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Office of the Spokesperson

PRESS BRIEFING

Following is a near-verbatim transcript of the press conference held jointly by the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary General in Sudan, for Humanitarian Affairs & Development, Manuel Aranda Da Silva, and the Programme Director for Save the children/UK, Kate Halff, on Saturday 16 October 2004

Radhia Achouri, UNAMIS Spokesperson: Good afternoon and welcome to the joint press conference held today jointly by the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary General in Sudan, for Humanitarian Affairs & Development, Mr. Manuel Aranda Da Silva, and the Programme Director for Save the children/UK, Mrs. Kate Halff. They will brief you on the tragic incident that occurred on 10 October, which led to the tragic death of two humanitarian workers of SC/UK. Mrs. Halff, the floor is yours.

Kate Halff : Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. I am going to read the Save-the-Children statement to you:

“Save the Children is deeply saddened by the tragic deaths of two staff members, Mr. Rafe Bullick and Mr. Noureldien Eisa El Tayeb. Our hearts go out to the families and loved ones of these two remarkable men.

Rafe and Noureldien died in Sunday afternoon, October 10th 2004. They were both killed instantly when the vehicle they were traveling in hit an anti-tank mine 13 km east of Um Barro, in North Darfur. They were traveling from Mubsat to Um Barro and were following tracks which had been used previously. A third member of the team survived and is currently receiving treatment for his serious injuries.

Save the Children worked with UNOCHA and WFP for several weeks in planning this mission. The mission followed an earlier multi-agency assessment of the area, and was aimed at registering beneficiary populations for food assistance, which was due to arrive in the area a few days after the incident. Health, water, and nutrition needs were also being assessed as part of the same mission.

Both parties to the conflict were fully notified of Save the Children plans. Travel authorization to access the locality was requested and received from government

authorities. Full notification was also provided to the Sudan Liberation Army. The results of a joint UN and Save the Children investigation into this incident are pending.

Words can not do justice to the sadness, outrage and sense of injustice that we feel that despite all notifications, we did not receive information of the fact that the area was mined, which such tragic consequences for our dead and injured colleagues. The lack of effective advance warning of the landmine, as required under international humanitarian law, also means that the population of north west Darfur, who have been without adequate humanitarian assistance to which they are entitled and urgently need.

The best possible tribute to Rafe and Noureldien is that they were they were carrying out to minimize loss of life in North Darfur can be continued by humanitarian actors in full safety and security. We hope that this tragic incident will at least serve the purpose of ensuring that all parties to this conflict take full responsibility for the immediate and permanent improvement in security information management and communication. We also hope that as a result of this incident, UNMAS will at last be granted authorization to operate independently in Darfur”.

Manuel Aranda Da Silva:

It is with much sadness that the United Nations mourns and deplores the loss of two colleagues and humanitarian aid workers working for Save the Children (UK). The victims are 34 year old Rafe Bullik (British) and Nourredine Issa Tayeb (Sudanese), 41 year old who leaves behind wife and five children. The Save the Children vehicle was hit by an explosion some 10km East of Umm Barrow in North Darfur. It is believed that this explosion was caused by an anti-tank landmine. Another Save the Children national staff member who was injured, has been evacuated, and is still receiving treatment in Khartoum.

The United Nations in Sudan extends its deepest sympathies to the families of the victims of this terrible incident. No words are sufficient to describe the loss of colleagues, whose work and efforts in North Darfur brought relief to the people caught up in this crisis. The United Nations, in this extremely difficult time, extends its solidarity and support to both Save the Children staff and other humanitarian aid workers, who are carrying out life saving activities in such challenging areas of Sudan.

Before this mission of the Save the Children staff, both the Government of Sudan and the Sudan Liberation Movement (SLM) had been duly notified, as per agreed notification procedures. The United Nations remind the Government of Sudan and the SLM of their obligation to take active steps to safeguard the security of humanitarian workers, which includes the provision of any information affecting security on routes of travel.

The Secretary-General has repeatedly condemned the use of landmines as weapons that kill civilians without discrimination. The United Nations calls on the parties to the conflict in Darfur to immediately cease the use of such weapons.

The United Nations has suspended road movement in the affected areas of North-

West Darfur until further notice.

I want to say that an enquiry is underway, including the UN and Save-the-Children fund. Preliminary reports confirm that this was an anti-tank mine laid down professionally, by professionals. The outcome of the inquiry also confirms that the road was used recently by other humanitarian organizations, and so indicate a strong possibility that this is a new landmine laid down recently. We are open to questions.

Radhia Achouri: Any questions?

Q: I want to ask a question about the 70,000 death figure the WHO released yesterday, seems like a huge number of deaths. Why is it such a high number (intelligible) over the capacity that the UN has now (intelligible) to do with deteriorating security (intelligible) ? what are the reasons for that?

A- The DSRSG: The figure I think the WHO is referring to is the figure of victims since the beginning of the conflict. As you know, this conflict started last year. And includes probably people that were killed by blasts and people who died due to the different conditions of civilians who are obliged to move for a long time in the region. I have not seen the report that you are referring to but according to the figures we have from the WHO, the number of people dying because of the current situation in Darfur, is beyond what is normal. People dying normally, also. The additional, increased numbers at this stage are very, very reduced. This means the figures are a projection only, projection for the month of October, and September, is a very, very reduced figure.

Q- My question is who do the UN and Britain hold responsible for the killing of the Save-the-Children UK staff? Second question is what are the measures the UN may take against the specified body is it the JEM, the SLA or the Sudanese government? What are the pressures the UN and Britain may exert to avert the negative aspects of this problem and make the government and the rebels sign (intelligible) human rights agreement?

A- Kate Half: Thank you very much. I will respond to the first and second questions. We are not going to speculate on who is responsible. We are currently having an investigation which is ongoing and no await the findings of the investigation. I can not tell you which action we will take at Save-the-Children/UK. It will depend very much on the findings of the investigation. There is one thing I can say that we will take a very strong line: as we are very, very concerned about what has happened.

The DSRSG: As United Nations I could say the same, on the first two questions. We do not have evidence that, at this stage, and we are waiting for the final outcome of the investigation to know what is coming up. That can permit us to identify one of the parties, as the one responsible for the incident. There are only two parties who have capacity to do this, in the region. There are no other parties who can do this in the region. So, we can not say it was the government, SLA or JEM at this stage. We are waiting for the final outcome of the investigation to come out. Concerning what actions

we would do, we consider that as a crime, a crime against humanitarian international law; to use landmines in routes that are being used by humanitarian workers. And no advice was given by those who laid them. I am sure that the international community will make people accountable, whenever possible, whenever we discover violation to the international humanitarian law. The third question was on humanitarian protocols. We have clear agreements today with both the government of Sudan and with the SLA about humanitarian principles and ground rules of operations in the region that imply the need to provide security for humanitarian workers in the region. The humanitarian protocol agreed in Abuja, is very important also, and reaffirms these principles and provide framework also for work of humanitarian workers in the region. We have been appealing to both parties to consider the humanitarian protocol agreed in Abuja; even before signing, as in place. The reason why the humanitarian protocol is not signed in Abuja although both parties have agreed to it is because it is part of a much more global discussion that includes security, political and economic negotiations. So they can not sign before the end of negotiations on the package. It is normal in negotiations, but the United Nations has appealed to both parties is to implement the agreed document without waiting for comprehensive solution of the peace negotiations.

Q: first, we appreciate the ever-increasing role played by the UN in the Sudan. Second, we would like to know is the incident the first of its kind to happen in the district? And, if statistics, since the beginning of the crisis, are available; how many incidents are logged? Finally I would like to know about safeguards and protection for humanitarian assistance workers. Thank you.

Q- Kate Halff: In regard to the first question, Save-the-Children has had another landmine incident late February of the same year - south of Um Barrow, further down. That incident happened in a very different context. The zone had been one of the focus areas for the conflict. And the mission which had been traveling, had traveled outside of a clear framework of notification for access to the parties, as that framework did not exist at the time. Save-the-Children took a strong position at the time that we would not try and re-access that area unless they had been UN security assessments, unless a multi-agency assessment went in first, and unless there was a clear framework to negotiate access to those areas with all parties to the conflict. So, as far as we are concerned the three conditions were met, and this recent incident has happened in a totally different context and environment from the first one. Thank you very much.

The DSRSG: I can confirm what was said, this incident occurred after all parties were notified about operations in this area, after a full assessment took place, security assessment, notifications to the parties about the program that was supposed to be carried out; and specific notification on the specific mission. On statistics, we will say that, on landmine incidents, this is the third we have noticed in the region of Darfur in the last 12 months. The last one was in February, as mentioned. There was an assessment of ... I would say surveillance on potential risks of landmines in the region and the surveillance has included the potential risk on these particular roads of landmines that was carried out much before. As I mentioned, the preliminary investigation reports are indicating that probably this was a land- mine that has been put in this place recently. We can confirm that there are other humanitarian organizations that use that road and the mine was put in a place where there would be

no vehicle going to that area without hitting the land-mine. It was placed between the trees and the tracks of all cars coming to this place needs to pass through those two tracks. And there was other car-tracks passed through recently. Concerning the second question, we have agreed principles, agreed with the parties on humanitarian assistance. These principles are very much based on international, humanitarian principles on humanitarian assistance, not based on political grounds. We also have a series of ground rules operations on how to notify and inform the parties of the presence of humanitarian workers in the region and what they bare doing. All these ground rules have been followed, in this particular stage because of the knowledge that this was an area of conflict, although we have a ceasefire. Separate from this, I would like to tell you that we have incidents, security incident involving humanitarian workers in the region. Most of them are in spite of these rules. Most of them are linked with armed robbery of vehicles and personal belongings of humanitarian workers. The trend of this kind of incident has been growing in the last weeks. There are also many incidents related to humanitarian workers being present in a region where clashes develop without prior notification. This is why we are going to have a very, very strong security arrangements in the region that permits to identify when we should go into an area and when we should not go. There are many roads that are today open and tomorrow they may be closed and they are open again and based on a full, continuous assessment and I would say that security arrangements have proved to be so far efficient; otherwise the humanitarian workers will in a very unsafe environment. Let me emphasize that mines mainly affect civilians in any conflict and 99% of the victims of landmines are not military they are civilians. Most of them women and children and so the use of landmines is a criminal act against humanitarian principles, against international humanitarian law and people using mines should be aware that they will be accountable for the use of landmines against civilians.

Q: The UN has called recently for fundraising more than (intelligible) assistance in (intelligible) could you tell us (intelligible) about the response of international donors to this appeal? And do you think that such responses are (intelligible)?

A- The SRSG: The UN appeal for Darfur has been funded by now up to around 60% of the total requirements. That is a very good progress in the last thirty days because as you know it was below 50% just recently. So there was contributions that have come from different donors; including Japan, the Netherlands and several other in the recent 30 days

Q-: The UN has suspended operations in the states. The question I have is: the UN is concerned about its personnel and cars? (intelligible) To do is to help the displaced, the IDPs. Many of these people are going ...they are going to miss food; they are going to miss aid. Is the UN mostly concerned about its personnel or (intelligible)

A- The SRSG: That is a good question. You know, the primary responsibility to provide assistance to people in Sudan is with the Sudanese government. The humanitarian community is here because of the difficulty and impossibility of the Sudanese government to provide assistance to a situation like in Darfur. They went, and all humanitarian organizations operate in this region for that reason. Both parties to the conflict are supposed to ensure and give us insurance for security conditions.

Humanitarian workers can not operate and be killed and continue to operate not because the needs are not there but because the conditions that need to be provided by the parties involved in any conflict are not conducive for us to be able to operate in safety. Everybody can understand that we can not operate when humanitarian workers start being targeted. That is not possible. Humanitarian workers are not armed, they are civilians, they are people in that area to provide humanitarian assistance objectives. They are here to reduce the suffering of people but they can not operate if the security of the region does not allow them to operate. Those who create insecurity conditions for humanitarian workers are those who are accountable to the lack of security provided to civilians.

Q- a question about the landmine in February do you have information what kind of landmine that was... whether it is a similar landmine that blew up ...on Sunday. And in terms of humanitarian protocols? Do you have problems with ... the rebel leaders in Asmara is there a problem between what you agreed ... is it the same with the government in Darfur?

A- The DSRSG: We don't have more information to give you on landmines. On the second question, we have contacts with the rebel groups in Darfur, we do not need to deal with them only in Asmara. We deal with them on the ground. Actually three weeks ago I personally had a round of negotiations with them in Darfur. So our discussions with them involves not only the political leadership but the commanders themselves.

Q: you talked about an enquiry committee. Did you feel that any of the parties is willing to cooperate with the investigation? And is any of the parties represented to the committee?

A- the DSRSG: The investigation team does not include the parties. It needs to work with the parties at different levels in the region. I can confirm that so far the collaboration of the parties with the investigation team has been very, very positive. They answered the team's questions. But as you can imagine, it is not going to be easy. So far both sides have denied having done it immediately after the incident, both sides denied in 24 hours but the investigating team is trying to go further, beyond that. The team has to collect a lot of information, including technical information about the type of explosive used.

That for me was the last question, and I would like to emphasize one thing. And this thing is that both parties were duly notified according to agreed procedures and there are no excuses from any of the parties to say that they were not aware of the mission. I am reaffirming that both the Government and SLA were notified about the mission, its purpose location and itinerary. But in spite of this, nobody said that there was a mine. That is a crime against international humanitarian law, and the people who did it should come before courts and should be accountable also for the consequences of the fact that people will remain for a longer period without assistance, because of this incident. Thank you very much, all of you.