

**NEAR VERBATIM TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRESS CONFERENCE HELD BY
SPECIAL ENVOY OF THE UN SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR THE
DARFUR JAN ELIASSON
KHARTOUM, UNMIS HQ
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UNMIS Spokesperson: Good evening everybody and thank you very much for coming. We have the pleasure that we have among us today his Excellency Mr. Jan Eliasson. He is conducting his first official visit to Sudan as the Special Envoy of the Secretary-general of the United Nations. Mr. Jan Eliasson was appointed as the Special Envoy of the Secretary General for Darfur crisis on 19 December 2006. Mr. Jan Eliasson has a long and rich career in diplomacy and he was the President of General Assembly at its 60th session and he was also the Minister of Foreign Affairs of his country, Sweden. More information on Mr. Jan Eliasson is available in his personal resume which is available both in English and Arabic for you. I now give the floor to Mr. Eliasson so he could brief you. So without further ado, I give the floor to the Mr. Jan Eliasson.

Special Envoy Jan Eliasson: Thank you very much and I am glad to meet you all, and I hope that we will have more contacts during my work in Sudan. I will try to work with you with as much transparency as possible. We all know the world's attention to the Darfur situation and I hope that we can work together. I have now come back to Africa. I used to be Under-Secretary General in the UN, and I was involved in the operations in Somalia and Sudan in 1992, 1993 and 1994. One of the most important challenges for me at that time was to bring about the humanitarian corridor into Southern Sudan, Operation Lifeline in Sudan that is, and we reached some very important agreements in 2003 on opening the humanitarian corridor in South Sudan. The person with whom I dealt with at that time was President Bashir. So I return 15 years later and there is now another item on the agenda and I hope we could reach positive results to this very difficult problem. That is the issue of Darfur which has been playing a very important role not only to the people of Darfur and the people of Sudan, but also has become a regional problem as well as an international problem.

The fact that I am here is the sign of the engagement of the International Community. I am the Special Envoy of the Secretary General Ban-Ki-moon. I was asked by Secretary-General Kofi Annan in consultation with Ban-Ki-moon and also in consultations with the parties. There were phone calls with the President el-Bashir. There were conversations also with President Konare of the AU. As we all know, the Darfur issue is very much in the hands of the AU be it in terms of peacekeeping or other aspects of the implementation of the DPA and we are here from UN to assist the AU in its efforts. It is commendable that the AU has taken the very difficult task of peacekeeping. What led to my coming here was the meeting in Addis Ababa on 16th November, where there was also an agreement -and Tayé Zerihoun (UNMIS Head)- knows more about this more than anyone in this room- an agreement for us to work together politically.

If I want to describe my function most simply I would say that I would modestly say that I am the equivalent of Salim Ahmed Salim in the UN. So there will be a Salim -

Eliasson team. I have worked very closely with Salim before. Some of you might be very interested to know that I was the Diplomatic Advisor to Prime Minister Palma who was a great friend of Africa, a legacy that he left with me. Salim and I have worked together for many years. I have been in frequent and regular contact with him. I spoke to him before I went to New York where we met together with Ban-Ki-Moon. I talked to him today about the outcome of my conversations (with Sudanese officials). We plan to work together hand in hand. I also took the symbolic step of going to Addis Ababa after my consultations in New York with the Secretary-General, where I got my instructions. I decided to go to Addis Ababa before I go to Khartoum, and I met with President Konaré and with Commissioner Djinnit who is following the situation in Sudan very closely as we all know.

I now have a three and a half day visit in Sudan and I will go to Darfur tomorrow, to el-Fashir. Here in Khartoum I have met President el-Bashir today. I have met with Lam Akol the Foreign Minister. I have met with Mr. Mustafa Osman Ismail and I met with Mr. Khalifa. I met with Mr. Minni Minawi. I met with Salah Gosh and I met with Nafie Ali Nafie.

I had fruitful and substantive conversations in a positive spirit. I think we can say we have established a good working relationship, and I was very warmly received by the Sudanese Government. The trust given to Salim and Salim and me is important in order to continue our task, and our task is mainly, and I stress this, is mainly to explore the road to a political process.

We have been so much involved in peacekeeping and peacekeeping discussions. We have talked about the UN role in stage 1, stage 2 (of UN support to AMIS) and stage 3 (hybrid UN-AU mission) and that discussion is continuing. But I go back to a very basic point and that is there has to be a peace to keep. For this to happen, we have now to try -all those concerned, the AU, the UN and also individual members States who could influence the situation- to encourage the political process. This of course as well as the degree and the extent of the steps we would be able to make towards a political solution will depend in the end on the political will of the parties, the Government of Sudan and the different groups; signatories or non-signatories. It will also depend ultimately on the people of Sudan.

If we don't reach that goal, if we don't make your best, strongest efforts, honest efforts to achieve this goal, then we run the risk of a Darfur tragedy with the Darfur nightmare continuing year after year.

I have been assured during this visit, and I'm sure I will be assured by the non-signatories in Darfur, that there is no military solution. There is no military solution for either side. This has been strongly confirmed during my visit.

As I start my mediation role, I am fully aware of the degree of difficulties I will have to meet. I will meet representatives of the other side (DPA non-signatories) both inside and outside Darfur. I will now work together with Salim Ahmed Salim to try to move forward with the talks with the non-signatories and I will go North Darfur tomorrow and I hope I will meet with some of them in el-Fashir. We (Jan Eliasson and Salim Ahmed Salim) also hope to be able to meet some of them (non-signatories) outside (of Sudan). I will also join the Secretary General in Addis Ababa at the

Summit meeting of the AU to be held at the end of January. The Secretary-General asked me to join him when I talked to him today.

This will be a good opportunity to meet relevant interlocutors in this process. Then I will take it from there with Salim and see where we go, whether to the area or outside to have meetings.

In the meantime, Radhia made a reference to my background as President of the General Assembly and representing its 192 Nations (members States). I do still claim to be representing all 192 Nations as the Secretary-General's Envoy. I also think that my recent experience as President of the General Assembly up until September this year will allow me to build on the contacts that I have developed during my presidency, not least with the UNSC members. Before I left New York, I had very thorough discussions with the Permanent Members of the Security Council and I was assured that this mission has the full support of the P5 and the Security Council as a whole. I have felt similar confirmation of support from neighboring States, relevant to the situation in Darfur .

There is very much at stake. We will make an honest attempt, in all humility of course, as I know the situation is extremely difficult. But there is so much at stake for the people of Sudan. I have been a great friend for this people since I started my 15 years work on the North-South issues.

Darfur conflict has deep ramifications, with differences between ethnical and religious groups being exploited to divide people. Sudan is a country with 9 neighbors with tremendous potential and of course resources and it is very important I think for Africa and for the UN that we succeed.

If we can do this (assist in resolving the Darfur crisis) in a joint AU-UN effort, then we could send the message that these Organizations can work hand in hand and complement each other. I will my very best, that's what I can say. Thank you very much

Spokesperson: Thank you very much, Mr. Eliasson. I do apologize because I forgot to introduce the Head of the Mission Mr. Tayé Zerihoun. He is the Head of the United Nation Mission in Sudan, so I do welcome him also to this press briefing. The floor is open for questions, and please do speak to the microphone and state the name of the newspaper or the news agency you represent. I have Khartoum Monitor, Juba Post and then Reuters.

Q: I have only one question. It is really good hearing that you are here only for the Darfur crisis. It has been going for long the issue of Darfur, the UN and so many people have been trying at least to end the crisis of Darfur, but until this moment it is still not stable. What are some of the mechanisms that the UN really believes that the mission is going to give solution to the Darfur crisis? Thank you very much.

UN SG Envoy Jan Eliasson: Thank you very much. It is the perfect first question; because I asked myself, how can you best see or prove that there is a political will to move towards a political solution? The answer to this in my view is: when there is a tangible and visible reduction of the level of violence. If we now can see a reduction

of the level of violence, and conscious and strong efforts made by all sides to reduce that level of violence, to bring about a cessation of hostilities and a monitoring of a ceasefire; if we can see such trends, we would have then so many gains. We will have less human suffering. We will have less pressure on the humanitarian agencies. We will have better access. We will have less fear among the population.

And here I have come to my point about the relationship to the political process. We would be able to create conditions to a political process. Salim Ahmed Salim and I could then give the process some credibility and say that it is moving in the right direction. If the fighting remains at the same level or intensifies, then it will be difficult to reach a political settlement and the political process would be much more difficult. So I have pleaded with the leadership here that there is such a reduction of violence. There are bombardments, there is support to different groups, there is an ongoing flow of arms . I will of course put the same requirements to the non-signatories.

But I would say, the best way to prove that there is a real will to find a political solution is to see a reduction of violence, and here of course everybody has a responsibility and I will be conveying this message to signatories and non-signatories in Darfur.

Q: The first question is, about the cessation of hostilities that was negotiated by US Governor Bill Richardson yesterday. What do you know about this? The second question is could you clarify the Addis Ababa agreements in light of phase three of the hybrid operations, Mr. Kofi Annan has referred to this as a force of up to 10,000 UN troops going to Darfur, but the Khartoum Government has a very different line , only heavy UN support. Can you clarify what did the Government has said to you about this? Thank you very much.

UN SG Envoy Jan Eliasson: On the cessation of hostilities, I was informed about it by Governor Bill Richardson before he saw the press –I had a conversation with him before he saw President Bashir. I don't know to what degree the non-signatories in Darfur are fully committed to this. It is not completely clear. He (Richardson) has met with some (non-signatories). I can only say that I welcome of course -and the UN would welcome- any effort to reduce the level of violence. So I would just hope that this would be the step towards that objective, that it would be now visible also in the field. We will be able to see whether this is a commitment from all concerned, a commitment which would have concrete effect on the ground. I always use this as a yardstick: success is measured by to the extent of which commitments are translated to reality on the ground.

The subject has not come up in my conversation with the representatives of Sudan, not even today. So, let us just hope that it will be translated on the ground. In that case, it would be completely in line with the position I have taken and the request I have made to see reduction of violence.

On the other issue, I have not spoken so much about the peacekeeping operation. My job is mainly in the diplomatic sphere, in the political sphere, and as I said, for me the job is to see that we have a peace to keep. If there is a peace to keep, then I think

things will be much simpler than they are today. I think it is good that the UN and the African Union are now cooperating also in peacekeeping. It's a new territory in which we are venturing. It is difficult for both the UN and the African Union to find the right forms for this cooperation.

President Bashir wrote a letter in answer to Secretary-General Kofi Annan's letter of December. It was a positive letter where he indicated that he was in favor of this cooperation. We have different stages of this cooperation. The first and the second stages (Light Support Package and Heavy Support Package) are underway. On the third one (hybrid UN-AU operation), we will see. I don't think that I can say much about that now. Of course there will be a need for an international presence. In the event of negative scenarios, there will be certainly a need for a larger presence, and in a positive scenario, in case we have a ceasefire, there's a need to monitor it.

Here in Khartoum and during my travels to the area I will not deal with peacekeeping, I will not deal so much with that issue. I would hope that through progress in the political field, these issues will be less complicated than they are today. Would you like to add something Tayé?

Head of Mission Tayé-Brook Zerihoun : Just to reiterate what is known publicly, that during the discussions held in Abuja, the Government had expressed some reservations about some aspects of step three, the hybrid mission, and those relate one to the size of the force and to the command and control structure as well as to the appointment of some of the senior leadership for this hybrid mission. On the size of the force, the position taken was that it was a technical decision and not a political decision, and the initial estimates about the size were based on the joint assessment by the African Union and the UN and that was done in June. Much has changed on the ground since and I think it is reasonable to assume that another assessment will be needed. At any rate, it is not a political decision, but the assumption for the transition to a UN operation which was made on the basis of the realities on the ground when that assessment was made, was that a force of a size of 17,000 is needed. Thank you.

Spokesperson: Thank you both and now AlRai AlAam.

Q:The Government is of the opinion that with Addis Ababa understanding, and the Presidential statement of the Security Council, 1706 Resolution has been bypassed. So you agree with the government on this perception?

My second question: as you since you are focusing on the political process and conducting political talks between the government and the non signatory groups, based upon information can you give us a definite time for starting the political talks and the capital that will host the talks?

Special Envoy Jan Eliasson: The resolutions of the UNSC are very important always, and they remain valid of course. But let me tell you that my mandate is based on the DPA, the Abuja Agreement of May last year. It is based on the Addis Declaration of the 16th of December of last year and it is based on the decision in Abuja on the 30th of November. To this I add of course the exchange of letters between the Secretary-General and the AU Commission Chairman Konaré and

President Bashir and the exchange of letters of the formal basis of cooperation with Dr. Salim and President Konaré.

So we look for the future. We hope that these bases will be strong bases to lay the foundation for the political process.

If we come to an agreement which leads to serious consequences for the political process and a peacekeeping operation, I'm sure that the Security Council will look to this issue again and formulate its decisions in a way that corresponds to the reality of that time.

The date for the talks I can not yet establish. I talked to Salim today, and I talked to the Secretary General. I think the next step will be the Addis Ababa meeting in the end of January.

But we will try to keep the momentum. We need to give momentum to this process. We will try to meet the non-signatories as soon as possible in the best possible way. We haven't decided yet, it's far too early to say. It has to be worked out with the African Union and also of course with the people who are supposed to come to the meeting. Then of course in the next stage, I will try to have a meeting with signatories and non-signatories. The aim is to have negotiations without conditions from both sides, but that comes of course at a later stage. I would hope that we will not celebrate the first year anniversary of the DPA without progress in the political field. The people of Darfur and people of Sudan have been suffering for far too long.

Spokesperson: Any further question? The last question from Sudan Radio Service.

Q: Just a clarification; you told us that you were warmly welcomed by the government officials including the President himself. Did they make any statement of commitment that they are committed to resolve the Darfur crises? Any tangible statement from at least the five top senior officials of the Government of Sudan including the President?

Special Envoy Jan Eliasson: Well, I'm sure that you will have contacts with the Sudanese Government officials themselves. It is not for me to go into details on how they formulate decisions, but I can only repeat that I was told by practically everybody that there is no military solution; this also goes for President Bashir. I was told that it has to be a political process and that it has to tackle the root causes of this problem, and that the political process is to be encouraged, and that there is support for the African Union and UN efforts.

I have asked that there will be a reduction of the level of violence, and I have received some answers on this that could mean progress in some areas, but it is not for me to expand on them, and I would hope that we will see some reduction of violence as a result also of our discussions today.

This is of course a matter that will be equally brought up strongly with the people and the signatories and non-signatories in Darfur.

Thank you very much for your attention and I hope that we would meet again and I will be making myself available to you whenever I can.

Spokesperson:

Thank you very much Mr. Eliasson and thank you all for coming in this late evening.