



UNMIS

Press Conference

28 March 2010

Near-verbatim Transcript of the Press Conference by Mr. Haile Menkerios, Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General in Sudan

Opening Remarks

Good afternoon and thank you all for coming.

This is my first press conference as Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) for Sudan and Head of UNMIS. Let me, therefore, take this opportunity to express my appreciation for your work and inform you that I intend to continue regular interactions with the press here to give updates on our work as a mission which is mandated to support and assist in the implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in letter and spirit. Before I say a few words, I would like to introduce my colleagues in the leadership of the mission on whom, as a new comer, I may call to help answer some specific questions you may want to raise.

1. Mr. Jasbir Lidder, DSRSG assisting me in the political sphere
2. Mr. George Charpentier, newly arrived DSRSG (R/C, H/C) and responsible for development and humanitarian issues;
3. Force Commander Lt Gen Thapa
4. Chief Electoral Assistance Division Mr. James Ray Kennedy
5. Acting head of Mission Support Ms. Landon
6. Chief of Public Information Office Mr. Khaled Mansour

This is probably the most crucial period in Sudan's history since its independence. The Sudanese people will be taking decisions which would impact not just their lives, but those of their future generations. The signing of the CPA was a landmark achievement that not only ended decades of civil war that cost millions of lives but also included principles that would bring lasting peace. The signatories have to be commended, thus far, for maintaining their commitment to its implementation, and managing the transition without a major breakdown for the last five years.

The next critical benchmark in CPA implementation is the conduct of national elections, preparations for which are underway. After so many years, all Sudanese, except perhaps a few prevented by ongoing conflict, will exercise their right to franchise and vote for candidates at different levels. The coming elections have two inseparable functions – first, they are an important and essential benchmark in the implementation of the CPA; and second, they are intended to usher in a democratic process in Sudan. I believe these two functions are inseparable and essential for long term stability in the country. The opening of the political space, even if some may feel not yet wide enough, and the discourse among Sudanese stakeholders generated by these elections is a healthy beginning which can and must lead to a widening of that space for broader and institutionalized public participation in the overall governance of the country.

In order to achieve the aforementioned goals, elections need to take place according to timelines subscribed by the CPA, and they have to be conducted in a conducive atmosphere to ensure a free and fair process. Ensuring that this happens is the responsibility of the Government of National Unity formed by the two signatory parties and the institutions established by that government, primarily the NEC. Thus, the election in all its aspects is a totally nationally owned process.

UNMIS is mandated to assist the government and the NEC in a manner that safeguards both these conditions and it is doing so. It is providing technical and logistical assistance to the National Election Commission (NEC) to enable a timely conduct of the elections, and advising and encouraging the NEC, the government and all other parties concerned to address concerns that may jeopardize their credibility.

UNMIS has, in cooperation with donors and UNDP, provided technical assistance through its Electoral Assistance Division since voter registration. It is currently engaged in providing logistical assistance particularly in the South, and technical advice on operational planning. UNMIS has also been involved in intensive election security training both in the North and South and we have trained almost 24,000 police officers, close to 17,000 in the north and over 7,000 in the South. While the responsibility to provide security during elections lies with the Governments of National Unity, and the Government of Southern Sudan in its area, our peacekeeping forces will also assist in enhancing security in areas where threats of armed confrontation may exist. Here I would also like to thank the donors and UNDP, without whose role and support our efforts to assist the authorities would remain wanting.

I wish to state very clearly that the United Nations does not have a monitoring role in these elections. Hence, I would like to ask your cooperation that our role in these elections is reflected accurately in your reporting. There are various independent observer groups, both international and national, accredited by the NEC that will perform monitoring functions and report accordingly. Recognizing the importance of the role of these monitors, we shall of course, assist and provide them logistical assistance in accordance with our mandate and within our capacity.

Finally, the upcoming elections are an important landmark in the process of peace consolidation and democratization in Sudan, and I encourage all Sudanese to participate widely by exercising their right to vote in a free and fair atmosphere, and the Government, the political parties concerned and the NEC, to ensure that they do so.

The next, and last, major benchmark in the implementation of the CPA, will be the referenda in South Sudan and Abyei, and UNMIS will assist in like manner to that of the elections.

Thank you and I now welcome questions that you may have regarding our role.

Q & A

AFP: You mentioned that the peacekeeping operations would be reinforced. I would like to know where and what are the hotspots, according to UNMIS

[Indiscernible question on Darfur]

Reuters: Do you agree with the Carter Center that there may have to be a delay in the elections due to some logistical problems?

Are you happy with UNDP's roles in selecting tenders for printing presidential ballots? I was wondering why UN short-listed a couple of companies for the printing of these ballots.

SRSR Haile Menkerios: I am not saying that there would be a reinforcement of our peacekeeping forces. I said that our peacekeeping troops will also assist in ensuring areas where threats of armed confrontation may exist; they could simply be the troops actually doing exactly what they are supposed to do. This could augment other efforts UNMIS would do in trying to carry out its mandate for civilian protection which is not necessarily just by the troops. It is by the work that is done through other sectors of the mission: Civil Affairs, Rule of Law and Protection of Civilians where they try to make aware and assist the legal institutions in this country to protect the rights of civilians. To augment that, our troops would assist in making sure that these conflicts do not create an atmosphere where people would not have the freedom to vote.

The major threat is where armed confrontations have existed so far and still exist. One is Darfur – particularly where the fighting is still continuing – and some areas in the border areas between the south and the north and other areas within the south as well. These are those areas with localised conflict between communities; conflicts generated between, in other words, some communities and the SPLA; conflicts that are generated by the campaigns that are going on. And we should do whatever we can to help resolve the causes of this and, at the same time, try to do what we can to see this violence mitigated, if not prevented, particularly in as much as it affects the freedom of the people to vote.

The other question was on if I agree with the Carter Center that delays may be necessary. I explained that our role is a technical role ... a role supporting the National Elections Commission (NEC) in the technical aspect. The decision whether to delay or not delay rests with the Commission.

Your question on whether I was happy with the UNDP's decision and desire to have the ballots printed in Sudan. UNDP advised on the tenders for the printing of these ballots. The decision to print the ballots in the National Printing Press here in Khartoum was taken by the NEC. It was not on the basis of advice or consultation in decision-making with the UNDP. It is solely the decision of the NEC.

Sudan Television: According to your statement, you do encourage or call for the conduct of the elections. Since UNMIS is concerned with the implementation of the CPA, does the mission have a role in terms of urging political forces, especially in the opposition parties to participate in the elections?

What would be the status of the CPA should the elections not take place because any one of the Parties to the CPA decide not to contest especially since the CPA says there would be no delay of the elections unless the two sides, through the NEC, call for such measures?

SRS: You did mention that UNMIS does not have any monitoring role in the elections and that its role is only to render technical and logistical support. Don't you think that the technical and logistical support UNMIS renders would be a waste in case the result of the elections comes out to be something that is not satisfying the expectations of the international community?

SRS Menkerios: Implementation of CPA is the basis of our mandate and our presence here. We and the UN have been invited by the two Parties. The mandate that was given by the United Nations Security Council is based on the agreement the two sides made, which is the CPA. Therefore, we would continue to assist the two parties to implement it without fail. If there is any digression from that, we would talk to the Parties that this is what they committed to and we shall wish it upon them to do meet their burden for us also to meet ours ... which is to assist them to implement it. So far, there has been no fundamental digression from the agreement by the two Parties. In fact they have continued to accept their commitment to the implementation of the CPA.

The CPA, however, is an agreement by the two Parties. And should the two Parties decide whether to have the elections on time or should they want to postpone them for a time, it is up to them. So far they haven't done so. I understand that the Presidency is going to meet on Tuesday to discuss the request that has been presented by the political parties for a postponement.

On the other question, yes, UNMIS does not have a role in monitoring the elections – not a formal role in monitoring the elections. But I did say before that the two parties have committed themselves ... it is in the CPA that the elections be freely and fairly held, that it be credible, and any discrepancy that we see by ourselves, we have brought to the two Parties and to the institutions that they have set up to follow up this elections process – that is the NEC. We have continued to advise, to encourage and to assist that measures be taken to ensure that a conducive atmosphere for free and fair elections exists and continues to do so.

Xinhua: You are the Representative of the UN Secretary-General who has expressed surprise over the calls for a delay of the polls in Sudan. Could this be interpreted that the UN does not support the calls for a delay of the polls especially in light of the fact that a delay may affect the conduct of the 2011 referenda?

SRS Menkerios: I have expressed, at the beginning the importance of this election both as an important benchmark in the implementation of the CPA which is to settle an age-old conflict between the north and south of Sudan peacefully and it has a timeframe for this process to be concluded by the referenda.

The Secretary-General expressed his wish that this process is not derailed but he is fully aware, fully supportive, of the fact that the elections must also be held credibly within a free and fair atmosphere. What he expressed is the issues raised by the opposition to make this process free and fair need to be addressed in a way that does not create an obstacle to the implementation of the CPA. It is not for him to decide, he has never said so one way or the other, he expressed his concerns that both aspects in these elections be addressed and carefully weighed.

Director of Public Information, Khaled Mansour: Thank you very much, Mr. Menkerios. Thank you all for coming. I would like to inform you that the Opening Remarks and a short biography of Mr. Menkerios are available at the table over there and that a full transcript of this press conference would be shortly sent to you.

Thank you.

ENDS
