



**Press Briefing by the Deputy Spokesperson and Chief of Public
Information, George Somerwill
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Khartoum**

SRSG

The SRSG, Jan Pronk, has returned from a two-day visit to North Darfur and El-Fasher, where he met with the SLA leadership on the ground. He briefed the leadership on the ground and he says that he has “good reason to believe that the Abuja process is supported at the field level.” He also met with the Deputy Wali, commending him for a successful relocation of IDPs from Abou Shouk camp to the new camp at Al Salaam.

Mr. Pronk will intensify his meetings with the SLM and if possible the JEM, at the field level, with a visit to South Darfur in August. These meetings will keep the parties informed of the preparations for the next round of Abuja discussions which are to take place on 24 August.

Also in the context of the next round of Abuja talks, Mr. Pronk will meet, after his return from New York, with the Chief AU Negotiator, Salim Ahmed Salim

Tomorrow Mr. Pronk will travel to Asmara where he will meet with the President, Isaias Afewerki, as well as with the leadership of the Eastern Front. He will follow up on previous UN contacts with the Eastern Front, which were made by Deputy SRSG Zerihoun three weeks ago.

On 19 July, the SRSG will fly to New York. On Friday 22 July he will brief the Security Council on the situation in Darfur, based on his June report to the Security Council. He will also brief the Council on the North-South peace process, specifically the work of the Joint Implementation Mission (JIM) which has now been in operation for one year. The June report on the situation in Darfur will be published in the next few days.

Political

The Abyei Boundary Commission report is to be released to the Presidency in the next few days. It is expected the Presidency will take some time to review the report. The SRSG looks forward to the decision of the Commission, and in the meantime UNMIS is monitoring the situation on the ground.

The Abyei Boundary Commission is made up of five international boundary specialists and one representative from each of the two parties. The chairman of the commission is Don Petterson, a former US ambassador to Sudan.

UNMIS has welcomed the reports of the end to press censorship, as well as the Government decision to end the state of emergency in some states. Mr. Pronk welcomed this as a sign of the unity Government working hand-in hand to implement the peace process. UNMIS will continue to monitor the situation of press freedom and will continue to have contact with all members of the media industry on this issue.

Security

There are continuing reports of generalized banditry in villages as close as 8 kms to the South of Nyala in South Darfur.

In West Darfur, the area around Geneina has again been declared safe for humanitarian activity, following the insecurity and violence which erupted there during a WFP registration exercise on 8 July. Ten registration personnel suffered minor injuries caused by sticks and stones.

Protection

UNICEF has welcomed provisions in the Interim National Constitution which strengthen the rights of children and women. But it also calls for the elimination of clauses which allow for the death penalty to be imposed on children under 18 years of age. The Agency also noted that the document does not prohibit either the recruitment or the voluntary signing-up into the armed forces, of children under 18 years. UNICEF urges that the final Constitution be brought into conformity with the international and regional conventions that Sudan has ratified. A separate press release is available today.

Firewood patrol meetings have been reinstated at Hamadiya and Hassa Hissa camps near Zalingei (West Darfur) by IRC. The meetings include representatives of the AU, female IDPs, sheikhs and the humanitarian community.

In South Sudan, in Malakal, WFP, UNICEF and ADRA have provided food and non-food items to 120 IDP families (753 individuals) on 7 July. The agencies noted that shelter was still lacking.

Civil Affairs

UNMIS Civil Affairs conducted several interviews in markets in El-Fasher to gauge public opinion on the recently signed Declaration of Principles in Abuja. In general people welcomed the signing with optimism. There are some concerns that the process will take too long to implement, which would extend the suffering of the people.

Humanitarian

WFP reports that the third phase of the WFP-led inter agency cross line operation delivering food and non-food items by barge in Upper Nile State, is underway, moving along the lower section of the Sobat river corridor. The first phase of the mission ran along the Tonger-Zeraf river corridor in Jonglei, covering areas from Malakal to Old Fangak. It involved some 59 workers from WFP and UNICEF, FAO OCHA HAC SRRC, Sudanaid and Adra. WFP distributed 872 MT of assorted food commodities to 48,562 beneficiaries, that is 8,094 households in locations along the corridor.

The second phase began on 16 June with 38 participants. The mission left Malakal with 4 barges, 2 pushers and 6 boats. WFP distributed a total of 560 MT of food, to 31,500 beneficiaries in locations reaching as far as Aweth,(135 kms from Malakal). A total of 50 villages were served.

The Federal Ministry of Education, with support from UNICEF is, for the third successive year, encouraging families to enroll their primary school-aged girls in school. The campaign will start this Saturday. Overall, about 56 percent of 3 million primary school-age girls are enrolled in school in the north, Juba, Wau and Malakal. In the rest of the south, enrolment is much less and only 1 in every 100 girls complete primary education.

Q: When will Mr. Pronk be meeting Mr. Salim?

Deputy Spokesperson and CPIO: I don't think a date has been set yet. As I said, the SRSG is going to New York next Tuesday. He plans to be back here the following Sunday and it will be sometime after his return here that he will be meeting with Mr. Salim. As far as I understand from my conversation with Mr. Pronk this morning that he does not yet have a date set for that but it will be sometime after ten days, or approximately ten days from now.

Q: There are rumored reports that the Kenyan capital will be hosting talks between the GoS and the rebels of eastern Sudan. How true are these?

D. Spokesperson & CPIO: No, as I mentioned earlier, there are discussions taking place at the moment but we have no details whatsoever. Clearly, it is not appropriate at this time – even if we know what the nature of the discussions were – it is not appropriate at this time to say anything because the discussions are taking place about talks. And that, of course, is the reason why Mr. Pronk is going to Asmara. We are simply falling up on a process which was started by the Deputy SRSG three weeks ago – discussions as to how we can move ahead in the best way possible and how we can assist – how UNMIS and the United Nations - can assist in this process of bringing about a peaceful resolution in eastern Sudan.

Q: Most of Pronk's recent discussions, especially in North Darfur state and his heated discussions with the deputy governor there were on allegations of violence against women. This issue still dominates most of the UN's discussions with Sudanese officials be it at state or federal levels. In your view, what do you think is required to be done by government on this issue? Do you have a detailed plan to put a stop to violence against women?

D. Spokesperson & CPIO: Thanks for your question. I don't think it is up to the United Nations to tell the government what to do. The government knows that it is responsible for the security of all the citizens of Sudan. The government knows that it is its responsibility alone to look after the security of all of the population of Sudan no matter where they are.

In terms of the way in which UNMIS will deal with the situation is that we will continue to discuss with members of the government exactly what is going on. We will monitor the situation. We have human rights monitors on the ground in Darfur. Discussions still take place at a very high level between our staff and members of the government in Darfur – the state government and, indeed, members of the federal government. This is an ongoing process but in the end the bottom-line of that process is that the situation of security for all IDPs, whether they are women or men, the situation of security for all IDPs is the responsibility of the Government of Sudan and we will expect them to take action accordingly.

There are some signs that in some places the situation has improved. It has improved largely because of the presence of African Union monitors and in some other cases there are police stations set up in critical areas. This has improved the situation but nevertheless there is still a tremendous amount of fear on the part of all IDPs and especially the women. There is a large amount of fear – people are very afraid of what might happen to them if they go out of the camps. Some of the smaller steps which we have taken and which we are continuing to take – and in fact in the press briefing notes which I gave you earlier there is a reference to this – we are having things like firewood patrols in which when the women go out to search for firewood so that they can cook, they are accompanied either by AU forces or they are accompanied in some cases by police or in some cases by both GoS police and the AU forces.

These are some of the steps which are being taken but the situation still needs to improve because, in the end, IDPs remain very, very afraid and they are afraid of the activities of the militias, they are afraid of the activities of bandits – there is a lot of banditry in Darfur as we mentioned last week and as we have mentioned again – there is a lot of banditry going on. And as long as there is that high level of fear, we have to ask “what are people afraid of?” And when you speak to the women of Darfur in the IDP camps, many of them will say that their biggest fear they have is the fear of rape.

Okay, any more questions? No?

Thank you very much for attending and we look forward to seeing you next Wednesday. Thank you.