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Special Media Monitoring Report on the activities of the Joint Technical Assessment Mission and related issues

25th June 2006

(By UNMIS Public Information Office)

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Contents:

- Joint Technical Assessment Mission says the situation in Darfur calls for international assistance.
- U.N., African Union warn of Darfur fights
- Annan Will Meet Sudanese Leader Next Week

Highlights:

Joint Technical Assessment Mission says the situation in Darfur calls for international assistance.

(The local press – 23rd June. Khartoum) The joint Technical Assessment Team of the United Nations and the African Union have held on to the position that there is a need for the international community to keep the peace in Darfur.

African Union Commissioner Alpha Oumar Konaré assured the government however that the African Union will not allow for a transition to a United Nations operation without the consent of the Sudan government.

On the other hand, the TAM has described the situation in Darfur as bad but has left the final decision for a transition or not to the government and the political leaders at the United Nations and the African Union that is supposed to hold an emergency meeting in The Gambia next week.

Undersecretary-General Guehenno draws a bleak picture of the situation in Darfur. At a press conference in Khartoum yesterday, the Undersecretary-General for peacekeeping operations said that the situation is deteriorating and that there is a growing risk of fragmentation and violence as the rainy season is drawing to a close. He added that this may call for the deployment of international forces to Darfur despite government rejection to a transition.

The Undersecretary-General said also that there will be continued discussions with the government on this issue in order to dispel the misunderstandings that the government has on these troops which they see as an invading force.

The United Nations Undersecretary-General said he had lengthy talks with President Bashir following the President's statement rejecting United Nations troop deployment to Darfur and added that the United Nations tried to explain its position as it seeks to assist the people of Darfur where many have been displaced by the conflict.

"I was not happy to hear those official statements," he adds, "and there is no reason for us not to continue in our duties."

The Undersecretary-General said that the TAM sees a "window of opportunity in Darfur" that opens hopes for peace and this, he adds, needs to be utilized through strengthening the African Union and seeking a role for the United Nations based on the tasks in Darfur.

He said he was pleased however to see that the government accepts the peace-keeping and humanitarian aid provided by the mission.

Mr. Guehenno said that the mission presented flexible proposals to the government to accept a United Nations mission in Darfur as a measure needed to meet the challenges on

the ground but added that the final decision for a transition rests on the African leaders at the African Union, on the United Nations and, before that, on the Government of National Unity.

The United Nations Undersecretary-General for Peace-keeping Operations is due to present his report to the United Nations Secretary-General who in turn will report to the Security Council ahead of a final decision on the issue.

On his part, African Union Commissioner Said Djinnit said that the TAM had a series of long and intensive discussions with government officials and other stake-holders but the government, according to Commissioner Djinnit, has rejected any transition from the African Union to a United Nations operation in Darfur and prepares instead that the African Union be strengthened.

Meanwhile African Union Commissioner Alpha Oumar Konaré has reassured the Sudan government that the African Union will not allow a transition to take place without the consent of the Sudan government.

President Bashir received Commissioner Konaré yesterday following the latter's two-day tour of Darfur. The discussions between the two focused on the appropriate measures for the implementation of the Darfur Peace Agreement

Following his meeting with President Bashir, Commissioner Konaré said he requested the Sudanese president to disarm the outlaw groups in the region in order for the citizens to live peacefully and deter future violence. He said also that their discussions also highlighted the situation on the ground in Darfur and the efforts being exerted to turn peace into a reality.

Konaré reiterated the African Union's commitments to bring stability in Darfur and prevent any new conflict.

Konaré urged holdout groups to be fully committed to the ceasefire agreement and not to obstruct the activities of international and humanitarian organizations.

He expressed hopes that the holdout groups will join the DPA in the long run.

On the other hand, the Foreign Minister of the Republic of South Africa says Sudan has not fully closed discussions on the issue of a possible transition of the African Union to a United Nations operation in Darfur but Khartoum has to be consulted in order to calm its fears.

She said that Sudan's major complaint was that the United Nations consulted everybody except the Sudan government.

Speaking to Reuters in Johannesburg, RSA, she pointed out that the United Nations consulted the African Union and all other parties but ignored Khartoum and Khartoum believes this is not right.

In another development, an African Union official who opted anonymity told Reuters that African leaders meeting in the Gambia on the 27th of this month will seek to convince Sudan to accept international troops into Darfur.

U.N., African Union warn of Darfur fights

(AP – 22nd June. **Khartoum**) The 7,000-strong African Union peacekeeping force in Darfur requires urgent and effective support from the United Nations to prevent a new round of fighting later this year, AU and U.N. officials said Thursday.

"There is a risk of major violence," the U.N. peacekeeping chief, Jean-Marie Guehenno, said at the end of a two-week assessment mission to Sudan's western Darfur region. "The risk of fragmentation, of a new cycle of violence, after the rainy season is quite real, very real."

Guehenno, and the African Union's peace commissioner, Said Djinnit, were mandated by the U.N. Security Council to study the prospects for replacing the AU peacekeeping mission in Darfur by a larger, better equipped UN force. They held hundreds of meetings in the western Sudan region.

The AU troops in Darfur have been unable to halt the killing and looting that has left about 200,000 people dead and displaced another 2 million since the conflict began 2003.

The AU force needs "a more robust mandate, but also more robust support from the United Nations," Djinnit said at a news conference with Guehenno.

The one rebel leader in Darfur who signed a May 5 peace accord, Minni Minnawi, warned last week that the agreement will collapse if U.N. peacekeepers are not deployed to implement it.

But Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir has ruled out any U.N. deployment in Darfur. He said Tuesday he would personally lead the "resistance" if U.N. troops came to Darfur, accusing them of being neo-colonialists.

"The U.N. is not in the business of colonizing any country," Guehenno said Thursday.

The Security Council has said it hopes to see the U.N. force take over from the AU by early 2007, but Guehenno stressed the peacekeepers would not come to Darfur without Khartoum's approval.

"As long as the government of Sudan does not accept a (U.N.) mission, there will not be one. It's as simple as that," he said.

U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan said Thursday he hoped al-Bashir would change his mind.

"The talks continue, and I hope ultimately we will be able to convince them to accept a U.N. force," Annan said in Geneva.

Guehenno said the immediate priority was to support the AU troops in Darfur.

"The idea of U.N. peacekeepers supporting an African Union mission would be something that has never been done before," he said.

The May 5 peace agreement had created "a window of opportunity for peace" in Darfur, but more needed to be done, Guehenno said.

While clashes between pro-government forces and rebels have largely ceased since the May 5 agreement, fighting among the rebel factions has increased, he said.

There have also been clashes between members of rival tribes, the Fur and Zaghawa, in North Darfur, the U.N. said in a statement Thursday.

Minnawi, the commander of the rebel Sudan Liberation Movement who signed the accord, comes from the Zaghawa. The leader of a breakaway faction of the SLM, AbdulWahid el-Nur, comes from the Fur tribe and rejected the agreement.

Annan Will Meet Sudanese Leader Next Week

(*AP Online* – 23rd June. **UN**) United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan said Friday he plans to meet Sudan's president at an African Union summit next week to press for a U.N. takeover of peacekeeping in conflict-wracked Darfur despite the Khartoum government's opposition.

The African Union has said it cannot handle a long-term peacekeeping operation and wants its 7,000-strong force replaced by U.N. peacekeepers. The U.N. has envisioned taking over in early 2007 and wants to beef up the poorly equipped AU force in the interim but the handover is contingent on approval by the Sudanese government.

"We have not got the agreement of the Sudanese government yet, but the dialogue continues, and I look forward to seeing (al-Bashir) again at the African Union summit in Banjul (Gambia) next week," Annan said. "I hope we will be able to pursue the discussion, not only with me, but with other African leaders."

The Sudanese government wants AU troops to remain, arguing that U.N. peacekeepers would represent a foreign occupation and intervention, and remind the country of its colonial past.

"I have tried to get across the message that we are coming in to help the Sudanese authorities and the people of Sudan, the people in Darfur, and quite honestly, if they had been protected, the question of U.N. deployment would not be necessary," Annan said.

Annan also said pressure must be exerted on two key rebel groups in Darfur that have refused to sign the May 5 peace agreement between the government and the main rebel group.