so. However we welcome both their commitments and their frameworks.

Now if I could move on to the issue of child recruitment, I must say that as you know, independent monitors have pointed to us through verified data that child recruitment is decreasing in southern Sudan and increasing in Darfur and that all parties to the conflict engage in child recruitment.

As a result of our visit and also because of prior negotiations by UNICEF, we are happy to note that there have been some important commitments. The first is that all the signatories to

the Darfur Peace Agreement as well as all the non-signatories have agreed to an action plan, to agree to negotiate action plans with UNICEF for the demobilization of child soldiers. They have named focal points and we shall follow up on that.

In addition, all Darfur signatories, all Darfur non-signatories, the SPLM have agreed to an audit which is basically opening their camps to UNICEF and UNMIS Child Protection monitors to visit their camps to see if there are any children.

In addition, this morning the Minister of Defence told us that he would open the camps of the SLA as well as the Popular Defence Forces to allow for an audit. He named a focal point to follow up on that commitment.

We are therefore very satisfied with these commitments and we hope that UNICEF and UNMIS Child Protection will follow up with these commitments and that we can make sure that there are no children left with armed groups in the near future.

Secondly on the issue of sexual violence, we found in every report to the Security Council numbers and reports of this. There is, we must say, recognition of this issue now at the national level. The National Council on Child Welfare as well as the Ministry of Justice have recognized the problem and begun programs. We are particularly encouraged by the task force set up by the National Council on Child Welfare. Even at the local level, there are structures in place such as state committees and gender advisors. In addition, the Government of Southern Sudan agreed to form a similar task force in its region in their conversations with us.

However, as we said earlier, the situation on the ground does not seem to have improved since when the Security Council report was written. Medical reports and other forms of verifiable information show that there are high rates of sexual violence. We again repeat that a security framework is absolutely necessary that is more protective of women and children. An inter-agency team led by UNICEF and UNFPA will arrive in Sudan in February to deal with this issue.

We also spoke to the Ministry of Defence about sexual violence and exploitation. We discussed the need for all military including the UN to ensure that no kind of sexual exploitation takes place and we pointed to evolving guidelines and programs that we have developed to try and have a “zero-tolerance policy” on sexual violence. The Ministry of Defence said he would work with the UN in developing guidelines also for the Government of Sudan Armed Forces.

With regards to the safety of humanitarian workers, there is an incident in Darfur everyday against humanitarian workers. There have been some terrible incidents in the past few weeks.

At every level we raised this issue and we were given assurances that they will try their best to prevent such incidents from taking place. We pointed out that diplomatic immunity attaches to the staff of the UN and if they are dissatisfied, then it is up to them to report the staff to the UN and the UN will take corrective action. That diplomatic immunity is absolutely crucial for the world system and not only for Sudan. We feel that we made a very strong plea in that regard at all levels of our official meetings

With regards to some other concerns that arose during our visit here, the first is that the destruction of the social fabric has led to a great many orphans and street children – a new phenomenon in Sudan. There is need for UN programmatic intervention in this regard. We feel it is a rising issue and needs concerted attention.

Secondly; we found that reintegration of Child Soldiers are not working as well as we would like. What happens is that children are demobilized but they come back to the armed camp because they have nothing to do in their communities or they feel alienated from their communities. The need therefore to develop the communities to which these children will return and the social services in those communities so that it is a place where children will remain, become the need of the hour. As a result, UNICEF will sponsor a study in Juba to study these reintegration programs to find out what is going wrong, what is going right and also to see how the community can develop with social services. We will try to do a very quick study and the recommendations from that study will then be implemented.

Thirdly; when we met with the Vice-President of southern Sudan, we spoke about the problems posed by the LRA rebels and he agreed to keep women and children as highest in his agenda with the UNICEF staff members to be on his technical committee. He also agreed to ensure that these issues will be there if talks resume under his mediation.

Finally; in our conversation with nomadic tribal leaders, we felt that there was a sense of discrimination and marginalization by humanitarian agencies of these communities primarily because of security reasons – many of these humanitarian agencies can't work in those regions. However, we feel that it is a matter of priority to have community-oriented programs on education and health in those communities as well so that they too will benefit by many of the humanitarian efforts. So UNICEF has began already – had begun even before we came – to begin discussions with them on how to better their services.

Finally; what is next? When I get back to New York, I will debrief the Secretary-General and in three months time I will report to the Security Council Working Group outlining the commitments and follow ups of the Sudan government and also what I feel is the situation on the ground.

In addition, UNICEF, UNMIS Child Protection and AMIS will follow up on action plans, audits, the task forces and the study that I described. They will work closely to follow up on these commitments

We hope to continue our dialogue with the government of Sudan especially with regard to security and protection framework for women and children.

Thank you.

Spokesperson Radhia: Ms. Rima, the floor is yours.

Dep. Exec. Dir.: Thank you. (in Arabic)

I am pleased and honored to accompany SRSR-CAAC and to support her as UNICEF believes it is the moral voice on children and armed conflicts the world over. You are aware that an important aspect of UNICEF's mandate is to encourage existence of preventive climates for all children including children affected by armed conflict. In addition to our

mandate and since the UNICEF has offices in every part of Sudan and in every country in the world, this also covers monitoring of violations of the Right of the Child as cited in UN Security Council Resolution 1612.

As for UNICEF's obligations, for example on child recruitment, UNICEF, in cooperation with UNMIS and AMIS, will continue to support DDR programs especially on reintegration and to ensure that child issues remain priority issues in planning and implementation. There also is a great need to expedite the process because children should not be left to wait. As we did see in Juba and Darfur that children are present in the armed movements.

We say that Demobilization and Reintegration are two faces of the same coin and demobilization of child soldiers from armed groups will adversely be affected if we are not able to reintegrate these children. We were told in Juba that despite all the efforts made, they are not able to reintegrate all the child soldiers as a result of poverty, lack of families and inability to reintegrate the child soldier into the local communities and families. UNICEF will therefore work alongside the other UN agencies to reintegrate all these children.

On sexual violence, UNICEF remains an active partner in combating Gender-Based Violence at all levels through, for example, child-friendly spaces in camps, establishing child and women protection units within the police forces, training of the police force and social workers on improving of monitoring methods for all cases of GBV.

On the humanitarian side, the SRSR-CAAC mentioned that access to humanitarian assistance is an important aspect of the activities of all agencies. It is important to ensure that IDPs and host communities have access. The people we met, especially the nomads, said that humanitarian assistance does not reach them. UNICEF works with them especially on education and water and will continue to do so.

To us at the UNICEF, this was an important new visit that will enable us review our strategies especially in reintegration of the child soldier into families and the local communities.

Thank you and we are available to answer your questions.

Spokesperson Radhia: Thank you. The floor is now open for your questions.

Q: I have 4 questions:

What difference did you find during your visit between the facts on the ground and the report discussed at the Security Council? It is known that Sudan had expressed strong opposition to that past report.

The government complains of lack of funding for its DDR program. What assistance can the UN give to facilitate this process?

Does the United Nations have specific statistics on children recruited in armed movements and the Child Soldier in Sudan?

What impact would your report to the UN have should it contain negative issues?

SRSB-CAAC: I think the difference is not so much a difference in reality but what has happened in Sudan since August. There is I think greater acknowledgement and recognition at the official level of these issues. And we welcome that. As I said there is recognition of these issues and structures have been set in place but the situation on the ground does not seem to have improved. But we hope that if these structures are implemented effectively, that there will also be a difference on the ground.

With regard to funding of DDR etc. I am going to allow Rima to answer that.

On your third question, my sense is that we don't have numbers and it will be impossible to give you numbers for the whole of Sudan. But I think the figures given are that in southern Sudan 7,000 have been demobilized and 3,000 are yet to be demobilized.

What are the negative consequences? Of course there is Security Council Resolution 1612 that allows the Working Group in the Security Council to engage the government in a variety of ways if things, over a period of time, continue to be negative. I don't know whether this report or that report ... but there is a provision in the Security Council Resolution for targeted measures against parties if they fail to, especially, stop recruiting children. That is the issue on which targeted measures have been assigned.

Thank you.

Dep. Exec. Rep.: Child recruitment is a big problem which not only the UNICEF works on but, as I said, also the UNMIS, AMIS and a number of other UN agencies. We still need funding. Our representative is here with us. We could say also that it is not on reintegration and funding because we also have programs such as on education and protection. In Juba, for instance, we launched a year ago the "Back to School" program, opening of schools and providing them with health services. But the problem is that many communities, especially in Juba, can not access these education and health services. This is why the UNICEF, alongside other UN agencies, will focus on opening more schools in Juba and facilitating access to social services.

Spokesperson Radhia: Thank you very much. Just for your information, copies of the Security Council Resolution 1612 referred to by the SRSB-CAAC and Ms. Rima Salah is available in both the English and Arabic versions for you to go through.

Any more questions?

Q: Child recruitment is in the increase in Darfur and decreasing in southern Sudan. Can you clarify to what extent it is increasing in Darfur and decreasing in southern Sudan?

You said that the reintegration of children in southern Sudan is not going according to the UN need. Can you clarify that point and what are your comments on this?

SRSB-CAAC: With regard to Juba, I suppose because the armed conflict has stopped for the moment, we do not receive reports of recruitment of children and over the last year over 1,000 were actually demobilized in 2006.

With regards to Darfur, the monitors on the ground have told us that they feel that in the last few months child recruitment has increase ... though they have not given us any figures.

With regards to reintegration, I will let Rima deal with it at length but my sense is that an early school of reintegration which was to take children from the forces and then keep them in transit camps and then reintegrate them and this, they felt, was not very helpful. Now they reintegrate children into the communities immediately after tracing their families.

But even then just doing that is not enough unless you support the community to support them. So that is where we are at now. It is all a learning process. We are learning from other countries. There have been successful demobilizations in other countries and the UN system as a whole is trying to understand this process and to see how we can stop the remobilization of these children. So it is a learning process but we feel that a study in Juba ... in the cultural context of Juba ... will help us understand what the situation is like over there before we go on a massive reintegration planning.

Dep. Exec. Rep.: On reintegration, UNICEF has more than 20 programs on DDR and reintegration. We have some achievements and were presented with some when we were in Juba. But, however, even the Vice-President of the Government of Southern Sudan in Juba said that we have not been completely successful in really reintegrating children in their families and the communities.

Why? He mentioned some of the problems that are facing us. For example poverty, the fragile social fabric in the south in general and, also, the lack of access to social services – to education, to health services and to protection. And that is why we were so happy to have the independent voice of the SRSG-CAAC for advocacy to be with us there because this will give us the opportunity to review our strategies – all of us as the UN.

As I have always said, we have been maybe a little dogmatic in our reintegration strategy. So UNICEF, UNMIS, AMIS and other UN agencies are going to look again at the lessons learnt and the strategies of reintegration.

We are very happy that next week the SRSG-CAAC and I will be in a meeting in Paris and exactly to discuss those issues of reintegration.

Thank you.

Spokesperson Radhia: Are there any other questions from the press?

If not, I thank you all for coming and joining us for this meeting. I would extend my sincere thanks to the SRSG-CAAC and the Deputy Executive Director of UNICEF and we wish you all the best and have a safe trip.

Thank you very much.