



UNAMIS

UNITED NATIONS ADVANCE MISSION IN THE SUDAN

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Office of the Spokesperson

PRESS BRIEFING

Following is a near-verbatim transcript of today's weekly briefing (12:30PM) by Radhia Achouri, Spokesperson for the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Sudan:

Good afternoon,

First, I have an announcement: UNAMIS is celebrating today World AIDS Day. On this occasion, the Mission is organizing a series of activities from 2 PM to 4 PM around the theme "Women- Girls and HIV/AIDS". The programme includes video shows, prevention awareness, presentations and live testimonies and experiences with the virus with people living with HIV/AIDS, poems readings, drama and role play. You are all welcome to attend the event which will be held in the Grand Holiday Villa, in the ground floor.

SRSG/Political

- The Special Representative, will be leaving Geneva on 3 December, where he represented the United Nations on the occasion of the launch of the 2005 Wok Plan for Sudan, and will be heading to Nairobi where he will be attending a meeting of the Joint Assessment Mission (JAM) held in the context of the preparation of Oslo Donors Conference. The Donors Conference is scheduled to take place after the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement between the Government and SPLM/A. From Nairobi, he will be heading back to Khartoum in the evening of December the 3rd.
- The SRSG will be heading back to Nairobi in the evening of December the 5th or the morning of December the 6th to discuss the establishment of a trust fund to support development efforts including in southern Sudan.
- The SRSG will me meeting with the Minister of Foreign Affairs within the framework of the Joint Implementation Mechanism (JIM) on Sunday 5 December. You would recall that the UN partners from the donor countries as well as Ambassadors and representatives of other African and Arab Countries and the AU participate in the JIM meetings. The forthcoming meeting of the JIM is expected to focus on the review of the compliance of the Government of the Sudan with the terms of the Joint Communiqué signed by the Government of the Sudan and the UN Secretary-General on 3 July 2004 and the relevant Security Council resolutions
- The monthly report of the Secretary-General on Darfur will be presented to the Security Council by the beginning of the second week of December. The date of the Security Council meeting on the report has not been fixed yet.

-The Abuja peace process is set to resume on 9 Dec. in Abuja between GoS and two rebel groups, the SLM/A and the JEM. This round of talks, "Abuja III," will discuss the political, social and economic aspects of the conflict. UNAMIS will be participating in the meeting as an observer to support the AU mediation during the talks.

Darfur: latest developments:

North Darfur: The security situation in the state has remained relatively calm during the past two days although fighting was reported in villages approximately 15 km North of Tawilla on 27 November, where reportedly a group of armed tribesmen attacked and looted Debebat, Kunja and two other villages around Kossa hill. 15 civilians were reportedly killed and six others were reportedly injured from these attacks. An AU team is investigating these incidents.

- Reports suggest that on 30 November, the village of Serefaya (between Tawilla and Korma, Korma being an SLA stronghold) was attacked by armed tribesmen. IDPs from Tawilla had taken refuge in the village prior to the attack. This attack is one of series of attacks by armed tribesmen on civilians and IDPs following the SLA attack on Tawila town on 22 November.

-UNMAS is conducting an assessment of the presence of unexploded ordinance (UXO) in Tawilla and the immediate surrounding areas prior to the resumption of UN operations in these locations. The El Fasher-Tawilla road and the road to Zam Zam and Thabit have been cleared for UN operations. An assessment of other major routes in the State is ongoing with a view to resuming wider UN operations.

South Darfur: On 27 November, eight commercial trucks were stopped by uniformed men on camels 25 km from Nyala on the road to Duma. Four trucks were reportedly looted.

West Darfur: The areas beyond Sirba continue to be labeled 'no go' areas for UN agencies. The Seleah and Jebel Moon areas reportedly remain particularly tense. There are reports of an attack on 26 November by NMRD on villages in Jabal Moon area. Cattle was looted (300 cows). No casualties have been reported. There are also conflicting reports about clashes in the Gencina area between GoS, tribal militia and JEM forces. The AU has apparently not been notified of any of these alleged attacks and clashes reported by the parties themselves and which have not been verified yet by any independent sources.

Protection Issues:

North Darfur: Agencies are gradually returning to Tawilla and report that between 2,000 and 3,000 IDPs have returned to the town (against a previous population of 40,000 in Tawilla and IDPs in surrounding camps) and that a small section of the market has re-opened. In addition, some men are reportedly visiting the town during the day to check on their belongings and to conduct some business before returning back to the areas of refuge at night. The remainder of the previous population is reported to have fled to villages within a 15-20 km radius of Tawilla and, according to preliminary reports, some IDPs were reportedly tending to lands in those locations. Another small number of IDPs was also spotted on the road to El Fasher. Initial assessments also indicate that some of the IDPs might have fled to Gallab camp. The approximately 3,500 persons that were located in Dali camp, situated 5 km to the south of Tawilla, have reportedly returned back to the location. The deployment of around 100 GoS forces and the presence of the AU in Tawilla as well as the withdrawal of GoS and SLA troops may encourage further Tawilla residents and IDPs to return to the town.

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South Darfur: On 28 Nov., two interagency assessment teams travelled to Kassara El Buram, a site proposed by GoS for the relocation of some of the Kalma IDPs and plan to conduct further assessments to check on the appropriateness of the site.

West Darfur: Armed tribesmen reportedly attacked Gidad village, approximately 5 km from Habilla, on 27 Nov., reportedly killing one person and looting some food items.

-An INGO reports that during the course of the week three villages in Talabeiba, near Masteri were reportedly burnt.

-Agencies in Geneina report that local GoS authorities have reiterated calls for IDPs to return to their villages of origin.

Food/NFIs

North Darfur: FAO reports that it has received over 1,900 kg of okra, tomato and watermelon seeds to be distributed to conflict affected populations.

South Darfur: The national NGO, Sudan Development Organization (SUDO), reports that it has completed Non Food Items (NFI) distributions (including blankets, cooking utensil and soap) to approximately 3,000 beneficiaries in Ishma a location approximately 50 km east of Nyala.

West Darfur: The national WFP implementing partner, Sudanese Red Crescent Society (SRCS), completed distribution of food in Kubum and Um Labassa on 28 Nov. The Italian NGO, CESVI, reports that it has completed distribution of FAO agricultural kits in the villages of Daura, Singita and Guba.

Health

South Darfur: The national NGO, SUDO reports that they completed the construction of a health clinic in Ishma and has commenced the construction of a nutritional center. Cordaid reports that it has conducted blanket feeding to 5,000 IDPs in and around Al Daein. Norwegian Church Aid (NCA) and Caritas report that they continue to provide health services in villages in and around the Ta'asha area.

Sustainable Returns Team

Recently, authorities in Aweil town, Bahr El Ghazal have demolished 83 households in the William Ajel camp. 1,193 IDPs were to be relocated to Koum, 5 km south of Aweil, an area without sufficient clean water resources, shelter or services. The IDPs from the William Ajel camp have decided to move and stay in an open space near Maliak IDP camp, which is also without services.

That's all I have for you today. Any questions?

Q: There has been mentioning in earlier reports of attacks by government and janjaweed militias on (inaudible) and (inaudible) villages. Do you have any information on that? Have

there been any confirmed reports that the government has been flying Antinov planes on Darfur or any confirmed reports of bombardment on Tawilla town since the (inaudible)?

Spokesperson:

Could you indicate to me the reports that you had on the first question – what's the area?

Q: (inelligible) and (inelligible) villages in North Darfur.

A: Well, I do not have any report on any attacks in North Darfur in particular except the ones that I reported to you today. The fresh reports that we had are mainly on West Darfur and I reported them to you. However I will check on that particular information. As for the use by the government of Antinov planes and confirmation of bombing, to date we do not have any official confirmation by the African Union of any bombing including the one that was reported in Tawilla. However we are aware of all those testimonies from eye-witnesses including some NGOs who are on the ground stating that they witnessed actual bombing by the government but we are still waiting for the final word by the African Union which is still investigating the case. They are on the ground, they are looking at the craters and they will come back to us with a final report checking what caused that crater – was it an actual bombing or something else like mortar or whatever – but we are waiting for that particular report.

Q: I just wanted to ask about the Janjaweed. Does the UN consider there are actually Janjaweed leaders who are identified and has the government arrested or identified any of these Janjaweed?

A: If you mean by your question if the UN received a list of Janjaweed leaders who have been arrested by the government - I have to say the following: we received in the last meeting. I can recall, of the JIM (the Joint Implementation Mechanism) a paper from the government in which they gave us a couple of names of what they called Janjaweed. One of them they said is a Janjaweed leader and another person a Janjaweed member. And in that paper they indicated what kind of measures they took -- they brought both to trial and justice is taking its course they said. However, we never received a comprehensive list listing Janjaweed members as of to date.

Q: Does the United Nations actually consider there are Janjaweed leaders; that there are leaders of the Janjaweed?

A: I can only remind everybody of the terms in the Security Council resolutions that asked the Government to bring to justice the Jandjaweed leaders to justice. That's the stand of the United Nations and we stand by the terms of the Security Council resolutions.

Q: You talked of some 2,000, 3,000 people going back to their homes in Tawilla. Can we say things are getting better and better? Or is it for a few days only?

A: Everything being relative, I will say the following: in Tawilla town *per se*, the town, things seem to be returning to normalcy. However in the areas surrounding Tawilla things are not as calm as they should be. I just reported to you, although we have not confirmed them as yet, but we have some reported attacks including the ones that took place on the 27th - you have it in the brief of points. In the area surrounding Tawilla there are attacks by armed tribesmen targeting the civilian population and IDPs who fled the fighting between the government and

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the SLA following the SLA attack on Tawilla town on the 22 November. So the picture is quite mixed; in Tawilla town itself things are returning to normalcy, in the surrounding areas of Tawilla some areas are stable and some others are not but we are following this up very closely and we are not really able to give you a very clear picture saying that yes the whole area is fine or the area is not fine.

Q: Okay to say that things are better?

A: Tawilla town, yes. I will not make a general statement saying that the whole area surrounding Tawilla is better. We can not generalize or make a generalized statement saying that the whole area surrounding Tawilla is going back to normalcy.

Q: When you are talking of the armed tribesmen, are we talking of Arab tribesmen – are we talking of the Janjaweed? Well about the events of Tawilla (inaudible).

A: When they say armed tribesmen, we do not have particularly any information that would say these are actual Janjaweed or they are something else. As for their ethnicity, I do not have more clear indication. However, there is an assumption, a strong one I would say, that these armed tribesmen are retaliating after the attacks by the SLA. So the assumption is that they are not of an African origin and they could have an affiliation or certain sympathy towards the government of Sudan.

As for your second question on Bahr-el-ghazal, unfortunately that's the only thing that we have for today, of course I will give you a general answer. In general terms, we are very concerned about steps being made on relocation of IDPs to other areas and we have an understanding with the government of the Sudan that relocation has to be proceeded with on the same basis like return. Which means that first of all relocation should be on a voluntary basis. Two: the IDPs can not be returned or relocated unless the area in which they are supposed to be relocated is considered suitable, particularly in terms of safety and security. This is the understanding that we have with the government. I did not as yet hear anything coming from the government explaining why they proceeded the way they did but we are following up on this issue and we will keep you posted on any developments. But that's our stand on the relocation issues.

Q: On the issue of the bombing or not bombing Tawilla, you see if the African Union is going to (inaudible). Is the UN asking the African Union to get on with (inaudible)

A: The United Nations of course works closely with the African Union. We know that the African Union is seized with the matter. The African Union is the one with the mandate to decide if what happened was a bombing or not because the issue is quite important in it terms of its implications for the government of Sudan and its obligations as laid out in the agreements it has with the rebels and the Security Council resolutions and also for the mandate of the African Union. So they are proceeding, within their terms of reference, to the ground to figure out what happened exactly in that particular area. They are already on the ground investigating. I do not know how long it takes to establish from a crater if it was a bomb from a plane or something else, but I do believe that the African Union is proceeding on that matter and we expect to receive a final word from them.

Q: Do you think that the AU is going to bury the whole thing about the bombing for political reasons?

A: I do not believe so. the African Union is proceeding in absolute neutrality and it is delivering its mandate independently from any of the parties. And it's credibility and integrity, as far as we are concerned, is not questionable.

Q: To date, the African Union has not completed deployment of its forces. Is the United Nations in contact with the African Union to expedite the deployment of those troops and does that commitment still stand?

A: The African Union has according to my information something like approximately around one thousand monitors already on the ground. We are hoping that the deployment be completed in the course the forthcoming two months. However I do not have any particular indication on the timing for a completion of the deployment.

On the African Union and the UN consultation on this matter; well we are proceeding to it on regular basis and we have regular meetings, weekly meetings, with them. These regular contacts are taking place with the African Union here in Khartoum, and besides that we have regular contacts on the phone and otherwise with the African Union here in Khartoum and in Addis. We are continuing in our efforts to press on the countries who promised to provide the African Union with the requisite support for it to be deployed expeditiously.

Q: Is that the reason for the delaying – is it money?

A: Mainly that is the reason of course because there is no point in deploying the troops if you don't have the equipment. As you know, the African Union does not have the capacity to provide the equipment and the understanding was that the African Union would provide the troops and other countries which are in the position to do so will provide the African Union with all equipment necessary for a rapid and also an effective deployment.

Q: The question was on the decision of the Government of Sudan to expel the two heads of Oxfam and Save the Children (UK) and its subsequent decision to suspend it's decision. The question specifically is what are the positions of the two NGOs and what is the role of the United Nations to resolve this issue if any and what kind of steps were taken by the UN in that direction.

A: Yes the United Nations had a role to play in terms of helping resolve the crisis between the two NGOs and the Government of the Sudan and we had a lot of contacts at the level of the Special Representative and other levels to convince the Government of Sudan to possible reverse its decision. We expressed our concerns over the decision of the Government of Sudan to expel the two NGOs particularly given the vital role played by those two NGOs and the fact that these NGOs come here and sometimes put a price to their contributions including that incident that happened in 10 October when two workers from Save the Children (UK) died in the landmine incident. These NGOs, all NGOs, are vital for United Nations operations in terms of humanitarian assistance. Most of them reach the ground actually before the United Nations itself and we can not do our work without all other partners from the NGO

community and we do hope that Government of Sudan will reverse its decision in a definite manner so we could proceed with our work as usual.

Q: The SLA says Tawilla had been used in the past for distributing weapons by the government to Arab tribesmen, Janjaweed (inaudible) groups who want to use, according to some sources here in Khartoum even two planes have been sent in the last few weeks to El-Fasher and then the weapons were distributed from Tawilla. I am just wondering if there is any evidence for that and if you can explain why Tawilla had been attacked.

You also mentioned the existence of this new rebel group. I was just wondering if there is any information on which areas do they control, where their authorities come from and if they are strong enough one day to claim a seat in Abuja.

A: On your first question: we heard the same report and we keep receiving so many reports from so many different parties including the allegations or the information from SLA on what the government might have been doing according to them. Again we do not have any particular information corroborating the SLA reporting. That again is an issue for the Joint Commission on Ceasefire that holds its meetings in N'djamena regularly. I will check that again further but to my knowledge I don't have anything in particular on that but I will try to check from the African Union on the particular report because I would imagine that this particular issue has been raised in N'djamena -- the latest meeting of the Joint Commission in N'djamena --. On the rebel movements, NMRD and others, we started hearing about them -- AlShahama and NMRD in particular -- a couple of months ago. We do not have a real clear picture on the agenda of these two groups, we know more or less that NMRD defected from the Justice and Equality Movement and that the new rebel groups are not part to any agreements and they made it very clear that they are not bound by any of the agreements that were signed by the other rebel groups with the government of Sudan. We are very concerned about the emergence of these two groups in particular because we don't know them, we don't know what they are about and we don't know their agenda and we do believe these two groups would make, is making actually, the situation more complex than it is already. First: because they are clashing obviously with the government. Two: because they are clashing sometimes with the JEM. So their emergence is adding to the confusion in terms of reading the picture in Darfur.

On whether they will be eventually part of the existing framework of the Abuja negotiations, I do not have an answer for you, sir. I think that this issue has to be followed further. But if this group, particularly NMRD which is making the news more than the others, if it continues to be active in the area I do believe that it is in the interest of anybody that this group and any other group would join a table of negotiations. Otherwise we end up with a situation whereby you have the phenomenon of war-lordship all over the place and the situation will be completely out of control. But we are following the situation, trying to understand better what this and the other groups possibly are about and to see what kind of framework should be provided so we could contain these two groups and make them join into a negotiation process eventually.

A: We here about the SLA activities in Darfur and this new movement but not much about the JEM. Are they active on the ground? And if so where?

Q: I missed one of your questions, sir, on why SLA attacked Tawilla and I will come back to the question on the JEM.

Tawilla area is a strategic location. If you get hold of Tawilla you can basically secure control over the North Darfur and El-Fasher roads and the SLA is reported to have some of strongholds in North Darfur. And we kept hearing lots of reports that the SLA has its eyes on Al Fasher and that they kept threatening that they are going to take North Darfur and El-Fasher in particular. So it's something that has to be looked at from a strategic point of view - securing land and so on and so forth and expanding control. However, I have to reiterate again that, based on the agreement that they signed too in Abuja, the SLA is not supposed to do so. They are supposed to stay where they are. They are not supposed to take land by force - none of the parties is supposed to take land by force and expand it's control. Whereby we are saying that the SLA in that particular incident was the faulty party because it went out of its way to violate an agreement that they freshly signed in Abuja.

Now on the BBC question on the JEM, the JEM is in general terms I would say less active on the ground compared to the SLA. However they are active in some areas, and I just reported to you although we could not confirm as yet, in West Darfur they are having some activities. JEM does not have the same capacity on operational basis on the ground compared to SLA and they are less active than the SLA and are more operational in West Darfur than in the rest of the Darfur region. In general terms however, JEM and the SLA are "associates" and they operate together.

A: Have they broken the Abuja agreements yet?

Q: I would say yes. But that I will have to confirm based on the report of the Joint Commission on the Ceasefire.

I will take a last question because we have to vacate this room which will be used for this event on HIV/AIDS to which you are all invited.

Thank you and see you next Wednesday.