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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,

On Kenya peace talks:

- At the invitation of General Lazarus Sumbeiywo, IGAD's facilitator of the Kenya peace talks, the SRSG, Jan Pronk, will arrive to Nairobi on 7 October to attend the peace talks. The United Nations has been invited to participate in the talks to provide assistance to the IGAD secretariat and a UN team will be participating in the technical negotiations.

On Darfur:

- The Security Council held a public meeting on 24 September and heard a briefing on Darfur by President Obasanjo, the current Chairman of the African Union. Alpha Omar Konare, the Chairman of the African Union Commission was present at the meeting. Copies of the Statements made by the UN Secretary-General and President Obasanjo are available for you.
- The sixth JIM meeting was held on 24 September. The Sudanese Minister of Agriculture, Majzoub Al Khalifa, who led the GoS delegation in Abuja Talks, attended the meeting on behalf of the Government. Representatives from the AU and the Chairman of the AU CFC, General Okwonko, attended also the meeting. The focus of the discussions was the harmonization of the implementation of N'Djamena Cease fire agreement, the Joint Communiqué and the Darfur Plan of Action.
- The SRSG is currently in Brussels, to meet, at their invitation, with high EU officials. He is meeting today with Javier Solana. He met yesterday with the Political and Security Committee and members of the European Commission. Discussions focused on the situation in the Sudan, support for an expanded AU monitoring mission in Darfur and the urgent humanitarian assistance needs.
- The SRSG is expected to arrive to New York on 30 September to submit his monthly report on Darfur to the Secretary-General. The SRSG will present the report to the Security Council on 5 October.

- The DSRSRG for humanitarian and development affairs, Manuel Aranda Da Silva, led a UN team to the IGAD Partners Forum (IPF), which is meeting for two days in Oslo (27 and 28 September). The main focus during the first day was Darfur. The DSRSRG emphasized the need for a political solution to the Darfur Crisis. He warned that even in a "best case" scenario, the current level of humanitarian response and donor support must until at least the end of 2005. [To date, UN funding requirements are nearly USD \$365 million with donors having contributed USD \$193 million or 53% of the requirements]. The second (and last) day of the IPF meeting in Oslo focused on the preparation of the donors and the parties for the post-peace agreement period in Sudan. The renewed dialogue in the peace process was welcomed by the donors and international organizations, as was the continued involvement of IGAD

- No security incidents have been reported during the last couple of days. However, such incidents in the three Darfurs, including attacks by SLA on GoS military and police camps, continued to be reported during the past two weeks. Reports on attacks attributed by GoS to the SLA include: an attack on a police station on 25 September in Kalma (outside the IDP camp) -two policemen were killed and two wounded-; an attack on 25 September on a Popular Defense Force camp North of Nyala (no deaths reported); attacks on GoS police and military camps South Al Fasher (24 September) and western Kordofan (22 September). These reports on attacks are being investigated by the AU CFC. The reported incidents include also acts of banditry, in North and West Darfur, and tribal clashes in West Darfur. Due to regular banditry incidents on the El Fasher-Um Kaddada road, including an incident on 21 Sept., between Jebel Hilla and Sherif Kabashi 25 km east of Um Kaddada, where a 25 commercial vehicle convoy carrying WFP food was stopped by a gang of armed bandits on camels who reportedly fired shots and looted some of the food, the Um Kaddada - El Fasher road has been closed.

- UN agencies reported on 23 September, that a recent gathering of approximately 3,000 people in Besharia (2km of Al Fasher) was cleared by the police who loaded them into trucks and drove them to different locations. OCHA and several UN agencies as well as the AU CFC are discussing the issue with the Sudanese Humanitarian Affairs Commission (HAC). An interagency visit on 27 September to some of the areas where the gatherers were returned, including Gammina 1, Gammina 2, and Fireash villages, received reports from the IDPs that militias suspected to be Janjaweed, continue to harass and intimidate them. The community leaders and the women that were interviewed by the team further indicated that GoS military had warned them of dire consequences if they return to El Fasher. They further stated that a 14-year old boy was shot by Janjaweed militias on Saturday 25 September at Gammina village; two days after the IDPs were forcefully returned to their villages. The interagency team reported that there was no visible presence of GoS officials including no police presence.

- The voluntary relocation by IOM of 10,000 IDPs continues from Abu Zar School and other public buildings in El Geneina to a new site called Ashar Beyut located 3 kilometers outside the city. In addition, registration of IDPs in Riyadh Camp (estimated 45,000 IDPs) by IOM, WFP, Islamic Concern Worldwide and other partners has begun after a substantial delay caused by disruptions in the camp.

- IOM and OCHA held consultative meetings on the Management and Coordination Mechanism (MCM) on the voluntary return of IDPs with UN agencies, INGOs, NGOs, HAC, IDP representatives and local authorities in the Darfur region from 24 to 29 September. These

meetings took place in Nyala, Zaleingi, Geneina and El Fashir. Issues to be discussed include the MCM draft framework, standard operating procedures and the criteria for voluntary IDP return.

- FAO is planning to support vegetables cultivation in the winter season in both GoS and SLA/M controlled areas of Greater Darfur. Initially, FAO has agreed with GOAL to distribute 550 kgs of assorted vegetable seeds and 2,000 hoes and 300 animal ploughs for 5,000 households in Jebel Mara. The objective of this intervention is to restore the capacity of households in vegetable farming and to improve the nutrition of children in the targeted locations.
- Finally, WFP operational updates as well as a paper on the latest on health and delivery of food and non-food items (NFIs) are available. We have also for you information on UNDP's response to Darfur. And a statement by the UN Commission on Human Rights' Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women, who is in mission in Sudan from 21 September to 1 October 2004.

I would like now to give the floor to my colleague from UNHCR, to brief you on the High Commissioner for Refugees' visit to the Sudan

Melita Sunjic (Spokesperson of UNHCR in Khartoum): As you know, Yesterday the High Commissioner for Refugees, Mr. Ruud Lubbers concluded a five-day mission to Chad and Sudan where he wanted to see the situation of refugees and displaced people from the strife-torn Darfur region.

- On Sunday and Monday Mr. Lubbers visited IDP camps in Darfur, near El Geneina and another camp in Seliah, about 100 km north of the regional capital.
- On Tuesday, the High Commissioner met senior government officials in Khartoum, including Vice President Ali Osman Mohamed Taha, and several ministers.
- Major donors from the European Union, US, Japan, and Germany accompanied the High Commissioner on his trip. These donors account for the majority of the contributions to UNHCR's operations related to the displacements in Darfur.
- Lubbers, who visited the region ten months ago, found a number of changes on the ground. He noted the first phase of open large-scale violence and military attacks of the villages was over. Now the region has entered into a ceasefire which is an improvement in itself. There is also sufficient food for the IDPs in the region.
- From his numerous discussions with IDPs Lubbers learnt that people do not return to their villages because they do not trust the security situation. Lubbers therefore urged to enter a third phase of confidence building measures and a political resolution. Only political measures can turn a ceasefire into a lasting peace.
- The High Commissioner reported that the Sudanese officials were open to the UNHCR's expanded protection role in Darfur and that the Vice-President requested that the refugee agency ensure the civilian nature of camps for internally displaced persons (IDPs). One minister told Lubbers that 180,000 people have already returned to their villages and

asked UNHCR to verify the voluntary nature of these returns because some people did not believe the government's information.

- The High Commissioner also noted that he had held discussions with African Union monitors in West Darfur and agreed that the role of the AU is not only to monitor the ceasefire but also to restore trust and confidence among the population. He announced that UNHCR will work together "in tandem" with the AU.
- More specifically, the High Commissioner mentioned the need for reporting mechanisms for victims who want to go on record with their complaints. He mentioned the possibility of establishing special units of female police officers, who would work solely with the victims. He announced that UNHCR will develop community centres where the IDPs can be heard and find solutions to their problems.

R. Achouri: Thank you Melita. That's what we have for you today, and if you have any questions we will be very happy to take them.

Q. I just want to ask how many AU troops and monitors the UN is asking for and what (...) the expansion of their mandate?

A. The answer for your question is as follows. President Obasanjo, in his statement that we gave you, mentioned an overall number of an expanded African Union monitoring mission ranging between 3000 to 3500. You know that Mr. Pronk, when he was asked about the same figure, was talking about thousands. As for the details on the preparation and what is needed to support it and what kind of mandate it should have, I will start with the mandate. It for the African Union to decide on the mandate, but the recommendation that came from Mr. Pronk was that the mandate has to be expanded so we would achieve the following:

- 1st;** a more effective, proactive monitoring. So the African Union monitors will be actually deployed on the ground in the IDP camps so they do not react after the fact but they would see on the ground what is happening and report on it immediately.
- 2.** By such a presence, we would like to achieve a deterrent factor so by deploying such a large number anybody who would like to breach the ceasefire or to proceed to any violent act, they would be deterred by the sheer fact of having the African Union monitors on the ground.
- 3.** We would like for the monitors also to help in terms of protection - protection of humanitarian workers that is.
- 4.** We would like also for the African Union monitors to help in terms of confidence building. I'm talking about the confidence and the trust between the IDPs and the community where the police of the Sudan serves in Darfur. So basically the confidence between the police and the IDPs. So we would like the monitors also to monitor the police of the Sudan to help in bridging this gap of confidence between the IDP community and the Sudanese police.

In terms of preparations, of course there are so many talks going on right now, contacts between the United Nations at the HQ-level with the African Union. Mr. Pronk himself spoke to the African Union peace and security representatives in his last trip to Addis, and we are trying to speed up the process. In his statement on 24 September, the Secretary-General made a very strong point on the need for a quick and urgent support for the African Union Mission's deployment. The SRSG also made it very clear that the deployment expanded African Union need to be achieved as soon as possible, by the end – hopefully, of the month

of October. So we are trying to speed it up and to make sure that this expanded mission will be on the ground as soon as possible. And, on a final note, I would like to add that we are also encouraging, and calling upon the Government of Sudan to accept, and to cooperate, constructively and positively with this expanded African Union mission to Darfur.

Q. On the last thing you said. Have you had a formal acceptance from the Government of Sudan on the expanded number and mandate of the African union in Sudan, yet? ...and what you said about protection within the camps...does that give them... or would you like them to have the right to be able to fire back if they're fired upon?

A. So far we've had a very positive response and the Government of Sudan stated its readiness to cooperate and to accept such a deployment. However, as far as I know, we did not receive any particular response as to the figures. Because the figures are not final as yet. Now, in terms of the mandate; as I mentioned... first of all the mandate has to be elaborated by the African Union itself. The points that I told you it is what we would like the mandate to include. I mentioned protection for the humanitarian community, essentially, to help them do their job and provide the assistance safely, and to have the access on timely fashion. So this is what we meant by protection. As for civilians, I do believe that the AU monitors would assist at least assist indirectly by being present in ground, so if they witness something happening to the IDPs they would at least assist us in reporting it to us and we will take it from there. But shooting at anybody; I don't think we ever mentioned this option. And you know that's the Chapter 7 of the UN Charter. But again, the mandate is for the AU to establish.

Q. We have been getting reports from the Government and the Minister of the Humanitarian Affairs, Mr. ...Ibrahim Mohamed, saying that 180,000 displaced have returned to their villages. And another figure is that 9,000 Sudanese refugees in Chad have returned, that is yesterday, to the Habelah area in Darfur. And then the Governor of South Darfur, Mr. Mohamed Yousuf Abdullah says that 5,000 displaced returned to their villages in south Darfur, and mentioned areas like Daraj.....what we don't ... is the UN following these figures? Because we know that according to information, IDPs are increasing. They come – not going to their villages. We really want to know what's going on?

A. A quick reaction before I give the floor to my colleague from the UNHCR. Yes, I can confirm that at least on our account the number of IDPs is increasing. The last count we had, it was 1.2 million IDPs. Now we are talking about 1.5 millions, more or less.

Melita Sunjic (UNHCR): The question of the 180,000 returned IDPs people was raised yesterday, during the meeting between the High Commissioner Lubbers, during his visit yesterday here in Khartoum. The Vice President requested that the UNHCR help them to independently verify these figure. Because they say the people don't believe these Government figures, and don't believe the Government when they say that 180,000 people have already returned to their villages. They want us to go there to verify both the figures and the voluntary nature of these returns. So, for the time being, I can just say that these are claims by the Sudanese Government and we will find a possible mechanism to verify those and then we will, of course, come back to you.

Q: my first question is on the funding of the UN. You say here that the fund received is only 193. Even that figure does not correspond with the OCHA figure of 194.5. This is one thing. The other thing is when the USAID was here, he said, up to now, the US alone have provided 200 millions in aid. The second thing; yesterday we interviewed the head of the African

division of OCHA and he said up to now the European Union have contributed 145 million. Really, we don't know what is the real figure. What is required? What happened, you know, is everybody is supplying a different figure. What is the true situation of funding? Thank you.

Q. (R. Achouri) let me tell you that there is no contradiction. The figures that I provided you with, today are only for Darfur. The figures that I cited today are the latest from OCHA's humanitarian profile for Darfur for the month of August. And I have a copy with me, so you can see it. I'm not sure what figures you are referring to; but maybe what you are referring to are not relating only to Darfur. You know that the United Nations humanitarian work covers other areas in Sudan, including the South. The figures I've just cited are exclusively on the assistance level and gap, in terms of financing for Darfur only. I don't know how much money the European Union is contributing, or the US for that matter.

Q: how would you describe the level of violence in Darfur: Is it constant? Is it increasing? decreasing? And what about the type of violence...banditry...?

A. Well, our assessment so far is the security situation is that it not improve; but did not worsen. That's a matter of concern for the UN. The status quo is not what we are looking for I have to add to it that lately, the one phenomenon that we did not experience before, not in this scale at least, is the banditry phenomenon and that is a major reason of concern for us. It hampers the delivery and access for humanitarian assistance. And particularly when our people, and I cited the case involving the WFP, are targeted. It's a major concern for the UN family, the NGOs; we are discussing it with the authorities, with the African Union, to see how to resolve this problem.

Any other questions?

Q. My question is about 5,000 civilians attacked and fled the...homes in a place called Ta'aisha in Darfur. What caused this? Is it the fighting between the Government and rebels, or the Janjaweed or other bandits?

A. I do not have information on what you've said. However, what I can confirm, in general terms, is that we've been receiving reports on incidents relating to security and I said also that we can confirm that there is a continuing displacement of people fleeing certain areas. I said also that the African union ceasefire commission is investigating all those incidents so I can not confirm why exactly civilians are fleeing their places of origin, but definitely they are not fleeing for no reason. There is a reason behind it and we do not know if it is because of actual attacks, or because of anticipation of attacks. We don't know also who is attacking whom exactly. We are waiting for the African union ceasefire commission to confirm who is doing what and then we can come back to you and tell you what's going on. Again we receive reports, that there are attacks; there are disturbances, there are clashes, there is Janjaweed movement, roaming around, intimidating people. In some cases, there is a report that is yet to be confirmed that they killed a boy recently.

Q. You mentioned that Sudanese officials requested assistance of UNHCR with the expanding of protection of IDPS in Darfur. According to our understanding, the UNHCR mandate is the protection of refugees outside their country. So, can you clarify this point?

A. Melita Sunjic (UNHCR): you are right. The core mandate of the UNHCR is the protection of refugees who are people who fled over an international border to find themselves in a

different country. But, during the last fifteen years, very often in many crisis, and given the expertise it has with displacement of large numbers of people, the UNHCR has often been asked by the UN, by the Security Council or by the countries concerned, to help with IDP situations, it is the case in Bosnia, for instance, and this is obviously the case here. So, if the government invites us to help with the protection of IDPs with our expertise, we extend our help.

R. Achouri: Any other questions? If there are no more questions, I would like to thank for coming and I will see you next Wednesday.