



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:

POLITICAL**Security Council**

The Security Council held yesterday informal consultations on the situation in the Sudan. The Council heard a briefing on the security situation in Darfur and the recent escalation of violence in the region. The Council members approved a press statement that was pronounced on their behalf by the president of the Council, in which they: 1/ condemned violations of the ceasefire, as well as the shooting at the African Union helicopter and called on the parties to abide by the ceasefire accord and by the security humanitarian protocols they signed in Abuja; 2/ reiterated their full support to the African Union efforts and to the Union mission in Darfur and reminded all parties of their obligations to fully support and cooperate with the African Union mission in Darfur; 3/ called on both parties when they resume their talks in January 2005 in Abuja to show the required political will in order to achieve a political agreement without delay; 4/ expressed their readiness to consider a full range of options to exercise pressure on the parties to ensure full compliance with United Nations Security Council resolutions; 5/ deplored the targeting of Save the Children workers and reiterated the Security Council call to all parties to allow unimpeded access of humanitarian assistance and invites the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs to increase its efforts and activities in Darfur. **Copies of the press statement by the President of the Security Council are available for you.**

Secretary-General

In his year-end press conference held yesterday at the UN Headquarters in New York, the United Nations Secretary-General stated that *"the North-South peace accord must be concluded, and the momentum used to promote peace throughout the country. In Darfur, the security situation is deteriorating. The government and the rebels must cease attacks and abide by their commitments. We need improved security and protection for the internally displaced in Darfur, and more humanitarian aid. The deployment of the African Union monitors, troops and police needs to be speeded up, and the international community must give the commission all possible assistance. And, ultimately, the Security Council must assume its responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security"*.

SRSB:

In a press statement issued yesterday (copies were distributed to you and are also available), the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Sudan, Jan Pronk, expressed his regret over the decision that Save the Children-UK had to take to cease their operations in the three Darfur states and he reiterated his strong condemnation of all attacks which target humanitarian workers.

The INGO Save the Children-UK announced yesterday as you all know that it was ceasing its operations in all three Darfur states due to the tragic deaths of four of its staff members in two separate incidents over the past two months, and a series of “extremely serious additional security incidents.” **Copies of the press statement of SC/UK are also available in English and Arabic versions.**

Joint Implementation Mechanism

A meeting of the JIM was convened in Khartoum on 19 December. The meeting focused mainly on the security situation in Darfur. The UN and partners expressed concern about the scale and intensity of the recent fighting in Darfur and its implications for the peace talks in Abuja. In their view, the GoS “road clearing” operation had gone beyond its stated objective in imperiling the safety of civilians and resulting in the further displacement of IDPs. Minister Ismail, while pointing out that the GoS was left with no choice but to respond militarily, nevertheless reiterated the following commitments:

- a) GoS agrees to an immediate cessation of hostilities and expresses its full commitment to the ceasefire agreement. The international community, including the AU and the UN, should convey the message to rebel movements and seek reciprocal commitments from them. Agreeing to cease hostilities did not mean that GoS would not retaliate if attacked. GoS in fact would take preemptive defensive measures if it deemed that it was under eminent threat of attack.
- b) Political negotiations, rather than military force, are the only means to settling the conflict.
- c) GoS would agree to a separation and withdrawal of forces by both parties to the 8 April 2003 position.
- d) GoS would continue to provide protection on major roads. It would also continue to seek the assistance of AU and explore with it the possibility of the AU taking over the task.

Abuja talks

The third round of Abuja talks ended yesterday without tangible results. The talks will resume sometime in January 2005. On 19 December, President Obasanjo met with the Libyan envoy to the Abuja talks, Mr. Ali Treiky, to discuss the Libyan initiative to break the impasse. This initiative contained the following elements: a) an immediate cessation of hostilities by both sides; b) a commitment to return to the ceasefire lines of 8 April 2004; c) the opening of all roads; d) a commitment by the parties to find a peaceful settlement of the conflict. To enable the parties identify and agree on the lines of 8 April, a ‘verification group’ would be formed, composed of Libya, Nigeria, Chad, the AU, and the parties. While the GoS accepted the Libyan initiative, the rebels have not.

SECURITY ISSUES:

Since the JIM meeting of 19 December, no major military activity by either side has been reported in Darfur, although the situation remains tense in some areas. However, isolated security incidents and banditry were reported in both North and South Darfur. On 18 December, the SLA had attacked an oil field in the Sherif area, close to Kordofan. During the last 48 hours, Janjaweed activities were reported near El Fasher, and a WFP truck was looted in the same area. The AU is currently investigating reports of a firing on its reconnaissance helicopter on 20 December. The AU has reportedly suspended its air monitoring operations in south Darfur until its investigation unveils what has happened.

North Darfur:

- The attack on Birka, a location between El Fasher and Korma, by suspected Arab militias on 17 Dec., reportedly resulted in the killing of five persons and in the injury of another five persons. UN staff is monitoring the situation and an assessment of the El Fasher – Korma road will be made in the next few days to clear the area for UN travel.

South Darfur:

-Following reports that a substantial number of people were injured during fighting in Muhajarija and Labado on 17 and 18 December, several medical NGOs traveled to those areas on 19 December to provide assistance to the wounded persons. On 20 December, another medical team traveled to the location and treated 32 injured people, 12 of them seriously wounded. All these cases were as a result of fighting on 17 and 18 Dec. During this visit, the team estimated that only 10 to 20% of the original IDP population of 25,000 and approximately 50% of the original 15,000 resident remained in the surrounding area. The rest of the population is believed to have partly scattered to nearby areas.

-The United Nations is concerned about where-about of some 20,000-30,000 people who have been displaced by the recent fighting in Labado and Mahajiriya. The medical team that traveled on 19 December to Labado was unable to assess the situation as fighting was still ongoing the same day in the area. According to the team, only about 20 women on donkeys and a few men were visible at the location. The team that traveled to Muhajarihja on 20 December interviewed an IDP who indicated that most of the Labado population was traveling towards Muhajarihja and Sharia. An international agency was denied permission to visit Sharia on 20 December by GoS authorities.

-An interagency team traveled to Marla on 20 December and found that out of the 8,000 people registered by Samaritan's Purse only about 1,500 were left. The persons interviewed stated that they did not feel safe in Marla and reported that following attacks on Marla on 17 and 18 December and subsequent GoS control of the area, soldiers were harassing them and reported incidents of rapes, killings and arbitrary arrests. The team failed to locate the missing population except for about 40 persons that were hiding in the bushes due to rumors of a pending attack.

West Darfur: The security situation remains relatively calm, however, agencies report a tense situation between nomads and settled farmers around Masteri.

Protection Issues:

North Darfur:

-New IDPs continue to arrive into Abu Shouk camp. During the past week, approximately 1,100 new IDPs are estimated to have arrived from Birka, Magla, and Serafaya. These IDPs reportedly fled these areas when Birka was attacked on 17 Dec. The group also reported that they were attacked and looted of some of their livestock on their way to Abu Shouk. The newly arrived IDPs reported that more displaced people were heading towards Abu Shouk.

-The IDPs that fled from the fighting in Kuma area last week have reportedly moved to Mellit. More are expected to be arriving soon. ICRC has conducted an assessment of the Mellit-Malha area and plans to commence food distribution to these locations early next year.

South Darfur:

-In addition to displacements caused by the recent attacks on Labado, Marla, Muhujarija and surrounding areas, approximately 350 families are reported to have arrived in Biliel camp, displaced from the 11 Dec. attack on Ishma. A national NGO reports that the IDPs and the resident population in and around Ishma including Um Zahegfa and Borgei might have all fled the area. However, there is currently no national or international presence in these areas to verify these claims. The national NGO was denied access to these areas.

-Agencies report large influx into Kalma camp especially since the 10th of December as a result of the recent insecurity. With the new arrival of approximately 1000 families in the past ten days, the total number of IDPs in Kalama camp is presently more than 120,000.

West Darfur: Agencies report that an unknown number of rapes have occurred in Arow village, located south of Mornei camp. Five women were reportedly attacked south of the camp by suspected nomadic tribesmen. However, only one of the women came forward to be treated at the MSF clinic.

Food/NFIs

South Darfur: WFP reports that food distribution has been seriously disrupted by ongoing insecurity. On 18 December, the SLA detained a total of 13 trucks. Five of them were released on the same day but the rest were kept until 21 Dec. Although none of the food was looted, the disruption affected food distribution in Marla and Sania Fundu. Food assistance has also been halted in Labado, Al Juruf, Muhujarija, Khor Abechi, Manawashi, Mershing, Rokero and Gildo Labado.

General food distribution has been completed in Adwa and has commenced in Edd El Fursan.

West Darfur: Interventions in the sanitation sectors in the two camps on the periphery of Zalengi, Hessa Hissa and Hamedia are ongoing.

Health

North Darfur: According to WHO, three polio cases were reported in North Darfur, as part of the 79 cases of polio that have been reported in the whole of Sudan. As a response, a new polio vaccination campaign is scheduled to commence on 10 Jan. in North Darfur.

Q: *(Indiscernible but question is on whether the UNSG will accept an invitation ostensibly addressed to him for a second visit to Darfur).*

A delegation speaking in the name of the JEM requested that the Darfur issue be taken before the Security Council and accused the AU of failure in the talks. How do you look at this issue?

A: We are not aware of any particular invitation or request addressed to the Secretary General to visit Darfur since the session of the Council was closed. We are not aware of such a thing. However if the Secretary General, in his own judgment, considers it appropriate or necessary to undertake another visit to Sudan, he will definitely make such a decision – but it is his decision to make. As soon as we get any information on this we will keep you posted.

On the issue of the criticism addressed by the JEM towards the AU attributing responsibility of the failure of the Abuja talks to the AU, the UN reiterates full trust and confidence in the AU. We just did it via the Security Council that voiced its strong support to the AU – be it its mediation, be it its deployment and all the undertakings that they are having in Darfur. The Secretary General himself did the same and we keep repeating the same thing: we have full confidence in the ability of the AU to lead this process. If there is a failure, the parties have to take responsibility for it because so far they did not show at this round of Abuja talks, any willingness, political or otherwise, to engage in serious talks and they have to bear responsibility for it. Peace is theirs to make. The AU is there to facilitate and did what it could do. Well, if the parties are not cooperating and they are not trying to broker the peace deal they are supposed to broker well that's their responsibility and not the AU's.

Q: The first question was the call by the Secretary General to the international community to support the AU in its deployment in Darfur and to provide all that is required for it to be deployed. What is the UN's assessment on the response by the international community?

What does the UN think about what role Libya can play in the negotiations taking place between the government and the two rebel groups of Darfur. What comments does the UN have on Libyan efforts to move the talks to Libya and oversee the negotiations process?

A: For the first question, at the time-being, we know that the AU has an overall number of its troops of 1,030 people currently on the ground. As far as assistance is concerned, we know that it is not really the issue and is not really what explains the delay in the deployment. This delay could actually be resulting from other considerations. The AU would be the one to ask about those issues because they know better. We however do know that even with its limited capacity, the AU has so far managed to really make a difference on the ground. Particularly in the area of Kebkabiya where the AU is deployed at full strength. It did make a huge difference.

Generally speaking, if the situation is not what it is supposed to be and regardless of the AU monitors deployed, it has to do with the fact that the parties are not committed and do not respect their obligations as signed by them in their agreements – the humanitarian ceasefire agreement in N'Djamena and also the protocols they signed in Abuja on ninth November 2004. Nevertheless, for any other details, please get in touch with the AU. They will provide you with the details of the situation relating to the delayed deployment.

On the second question on Libya, we are not in a position to comment on what would be the importance of the role of any particular country on any particular process. The question should first be asked to the parties that are negotiating who will be the ones to decide eventually who they want as a lead for the negotiations process. It is also a decision for the AU to decide since Libya is a member of the AU. It is up to the AU to decide whom to associate in the mediation efforts being undertaken by the AU as a whole.

As for the UN *per se*, what is important for us is that whatever effort is being undertaken, we would like it to lead, hopefully, to tangible results. We would like it to lead to the parties sitting on the table, tackling the real substantial issues and starting to really map up a peaceful negotiated solution for the issues that are the root causes of the ongoing situation in Darfur.

Q: Atrocities continue to be committed in Darfur; agreements continue to be dishonored; Abuja talks failed; my question is: Is it not the time to state that the AU in particular and the UN in general has failed to bring a positive environment in the region of Darfur?

My second question is: the UN Secretary General recently emphasized that tough measures will be considered if the two parties – that is the government and the rebels – fail to bring peace to the region. He emphasized much on the measures considered. What are the measures to be considered? Because previous Security Council resolutions had threatened Sudan with sanctions. So what are the measures to be considered?

A: You put a very gloomy picture of the situation actually. Let me come again to this business of failure. Nobody is failing – not the UN, not the AU. If there is failure, it is a failure of the leadership that is claiming it is representing the people of the Sudan and the people of Darfur. These are the ones ultimately responsible for securing the country, securing the environment for their people to have a decent life.

So far the UN role in Darfur is mainly humanitarian. The other thing that we are doing is on a diplomatic arena. We are trying to put pressure and to put as much weight as possible, speaking on behalf of the international community, to bring the parties to a better predisposition towards an actual political settlement. The AU did not fail. Nobody else did. The AU is trying and it is too early to judge the overall performance of that party or the other. The AU, as I said, is not deployed at full strength. The parties did not cooperate fully with the AU and made its task even more difficult but even with that, the AU managed to resolve lots of issues and are making a difference. Maybe it is not really that obvious for somebody who is looking at the bigger picture, but they are actually making a difference. We expect them to make a bigger difference once they are deployed at fuller strength. Again and again I need to stress the point that no third party, no matter what it is, no matter how strong it is in resources, capacity and so on, can make a difference if the parties are still choosing the way of the gun. Nobody can make that difference. The AU is not expecting to reverse the security situation if people are still playing it tit-for-tat, continuously violating the ceasefire and not trying to play by the rules of the game that they signed. The AU came here at the request of the parties. The AU Ceasefire Commission was established by virtue of agreements with the parties and the parties agreed to report on any claims of any grievances they have to the AUCFC which will play its role in resolving these issues. That is not happening. What is happening is that the parties – for instance one of them will think: “okay the government did this or that”, the SLA for instance will claim that the government did this or that without even going through the normal course they agreed upon and go through the mechanisms, they just go somewhere and attack. It is the same situation with the government. That is not a tenable situation for the AU for nobody can work normally and do what they are supposed to do if

this is the attitude of the parties who are acting on the ground. This is the situation. So, sir, nobody is failing. If somebody is failing, the parties are failing and they are failing their people. This is what is happening. Hopefully the situation will be redressed. Of course no matter what we try to do, we can not reverse the situation if there is no cooperation by the parties.

What the Security Council and the international community can do? I just read some excerpts of the statement and the Security Council said that clearly: it is following very closely the situation on the ground and it expressed its readiness to consider a full range of measures to bring the parties to a better sentiment about the whole situation. What are these measures? I would refer you to the Charter of the United Nations that specifies the tools that could be activated by the UN on behalf of the international community in playing its role in maintaining international peace and security. So, wait and we'll see. Hopefully we will not reach that point if - and it will take only that -- the parties would really respect their commitments. That is what it would take to spare everybody, this business of getting into a debate on what kind of measures could be imposed or not. But be aware of one thing: nobody is going to be sitting and watching this circle going round and round and round. The AU chairman of the Joint Ceasefire Commission stated in Abuja very clearly that and I quote: "The forthcoming meeting of the Joint Commission on Ceasefire will be meeting on 24 December and that measures will be taken against those who will fail to comply against their obligations". The AU is taking this issue very seriously. The AU's Peace and Security Council is following this very closely. The UN Security Council is following this very closely and we will see. Luckily if nothing happens and everybody will play by the rules, fine, we are going to encourage them. If they are going to continue doing what they are doing, accountability and it is going to be enforced. And it was stated both by the AU officials and by the UN Security Council.

Q: Do you think that the actual capacity that the AU has including resources and equipments are enough for it to undertake its task?

You said two weeks ago that there are two new rebel movements in Darfur and that they represented a great risk for overall security situation in Darfur. Do you think they still represent the same threat?

A: On the first question on the AU's capable or not to undertake its task within the capacities it has; again that is a question that has to be asked of the AU because it is in a better position to answer for itself. We state again and again that the AU obviously would make a better difference if it is deployed at its full strength but nevertheless, the AU performance should be looked at against the willingness of the parties to really cooperate with the AU and abide by the agreements that they signed. Again, any question of this nature should be addressed to the AU.

On the new rebel groups: the NMRD and Shahama, on the first one there was an agreement between the NMRD and the government on certain points. We actually distributed the agreement to all of you who were here and you will be having a copy of that agreement. We look at it at this stage positively. We are however being so cautious because so far until now we are talking of agreements that have been signed with other parties but they never materialized. So if these agreements will be translated into actual action on the ground and respected by both parties, well that will be a good news for us and will contribute to improving the security situation in Darfur. But if it doesn't it will just be another agreement signed but not respected. And that will still be a problem and the group will still be a threat.

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On Shahama, well we don't know much on that group because there are no reports that it is active on the ground. We just read on the news that they have lost their leader and that at some point they were supposed -- as reported by the press -- to meet at some point to look at their structure and organization and so on but we don't have any news on activities of this particular group.

Q: What chances are there for the files on Darfur to return to the tables of the Security Council especially considering recent statements by the JEM leadership emphasizing that the issue be returned to the attention of the Security Council?

A: *(In Arabic)* The issue of Darfur has always been on the tables of the Security Council. The Security Council has never abandoned the issue of Darfur. The Security Council, regularly in the form of monthly reports tabled before the Council on the degree of compliance from the GoS and the developments on the ground in Darfur, keeps track on the issue of Darfur. The issue has not gone out of the Security Council for it to be brought back.

The AU plays a political role in politically mediating between the two negotiating parties. It also plays a field role in monitoring the ceasefire and so on. I hope that all will understand the following: that the Security Council, in its support to the AU and so on, has the primary responsibility to maintain international peace and security. True that in some instances it may leave some particular parties or regional organizations such as the AU in the case of Darfur, to oversee the issue, but this shall never mean that the Security Council is reneging on her responsibilities which are primary responsibilities. This is the answer to your question. The issue of Darfur has never gone out of the Security Council in order for it to be brought back.

Q: The suspension of Save the Children (UK) will cut off assistance to about 250,000 children in Darfur. Are there any measures taken to fill this gap?

The other question is that the Security Council has urged OCHA to increase her activities in Darfur. In what form? What is OCHA going to increase?

A: On the first question on Save the Children. Of course you know that Save the Children had to take the decision -- I mean it was forced to take the decision because it was hit twice where it hurt. And it is in a completely understandable position. However, just that you know, Save the Children is not pulling out of all of the Sudan. It is pulling out only from Darfur and they are undertaking consultations with the GoS to identify other areas of operation in other areas of the Sudan but not Darfur.

On the impact of the withdrawal of Save the Children, I have to say that there was an immediate replacement for Save the Children. So whatever coverage Save the Children used to have has been taken over immediately by other NGOs so we don't have a problem in that particular area. So there is no gap left after Save the Children's departure because there are plenty of other actors and partners who are working still there and they are continuing doing what they are doing and their activities are being undertaken as usual.

On what was meant by the Security Council in calling for increase in the activities of OCHA, I really do not have a clear answer for that but my guess will be that given the circumstances that was taking place in there, and particularly the difficulties that the humanitarian community is having such as security incidents and so on, the OCHA is requested to increase its capacity to improve on the coordination of humanitarian activities. And you know that

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OCHA is playing a key role in coordinating all these activities and it has a major responsibility in making sure that these activities are going smoothly. You know that OCHA is the only UN office that coordinates with the NGO community. You have seen that recently the NGO community has been having difficulties because of security and so on. So OCHA is asked to increase its capacity to perform better and to really make this coordination of the humanitarian issues, particularly the NGOs, be improved and working better for the overall objective of making humanitarian assistance better coordinated and so on. That is just my guess.

I was not there when they put that particular section but that is just my guest.

Q: Is the Security Council reluctant to take a clear position on Darfur for certain considerations? Do, for instance, the ongoing talks in Naivasha have bearing on that?

(Inaudible) threatened that a full range of options will be taken if the fighting does not stop – and the fighting is still raging on. Why then is the Security Council reluctant to take a decisive stance on the issue despite the fact that many citizens pay the price for the continued fighting and the Security Council meets every time only to threaten and threaten and does nothing.

The AU was insisting that the GoS allow the deployment of more AU forces in Darfur. When finally the GoS conceded last October, there was, say that these forces will be deployed before the end of the year. Now the year has ended and will these forces will deployed? You talked of considerations beyond the scope of the AU but did not elaborate. What are these considerations? Where is the problem?

Kofi Anan says that if additional action is needed, the Council has to pursue its responsibility. What exactly is the problem? Is it a problem of resources or what? Why has the AU so far failed to deploy these additional forces? I believe that this is an important question that has to be addressed.

A: I believe I have answered all these questions. The Security Council takes its decisions at its discretion and has its own reasons for doing so. You mentioned that maybe Naivasha is one of the considerations. This is not a simple consideration at all. It is very important in all Security Council resolutions on the current situation in Darfur. I do not have much more in the form of answers to your question but to me, anything emanating from the Security Council in the form of resolutions and otherwise has its justification and the Council follows its own wisdom in issuing those resolutions.

You may think that immediate imposition of sanctions may put a decisive end to the situation. Let me say that in more than a situation, such sanctions, even if they are imposed, do not bring about immediate changes in the situation on the ground. When the Security Council deems that the situation has really gone out of hand and dictates the use of and invoking of sanctions then it surely will do so. The events in the Sudan must be viewed as a whole because when the Security Council sits to adopt a resolution on sanctions because of the events in Darfur, it does not concentrate only on Darfur but also takes other issues into consideration such as the Naivasha process.

We shall table our report to the Security Council by the end of this year and we shall see what measures the Security Council will take in light of the developments and what the Council has so far stated.

With regards your second question, sincerely I did not understand it. On the AU, again what I know is that there is not shortage of resources. The AU is the party you should ask on whether or not there are any other considerations and on their views. We as the UN have been

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asked to and have indeed given all necessary support to the AU. As far as I know, almost all the other states that have pledged logistic and other assistance have kept their word. The question on why the delay should be asked of the AU.

In Koffi Anan's statements there was no "if" as you stated. If you note from the brief I have circulated to you, there is no "if".

Q: (*Reading from an excerpt allegedly from the AP*): "While the AU has agreed to send its monitoring troops. If additional support is needed and additional action is needed, the Council has to assume its full responsibilities", this is from the Associated Press.

A: Sir, I only consider what I have officially, not what comes from the AP. What I officially have does not have this. Anyway, what Koffi Anan stated in all this is not new. Koffi Anan has been in the forefront of backers of the AU and among those who have advocated for the need for immediate support for the AU and the urgent deployment of AU forces. This is the preliminary position. We at the UN reiterate the need for a quick and urgent deployment of the AU forces. We have given support, those states that have the resources have given their backing; I am sure the AU has very reasonable reasons for the delay in deployment and if you ask them they will tell you of the reasons for the delay and not me. On my side I have answered that part of the question that concerns me. As for the other parts of the question, the AU is present in Khartoum, contact them.

I am the official spokesman for the UN and not the AU -- there is a difference.

Q: You stated that the parties to the conflict do not abide by the agreements reached. This has continued in a regular manner. What measures could you as the UN take in this connection?

A: I have been asked this question at least five times and I have answered more than once. The UN Charter is available and the Security Council can use or invoke any of the provisions of Chapter Seven of the UN Charter should it decide to do so. This is my answer to your question.

Thank you very much. See you in our next session on Wednesday next week at the same place because the new place has not yet been prepared.