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PRESS CONFERENCE

Below is a near verbatim transcript of the press conference by held on 16th August 2006 at the UNMIS Press Briefing Room, Ramsis Building.

Spokesperson Radhia: Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen and welcome to this press briefing. As we mentioned to you earlier, Mr. Kenro Oshidari, WFP Representative in Sudan, will start by briefing you on the activities of the WFP in Sudan and the difficulties and challenges it faces in meeting the needs that arise from the humanitarian crisis in Darfur and also in other parts of Sudan.

I will be available immediately after that to answer any questions you may have on the activities of United Nations Mission in Sudan. I will not give you a briefing today because I do not have enough material for a written briefing but I will be available for your questions.

But let us start with Mr. Kenro Oshidari. Please direct your questions first to him before he leaves us before I start answering your other questions later.

Thank you very much and without further ado, I leave the floor to Mr. Kenro Oshidari, the Representative of the World Food Program in Sudan.

Mr. Oshidari: Thank you very much. Thank you very much to UNMIS first of all for giving me this opportunity to speak on behalf of the WFP. Thank you very much for coming.

Today I wanted to basically talk about two concerns the WFP has at this moment. The first one being the security situation in Darfur which is seriously hampering WFP and also other humanitarian workers to deliver our assistance.

In July, the WFP was unable to reach some 470,000 people – that is close to half a million people – who require our food assistance and we were prepared to assist them but we were not able to deliver simply because of the security situation.

This is already a big increase from the previous month of June. In June we had 290,000 people whom we could not reach. So it is increasing month by month and this is a major

concern for us and especially that this is happening during the hunger season before the harvest and this is the season typically when malnutrition rates rise and also disease increase because of the rains. The WFP is seriously concerned of the well-being of these people who we can not reach.

At the same time, the WFP has over 700 staff in Darfur and I am very much concerned about the security of our staff. Our convoys and trucks that carry our food are under attack in many places and I must say that I am rather new in Sudan in my present position as Representative but I was here two years ago helping in our Darfur operations. At that time we were still struggling to bring in enough food and we were not reaching everybody. But that was our own logistical problem. But now that our logistics machinery is working well, the problem is insecurity that we could not reach. Two years ago, I remember, I used to go to various camps all on the road but now we are required to go to most places by helicopters.

The second issue I wanted to bring to your attention is about our resource situation. Thanks to our generous donors, we think we will be getting through this year 2006 with our minimum requirements. However, we already know that in January we will run out of food.

And why I have to make this kind of warning now is because it is a practical issue for food assistance from the time donors provide us with a pledge of their contributions, for us to get that food here, quite often from far away places like the US and from, say Port Sudan, all the way to Darfur, all this takes about 6 months. And this is why I have to now start to ask for resources for January onwards. And perhaps you would understand that food assistance is a very visible tangible assistance, something people need to have every day, day after day, especially you know in a camp kind of situation. So you can imagine that if this stops completely all of a sudden this can create a kind of unstable situation especially in places like camps. That is why the WFP needs to be a little bit aggressive in asking for resources that our – what we call – “pipeline of food” is always reasonable full.

What it means to us is that if we run out of food, then we simply can not afford to have a situation where we totally run out of food. Like we had to do in May this year, a few months before had to start cutting rations in order to simply stretch what we have into the future months. So if we do not get additional resources committed for the early parts of 2007 then we do have to start considering rations cuts as early as October. But of course this will be a last resort. We would not want to do this so this really needs to get to our donors’ and partners’ attention.

The one more complication we will have in the early part of 2007 is that usually in the first three months of the year, like we did this year, we need to preposition food in anticipation of the rainy season because if the rainy seasons come, the roads get cut off and our logistics network gets cut off. So in the first 3 months of 2007, not only do we need the food to distribute for the three months, we need additional four months to cover the rainy season and put this food in strategic locations where we lose access.

This year we have very much succeeded in doing this and the result is that we are not missing the distribution which we are supposed to be doing except for security reasons. And we also save a lot of costs because previously in Darfur or in the south we used to do a lot of these airdrops when access gets cut off and this is very expensive. By pre-positioning, we do save a lot of money and this is another reason that any delay will not only hamper our food delivery but will make our delivery much more expensive.

So these are basically the two main issues that I wanted to bring to your attention and I am happy to answer any of your questions.

Q & A

Q: Does the WFP have plans to request the Sudan government to avail food from the strategic reserves for their operations until the WFP receives the contributions from the donors?

Mr. Oshidari: Thank you for that question.

In general, we would like to encourage the government to provide us with resources. As you know, when we had the problem in May, the government did provide 20,000 tonnes. We very much appreciate that. And any additional contribution from the government will be most welcome.

Q: Could you tell us which areas is it that you have difficulties due to insecurity?

My second question; is it true that the WFP has stopped airdrops as a result of a rise in fuel prices?

Mr. Oshidari: This is an OCHA map [*available in the room*] but it does show the general insecure areas.

But generally speaking out of the 470,000 people we can not reach, the majority – about 350,000 - are in North Darfur and the remaining about 100,000 are divided into South and West Darfur. And in West Darfur it is mainly the northern part, the Zalengei area and then in the south it pretty much shows this area [*indicating on the map*], in particular in Buram and these other areas.

The question on the airdrops; we had stopped. We are not doing any airdrops in Darfur. We did airdrops in 2004 but because of this pre-positioning we did not have to do these airdrops.

In the south, about 20% of this year's assistance may be done in airdrops. But that is a big decrease and we are actually hoping that it is going to be only about 12% of our assistance in the south will be in airdrops. So it is a major achievement. The pre-positioning amount in the south was 39,000 tonnes pre-positioned in 2006.

Q: Which side of Darfur has the insecurity been worse since the peace deal and what exactly are the security risks which you are facing - is it because of the escalating in fighting or banditry and what do you think could be done about this?

Mr. Oshidari: From the information I have, we have lost 11 humanitarian workers in Darfur since the DPA. As I said in June we had no access to 290,000 people and now in July last month 470,000 people. So this number keeps on increasing and this is my key worry.

We all know that it is a combination of threat; it is the rebel factions fighting; banditry has certainly increased a lot and threats to our trucks and convoys are pretty much banditry but I think the attack on NGO vehicles and personnel are a mix as far as I can understand.

Q: What do you think should be done about it whether it is banditry or increased fighting?

Mr. Oshidari: Of course, from the United Nations side, I think we do require a lot of protection but this is of course being debated at the political level. At the local security authorities' , we hope that this is taken much more seriously.

And we do our best to inform all our movements – trucks, helicopters, aircraft - through the United Nations security system so that all those concerned, whether it is a rebel faction or the government side, are at least aware of our movements so that our vehicles, aircraft, and whatever are not being targeted. But I guess when it comes to banditry there is very little we can forewarn.

Q: The question still is what should be done? The African Union is there to protect humanitarian workers; that is part of their mandate. If they are not doing that, what then needs to be done?

Mr. Oshidari: As a humanitarian organization, we can only depend on security that is provided either by the local authority, the African Union at this point. And that there is not enough being done, that I can say, but the rest is going to become a political issue on who is going to provide that kind of protection.

Q: The recent rains have destroyed a lot of places and there is talk that there is going to be an increase in the flood this year compared to the 1988 floods. What measure have you, as the WFP, put forward to solve such kinds of problems may they occur?

Mr. Oshidari: We are aware of this flood threat and especially right now, because of the heavy rains in Ethiopia, the east side is in danger. For example, in Kassala, the river levels have come up to almost close to what it was in the 2003 flood. I heard that in the Red Sea, the border area, Tokar, has been flooded in certain areas.

WFP works, as you know, with out NGOs partners such as CARE, the Sudanese Red Crescent, in the case of the Red Sea it is the Oxfam in Tokar. So our partners allow accessing the situation specifically on the flood situation. So if there is a need for emergency assistance due to flood, the WFP is prepared to provide assistance.

Q: What kind of assistance are you preparing ahead of time for those people? And what are you doing for the people who have already been affected for instance in Amri where some houses have been destroyed?

Mr. Oshidari: We are waiting for assessment by these partners and if they come with the result that the WFP needs to provide assistance to so many people then we are prepared to assist.

We have not received a specific request for assistance from our partners nor from the government.

Q: I have just heard that the WFP, or rather donors are importing wheat and other rations which are foreign to the culture of the Darfurians. What are you doing about these rations like wheat, for instance, which is not used by the people of Darfur who use mainly millet and sorghum, for instance?

Mr. Oshidari: It is not so much policy. Of course our basic policy is to provide food that is most suitable and culturally acceptable to our beneficiaries. And even commodities from the US, we are bringing in sorghum but we do not have always enough quantity of the best commodity and the WFP does not always have the choice because some donors or most donors in fact give us in kind and some will give us in cash and then there we will have more flexibility.

In the past, we had purchased sorghum locally within Sudan and distributed it. We had to stop this for a while because the prices became so high in Sudan. But now I have got the good news that the price is coming down to more reasonable international market prices. So if we do get cash donations which usually come from donors in Europe or Japan, then we can consider buying the more acceptable commodity and within Sudan and will try to do this as much as possible and as much as we can.

Q: It is good news to hear that something is being pre-positioned for the rainy season. What can you tell us about food preparations for the returnees especially those in Kosti and other parts of the country?

Mr. Oshidari: Returnee assistance is part of our program. Presently our standard assistance is to provide 3 months worth of food for the returnee families and, depending on the timing of their return in connection of the agricultural season, we have the extended assistance over three months and this we will continue to do.

I think that one of the difficulties not just for the WFP but for the entire United Nations humanitarian community is that we can not account for all the spontaneous return. There are only very few that came back in an organized return so we have not been able to assist all the returnees but whenever they are identified it is our policy to assist them.

Q: You said that you have pre-positioned 39,000 tonnes in southern Sudan. Just at the end of June, there was a worry that there will be a problem in food security in many states like Bahr-el-Ghazal and so on. Will this quantity address the problem or is there still a problem?

The other thing is that nobody mentioned what the situation is like in states like the Blue Nile State.

Mr. Oshidari: WFP's assistance is of course to alleviate food insecurity and, in the south as you know, we have been providing assistance for many years during the war and are continuing to provide assistance. But I do believe that food assistance alone is not going to solve the food security problem in the south. It would require a much more developmental type of assistance to come in or otherwise just providing food assistance is not sustainable and so we are trying to team up with other agencies such as FAO and other NGO partners so that we can shift from providing only food security to doing more developmental assistance for example using food-for-work to increase agricultural production, road construction and maintenance, etc.

The difficult part of it, I think, is that the government is still rather limited in implementing such projects and also the south is a huge area and the NGO partners are not sufficient for us to work with them. But it is certainly our hope that we generally shift from what we used to provide, just bringing food, to something more developmental but we need partners to do that.

On your second point; Blue Nile, Abyei, the Transitional Areas, we are well-established there and I think the situation is basically the same kind of situation where we do need to bring in more developmental type of assistance but we have been continuing our assistance in those areas. If you need more information, I do have certain papers I can give you on information on those areas.

Spokesperson: If there are no more questions for Mr. Oshidari, I would like to thank Mr. Kenro Oshidari for gracing us with his presence today and convey this very helpful briefing that highlighted the major concerns and problems facing one of the most active agencies of the United Nations that is actually making a difference in the Sudan in providing relief in parts of Sudan facing the humanitarian crisis.

Thank you very much Mr. Oshidari and I hope we have you as a regular guest in these briefings.

Ladies and gentlemen, I am open for any questions you may have on UNMIS' activities.

Q: The African Union has issued a decision to dismiss all representatives of the holdout rebel groups from the Ceasefire committee and has given them 24 hours to leave. Does this not indicate a new war will start?

The IDPs complain of harassments by the SLM's Minnawi faction with government support to force them to return. There is an incidence that reportedly occurred in Kalma Camp when one IDP was killed as a result of such activities. What comment could United Nations Mission in Sudan give us on this?

Human Rights Watch issued a statement yesterday calling for sanctions on government officials for crimes committed on Darfur. What can you comment on this? Thank you.

Spokesperson : Thank you very much for the question. I will start with your first question concerning the issue of dismissal of the representatives of the holdout rebel groups from the ceasefire mechanisms; I can not want to say what will transpire as a result of that decision. This remains to be seen.

We hope that such developments as the one you indicated do not occur but I do not want to speculate on what will happen. The decision was a decision issued by the parties represented in the ceasefire committee and this is an issue that basically concerns them and they are the ones to decide.

What's important to us as the United Nations is to support any step that may consolidate the complete and expedited implementation of the DPA and, at the same time, encourage all efforts towards the improvement of the institutional mechanisms for monitoring security and ceasefire and that all parties honor their obligations.

This, in a nutshell, is my answer to your first question.

On your second, I am not aware of such attacks and if they do occur I do not know if they were targeted towards forcing IDPs to return to specific areas. In all, our position on this issue is very clear: the United Nations is against forced returns. Returns should first of all be based on the voluntary will of the returnee, secondly, be in compliance with relevant

provisions of International humanitarian Law and returnees must be availed the appropriate and good conditions for return to the areas they chose.

On the statement issued by the HRW, this is an international non-governmental organization and I do not want to comment on its statements. It can express whatever it wishes to express but the United Nations does not comment on statements issued by NGOs.

Q: There are reports that the government has barred the United Nations Mission in Sudan from going to Amri in northern Sudan. Can you comment on this?

Do you think that this DPA will be implemented while the majority of the rebel groups have not signed?

Spokesperson: Thank you very much but if you would allow me I would answer the question in Arabic. On the issue of Amri and the issue that you indicated, it is a very simple issue which is not as important as some may deem. It is true the United Nations Mission in Sudan did send a team the day before yesterday to that area based on a direct request submitted, not only to us but to all other voluntary agencies and the Red Cross and Crescent Society, by a group representing the people affected in the area. This group requested emergency humanitarian assistance to those affected.

As you are aware, the United Nations can not respond to whatever request before assessing the needs on the ground and this was the reason the United Nations Mission in Sudan team was dispatched.

What did happen is that the security organs in the place did not allow the team to pass and carry out the assessment. The team returned to Khartoum on the same day and we are now in contact with government officials here in Khartoum in order to determine and set another appointment for that team to carry out its assessment. This, in brief, is what happened.

I would also like to point out that there was no government decision on the issue and this is not a crisis as may be portrayed. It is just that the security officials in the area were of the view that the team should go in there. We had sent, I think last April, a team to the same place and there was no problem by then. We do not want to blow the issue out of proportion; it was a simple issue that can be overcome. Please take this into consideration.

On your question on the DPA, this question has been asked many times before and you are aware of our position on the issue. I would like to ask you to refer to what Mr. Pronk said in his last press briefing in answer to this question. He has answered that question in detail in more than one occasion. I would like to stop here on your question on the DPA.

Q: Still following up on the issue of child soldiers, do you have any report in hand concerning their situation.

Spokesperson: I don't have any report at hand concerning their situation for the time being. Whatever I had at the time I told you and I don't have any information on this for the time being.

Q: Recently there has been a sort of demonstration by people retrenched from civil service who came to UNMIS to present a memorandum. They came to the United Nations with the

view that it was a humanitarian issue. UNMIS refused to meet them. Why didn't the United Nations heed to their requests?

Spokesperson: who told you that the press refused to meet with them?

Q: its was reported in the press..

Spokesperson: The United Nations did not refuse to meet any person. The information you received was wrongly given you. The United Nations does not refuse audience to anyone. It is not the first time that newspapers report wrongly on an issue. So unless you were there yourself and somebody from UNMIS told you that the United Nations does not want to meet you then you can say what you said. The press is responsible for what it issues and I am not responsible for what the media reports. The media, whether Sudanese or not, is not scripture.

True there was a group of people who claimed that they were representing people dismissed in the past from the civil service and they came to present a grievance. They did not even reach United Nations Mission in Sudan offices and Sudanese security officials intervened and stopped them from reaching UNMIS' gate. We consider this measure from the security authorities as an issue that concerns Sudanese security authorities.

We did not refuse them audience and are ready to meet anybody even if they come in to present their grievances even on issues that do not fall within our mandate. For respect, we do not close our doors to anybody and if their complaint is not within our mandate, we only tell them so. Ethics within the United Nations demand that we do not close our doors before anyone.

Q: What is the position exactly in terms of the African Union-United Nations transition? It is known that there was an agreement following the African Union acceptance to extend its mandate. What will happen if the African Union runs out of fund by the end of September and does not renew its mandate?

Spokesperson: This is what is called the million dollar question. I do not know what will happen. The facts remain close to how you described it. The Secretary-General of the United Nations had proposed more than a scenario for United Nations operation in Darfur. But the background to all this is that a transition can happen when an understanding is reached with the government of Sudan to accept this transition.

The facts remain that to date, and according to daily reports from the press the latest of which came yesterday, President Bashir is still stands in rejection of such a transition.

The Secretary-General has repeated more than once and in more than one document and reports consultations with Sudanese officials and these have been echoed before by the Security Council delegation that came to Sudan when they said that the UN will not come to Sudan without the consent of the government of Sudan. This is how the situation stands to date.

The proposals of the Secretary General are before the Security Council. Sudanese government officials who have spoken so far on the issue, President el-Bashir and other high officials and they have expressed their rejection to this issue .This is what is happening.

To avoid any security lapses in Darfur, SG Kofi Annan asked Pdt. Denis Sassou-Nguesso, the current chairman of the AU when they met in Banjul to consider the possibility of extending the mandate of the AU mission until the end of this year. This matter concerns the AU, we just requested them and the President of the AU accepted this idea, but nothing has happened until now and we will see what will transpire. I am not in position to speculate on what is going to happen. Any thing might happen. Positions might change. The UN would like this position against the deployment of UN troops to change but we can not impose on anyone to change their positions.

Q: Last week you had a meeting with the head of the security service regarding the reports that petroleum companies have their own security forces and pose a threat to the people

To what have you arrived at in your previous meeting has been stated here? And also regarding the entrance of terrorist.

Spokesperson: With regard to the oil fields, there was a mix-up. This was a mix-up, if I am not mistaken, by the *AlAyaam* or *AlSudani* newspaper. We have never stated such a thing at any occasion and we have never had any contacts with the security officials in Khartoum regarding security forces on the southern oil fields.

Regarding terrorism I would like you to ask the Sudanese government because such a presence or not is a matter that concerns the State of Sudan and UNMIS does not have the role of seeing whether or not there is a terrorist presence in Sudan.

Q: Many people resort to the UN regarding their complaints and abuses and as I have stated in most of your answers that this is their own opinion.

Do you have the ability to compel the government to provide security in Darfur or in the south or do you just write reports?

Spokesperson: I couldn't understand your question, but I will try to answer it as far as I have understood it.

The UN is present in Darfur mainly for humanitarian considerations; we have no mandate to deal with the security file in Darfur. This mandate has been assigned to the AU. This is the reality we know, and you should be fully aware of it. We as the UN have been tasked from the first resolution regarding Darfur to present monthly reports on the developments in Darfur.

The Security Council took a number of measures and resolutions. It is the body in charge of assuring the implementation of these resolutions and you are aware of this. We are in direct contact with the Sudanese government, the rebel movements and the AU to urge them forwards if we feel that there is a shortcoming. We encourage them to undertake their responsibilities in the right manner. This is what the UN can do at the time being.

I couldn't understand the part about the people who were complaining to the UN, as I have answered you colleague, the doors of the UN are open to anyone but that does not mean that the UN will address all issues presented to it as some of them concern Sudanese internal issues that are exclusively under the jurisdiction of the Sudanese authorities. And we have no

mandate and no role and this is what we tell everyone who contacts us. We have never closed our doors to anyone seeking UN support, even if it's only to listen.

Q: The Sudan government has launched with the UN a plan as an alternative to maintain security and achieve peace in Darfur. What are the main elements of that plan?

Spokesperson: Ask the government of Sudan. We did receive it but it is not our document but that of the government of Sudan. Ask the government of Sudan.

Q: Following the visit to Khartoum of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, an agreement was reached with the government of Sudan and a mechanism was created. There were some problems regarding Darfur but of late there has been no news of what has become of the mechanism. Is it still operational?

Spokesperson: For a long time, the joint implementation mechanism has not met because there are a lot of developments that have happened. This mechanism as you know was established before even the first resolution on Darfur was adopted. More mechanisms were formed after this and so on.

I will inquire about the issue and find out whether the JIM ceases to exist all together or whether the stop is temporary.

Q: The situation is continuing to get worse everyday in Darfur while the government of Sudan continues to reject the deployment of UN troops there. If the government continues in its rejection up to next year, what then will the UN do?

Secondly; regarding the 51 names of the war criminals of Darfur, this issue has been silent. Have these people been forgiven or what?

Spokesperson: My answer is very short to both questions; on your first question, we did report to the Security Council and it is the Security Council who will answer this question: what will happen; what scenarios should be envisaged. We here at UNMIS only work on the basis of what we have and do not speculate on what we should be having later on. It is for the Security Council to answer that.

On your second question, direct it to the ICC. It is not for the UN, it is for the ICC. They are the ones who are, by virtue of Resolution 1593, seized of the matter and it is their issue and not an UNMIS or UN issue anymore.

Thank you very much and I hope to see you tomorrow at the press conference of the Special Rapporteur at 01:00p.m. not 12:30.