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(By Public Information Office)

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IN THE NEWS TODAY:

- **United Nations**
 - [Today's stories on this section could be found on the separate SMMR supplement]
- **CPA**
 - SSDF says 4,000 so far been killed as a result of the forced disarmament in southern Sudan as UN, GoNU look on in silence
- **DPA/Darfur**
 - African Union Konaré to visit Sudan's Darfur Tuesday
- **Eastern Sudan**
 - Khartoum, eastern rebels agree to cease hostilities
- **Other Developments**
 - Zoellick resigns from US State Department

HIGHLIGHTS:

CPA

SSDF says 4,000 so far been killed as a result of the forced disarmament in southern Sudan as UN, GoNU look on in silence

(*AlRai AlAam* – 20th June. **Khartoum**) SSDF Spokesperson Mohamed Chol says more than 4,000 people have been killed so far as a result of the forced disarmament exercise being carried out in southern Sudan.

He said some SPLA and SSDF soldiers have lost their lives in such exercises in different parts of southern Sudan while the United Nations and the Government of National Unity look on in silence.

Chol who was briefing a unit of the DDR Committee at the Commission for Popular and National Forces described the situation in the south as volcanic and said that the SPLA must stop this killing and displacement of innocent citizens.

He said it is difficult to disarm these armed groups in an atmosphere of insecurity and lack of trust in the south which he said was a lot safer before the CPA.

The SSDF spokesperson called for coordination with the SPLA in surveying and mapping the target groups and warned that the SPLM should not dream of having a pat on the back alone if it does not show commitment to the CPA to human rights and to carrying out the disarmament in the manner agreed upon. He warned that the SSDF will not remain silent as the SPLM continues to crumple the CPA.

He further pointed out that there is a flaw in the implementation of the CPA and wondered why the SPLA would enlist 20,000 more recruits if it was committed to the implementation of the peace deal.

SSDF leader Gordon Koung also echoed these concerns and has accused the SPLM of violating the CPA.

He said that the SPLM has taken the south back to the days of war by killing and the vulnerable.

He called upon all relevant parties to bear their full responsibilities towards putting a stop to the disarmament and added, “The President of the Republic must know that the situation is all jumbled up in the south”.

DPA/Darfur

African Union Konaré to visit Sudan’s Darfur Tuesday

(*ST* – 19th June. **Khartoum**) The Chairperson of the African Union Commission, Alpha Oumar Konaré, leading a high- level delegation, will pay a working visit to Darfur from 20 to 22 June, 2006.

The visit, which follows the signature of the Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA) in Abuja last May and the meeting with the members of UN Security Council (UNSC) in Addis Ababa, will be an opportunity for the Chairperson to assess the current situation on the ground, to review appropriate ways of implementing the DPA.

Konaré will also call on rebel groups that have not signed the DPA to adhere to the peace process.

Konaré will exchange points of view with the AMIS leadership on the practical aspects of the transition to a UN peacekeeping mission, said the spokesperson of the African Union in Khartoum Nouredine Mezni.

Consideration of the security and humanitarian situation in Darfur as well as the visit of IDP's camps are also on the programme.

Konaré will also meet representatives of NGO's operating in Darfur to discuss ways and means for enhancing the security and welfare of the populations living in these camps.

Meetings with Representatives of Civil Society will be organized with the view to secure the widest possible adhesion to the Darfur Peace Agreement.

The head of the AU executive body will seize the opportunity to pay tribute to the AMIS Troops for the work accomplished in maintaining peace and security in Darfur and for the daily support provided to the civilian populations in particular women and children.

Eastern Sudan

Khartoum, eastern rebels agree to cease hostilities

(*Reuters/ST* – 19th June. **Asmara**) Sudan's government and eastern rebels signed a pact to cease hostilities and agreed a framework for future talks on Monday to end a long-simmering insurgency in the remote but economically important region.

Long-delayed talks between the Khartoum government and the eastern rebels began last week in neighbouring Eritrea.

A written translation of the declaration was not immediately available, but would guide future negotiations, Yemane Gebreab, head of Political Affairs at Eritrea's ruling party, the People's Front for Democracy and Justice, said.

Speaking after the brief signing ceremony in the Eritrean capital Asmara, Yemane described the talks as positive, serious, and friendly.

"They signed a declaration of principles to guide negotiations between the two sides as well as an agreement on creating a conducive environment towards peace which includes a cessation of hostilities as well as a military stand down," he told Reuters.

"We will start discussions on the agenda for the substantive issues, starting tomorrow."

Sudan's east, like other regions in Sudan, complains of neglect by central government. The arid area has some of the highest malnutrition rates in the country.

The low-level insurgency in eastern Sudan seems to have escalated since January last year, when police opened fire on a peaceful protest in Port Sudan, the country's main port, killing and injuring dozens of residents.

Mutual suspicions had delayed the talks for at least five months, with the Eastern Front — including the Beja Congress and Rashaida Free Lions — insisting on Eritrean mediation.

Other Developments

Zoellick resigns from US State Department

(*AP/ST* 19th June. **Washington**) Deputy Secretary of State Robert Zoellick, the department's No. 2 official, is resigning, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice announced Monday.

Rice praised Zoellick's "tireless work ethic," and said he had served as her "alter ego" in the department. She did not announce a replacement.

"Our nation is stronger and safer because of your work," Rice said at a State Department announcement.

"I appreciate your confidence and friendship," Zoellick replied.

Zoellick, who served six years in the Bush administration, said he would join the Wall Street investment house Goldman Sachs Group Inc.

In his resignation letter, dated June 15, Zoellick, 52, did not say why he was leaving. A former U.S. trade representative, Zoellick reportedly wanted to be promoted to treasury secretary to replace departing secretary John Snow, but President Bush nominated Goldman Sachs executive Henry Paulson instead.

"I'm pleased to have built a first-rate team, offer counsel on a number of initiatives and backup the secretary," Zoellick said at the news briefing. "I've accomplished what I set out to do, and it's time to step down."

White House spokesman Tony Snow said Zoellick had "been wanting to pursue options in the private sector for some time and now he's going to do it."

"Bob Zoellick is a guy who is highly competent and has served a number of presidents but you also know at a certain juncture in an administration some people who have worked hard for a long time, need to go back and pursue other opportunities."

Zoellick is expected to leave the State Department in July, officials said.

He has been the administration's leading diplomat handling the volatile situation in Sudan's western Darfur region, where at least 180,000 have died since villagers began an uprising in 2003.

Zoellick has also been the State Department's chief diplomat dealing with China.

"He has been one of my closest and most valued advisers on every single international issue," Rice said.

Although Zoellick was not widely known beyond Washington, Rice made a joking reference to one instance when Zoellick's photo was printed around the world. During a visit last year to a Chinese panda preserve, the severe, often demanding Zoellick was photographed nuzzling a panda cub and looking delighted.

Rice said she had given Zoellick tough assignments that required him to travel often and fill in for her in Washington, "and occasionally even hug a panda."