

**The United Nations Mission In Sudan****Date: 8 June 2005****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:

SRSG

- The SRSG issued yesterday a statement on the recent clashes between the SLM/A and JEM. The text was sent to you electronically. Copies of the Statement are available in the room.

Text of the Statement:

“The Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Sudan, Jan Pronk, expresses his concern at the recent armed clashes between the two rebel groups in Darfur, the Sudan Liberation Movement/Army (SLM/A) and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM). He condemns these actions, which constitute, as stated by the African Union, serious violations of the N'Djamena Ceasefire Agreement. He deplores these irresponsible acts that led, according to the African Union, to loss of life amongst the civilian population. The Special Representative is disappointed that these violations are taking place at a time when the international community and the African Union are exerting every effort to assist the parties in achieving a breakthrough during the upcoming round of talks, scheduled to take place on June the 10th 2005.

The Special Representative calls upon the rebel groups to immediately cease hostilities and to head the request of the African Union to pull out their forces from Graidia and the locations vacated by the Government's troops and/or taken over by AMIS forces. He urges all parties, in particular the rebel groups, to fully comply with the letter and spirit of the agreements they signed and with the relevant provisions of the UN Security Council. The Special Representative expects the parties to live up to their commitment to engage in the forthcoming round of talks in good faith and to fully cooperate with the African Union mediation”.

- The SRSG, together with his Principal Deputy, Mr Taye Zrehioun and other senior officials of UNMIS will head tomorrow to Abuja to attend the talks between the GoS and the two rebel groups of Darfur, JEM and SLM, scheduled to start on 10 June 2005.”

- The SRSG, together with his Principal Deputy, met on 6 June, in Dar Essalam, Tanzania, with the AU Chief Mediator, Mr. Salim Ahmed Salim. They discussed preparations for the forthcoming round of Abuja talks, including the representation of the parties, particularly the rebel groups.

-The SRSG conducted a two days visit to the Darfurs on 2 and 3 June. In Zalengei, he met with the UN staff and the humanitarian workers, as well as with the local authorities and the AU. He visited Hassa Hissa and Salam camps. In South Darfur, he met with the Wali. He also met with the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, Mr. Am Moussa. The SRSG attended a reconciliation meeting between Arab Tribes, which was also attended by the Secretary-General of the LAS and the Sudanese Minister of Interior. The SRSG visited Abu Shouk camp with Mr Amr Moussa and the Minister of Interior. In Al Fasher, the SRSG met with Mr. Robert Zoellick, the US Deputy Secretary of State who was also conducting a visit to Darfur.

Other UNMIS activities

- Preparations for a visit to Darfur by the Joint Implementation Mechanism are ongoing. The Visit is scheduled for mid June. The purpose of the visit is to assess progress achieved almost a year after the signing of the Joint Communiqué between the UN Secretary-General and the GoS in July 2004.

-The PDSRSG Taye Zerihoun and the Force Commander Fazle Elahi Akbar, together with other senior UNMIS officials, held a meeting on 2 June with the SPLM delegation in Khartoum. This meeting is part of a series of meeting to be held between the SPLM delegation and the leadership of the Mission to discuss on a range of issues relating to the CPA implementation, including the deployment of the UN troops in the South.

- The Ceasefire Joint Military Commission, chaired by UNMIS Force Commander, Major General Fazle Elahi Akbar, held its third meeting on 6 June at the CJMC Joint Monitoring and Coordinating Office in Juba. The meeting considered a range of issues, including the terms of reference of the CJMC, review of military tasks and activities to be undertaken in implementation of the CPA, as well as their timeline. The next meeting of the CJMC will be held on 21 June 2005.

- The first ever joint meeting of the GoS Humanitarian Affairs Commission (HAC) and the Sudan Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (SRRC) since the signing of the CPA took place in Nairobi last month on 17-18 May. Organized and chaired by the UN Humanitarian Coordinator, Manuel Aranda da Silva, the joint meeting was set up to pave the way forward for a successful and effective transition of humanitarian coordination responsibilities in South Sudan and the three transitional areas and to strengthen ties between HAC and SRRC. The parties agreed to jointly establish coordination mechanisms and conduct joint missions to the GoS-controlled towns in Southern Sudan with SRRC, HAC, the Committee on Refugees and OCHA staff to plan and oversee this transition. A Technical Committee was set up and has been meeting yesterday and today, the 7 and 8 June, in Khartoum. This is a very significant milestone as it is the first time ever that the HAC and the SRRC have met inside Sudan. All future meetings will be held in Sudan - in the south and north.

The Technical Committee meeting is also seeking ways to facilitate access throughout South Sudan and to improve lines of communication for all humanitarian actors. All these activities

will support the UN's priority programme of assistance to the return and reintegration of displaced Sudanese - both within Sudan as well as from neighbouring countries. Successful return in safety and dignity together with reintegration will be important in building, at the local level and with IDPs and refugees, strong confidence in the implementation of the CPA. This advance in easing crossline movement will significantly improve humanitarian and recovery operations – improving linkages between North and South, reducing costs for operating partners and easing the administrative burden on accessing populations in need.

The UN stands ready to serve both the HAC and the SRRC as they proceed on this new and promising path, by facilitating activities and strengthening capacity of both commissions.

Security

There were a number of incidents reported in Darfur and Eastern Sudan over the last week. Please refer to the Public situation reports we've circulated to you.

Humanitarian activities

IOM reports that a first group of some 300 vulnerable Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) has reached the Busseri River, in Western Bahr el Ghazal Province, which they hope to cross later today with IOM assistance ahead of the rainy season. The Group is composed of some 1,500 vulnerable IDPs, mostly children, young mothers, elderly, blind and crippled.

They are part of a much larger group of some 5,000 IDPs who decided in mid-April to leave Mabilia camp in Western Equatoria province to walk to their homes in Raja district, Western Bahr El Ghazal, a distance of about 365 kilometres. IOM says the health situation of the group needs constant monitoring. The IDPs say that 32 people died since the group left Mabilia camp. A temporary camp has been set up north of the river and IOM plans to start transporting the vulnerable IDPs to a central site near Deim Zubeir in Western Bahr El Ghazal province.

This emergency rescue operation is being carried out in close coordination with WFP, UNICEF, MSF Spain, and World Vision International and at the request of the UN's Deputy Resident Humanitarian Coordinator for Sudan. IOM's partners are maintaining a sufficient level of food, non-food items, and health assistance for the IDPs by airdrops. (For more information please contact Bill Lorenz, Western Bahr el Ghazal, Sudan Tel +00 882 1651 105 796 or Edwin McClain, Regional Representative, MRF Nairobi at 254-20-4444-174/167 or write to EMCCLAIN@iom.int)

Health

The second Crude Mortality Survey in the Darfurs, conducted by WHO and the Sudan Ministry of Health started on 28 May. 10 international supervisors, 20 national supervisors and 48 local interviewers are in the field, questioning the IDPs and affected communities. It is expected that the interviews and data processing will be completed by the end of the month of June.

Questions and Answers

Q: Last week we heard that some returnees in Malakal were stranded on their way to their home areas as they were caught in crossfire. What has the UN done on their situation?

Spokesperson: Are you from the *Khartoum Monitor*?

Q: Yes.

Spokesperson: Well first of all since you are asking me the question I would like to address something directly to you. I saw that *Khartoum Monitor* was attributing these reports to me. I never said such a thing. I don't know where you got your material from. Not that I am having problems with the substance of what you reported but definitely you shouldn't have attributed it to me because I did not make these statements.

Two; on your question, I have to go back and check and if you can please direct me to the exact situation you are referring to because we have many activities in terms of movements of population – returnees and so on – including in Malakal. So, if you can be more precise then maybe later after the briefing I can check the information for you and come back to you.

Q: In fact I would like to comment on the relations between the press and the UNMIS.

Last week, the Sudanese press was subjected to an unjustified attack by SRSR Pronk. I in fact attended only the last part of the press briefing in question and requested my colleagues to update me on the details.

In fact I am very displeased of the attack by Mr. Pronk on my colleagues in the Sudanese press. We have been covering the briefings conducted by UN(A)MIS and Ms. Radhia is witness to that. It has never happened that we misrepresented what we hear from these briefings. Regrettably, we have been directly attacked by Mr. Pronk who said we do not cover his statements. We have been reporting to the Sudanese public a number of criticisms expressed here and see no justification for this unjustified attack by Mr. Pronk.

Unfortunately, the Council of Ministers last week strongly criticized the press saying that it does not report correctly. It is indeed a strange coincidence that the Sudanese government and Mr. Pronk have at last found a scapegoat in the Sudanese press on which to vent their conflicts.

I really see it as if we have been subjected to a humiliation. We are not judges and neither is Mr. Pronk. The focus was on the issue of rape in Darfur and the issue of the MSF. Mr. Pronk asked us to believe the victims. The United Nations itself formed a commission of inquiry and took the issue to the ICC and the ICC is yet to decide on the issue. These are still suspicions and I do not know on what Mr. Pronk bases his statements.

Before the United Nations came to Sudan, we in the Sudanese press have been writing and have indeed paid the price for what we write. *Al-Ayam* daily was closed for 3 months for trying to report on Darfur. Personally, I have been taken more than once for interrogation and harassment by the security and military for trying to write on Darfur. We were not waiting for Mr. Pronk and the United Nations to come to Sudan to teach us bravery in covering issues concerning our country.

This is a very regretful situation. We have been viewing the issue as a national issue. We as Sudanese journalists are brave and carry out our duties bravely and now that the United Nations is here and the Comprehensive Peace Agreement that provides for the freedom of the press and despite all these the press faces censorship.

Mr. Pronk further said that it is only the international media that report on what he has been saying on these incidents while the Sudanese press does not do so. But this is not true. As journalists we do not necessarily believe everything that we receive. We are reporters and not judges.

The United Nations as it operates in Sudan under these conditions must be conscious of its sensitive position in Sudan. As it is in its early stages in the Sudan, we request the United Nations not to become part of a tool for the conflict in Sudan.

The Sudanese press is a very brave press; the Sudanese people are very brave people. We therefore request the United Nations not to be a party to the conflict in the Sudan and turn the Sudanese press into victims through such lobbying for which we see no justification nor reason.

The United Nations is now focusing on Darfur while for 50 years a war has raged on in the south. Millions were killed and it has been the theater of atrocities of far more massive proportions than those happening now in Darfur. Why didn't the United Nations speak out on the atrocities in the south? Does the United Nations or the Security Council now demand that those responsible for the atrocities in southern Sudan face trial? Or is it that the victims of southern Sudan were of less value than those of Darfur?

We do hope that the United Nations and UNMIS don't embark on such hostilities with the Sudanese press. We have enough on our plates without need for more.

Thank you.

Spokesperson: Thank you very much for your statement. In any case, your statement is going to be reflected in the transcript we are going to be making of the briefing so it is going to be put on record. This is to assure you that the message that you wanted to put today will reach its destination.

Let me just react by saying the following: definitely the United Nations, Mr. Pronk and all of us who are working here, do have the highest esteem first to the Sudanese people, to the Sudanese press and we do take your point that you, as media representatives are in the frontline and you are your responsibilities at heart and you sometimes have to face a certain price for your loyalty to the noble mission that you are undertaking and its noble objectives-meaning defending the causes of your country, your people, and addressing these issues that are very important for Sudan, its people and all its representatives.

I just want to add that Mr. Pronk actually did not engage into a confrontation with the Sudanese media as you pointed out. His remarks were in the context of two issues: the issue of rape that was related to the issue of the MSF, and, more generally, the issue of the way the NGOs are being portrayed by some media, not all. That is what he said. He did not speak generally about all the media in Sudan. But you would agree with me if you read all the newspapers here that some articles in some newspapers sometimes are not all that helpful particularly if these comments they are making about NGOs and so on are not based on actual facts and are just, say, subjective judgments and are not being founded. And this is what Mr. Pronk was talking about.

On the issue of rape, he pointed out that he made many statements on the issue and unfortunately did not see anything reflected in the Sudanese media on that. And he said, “I don’t know why you don’t reflect on it – maybe because you think that the issue was not important enough; maybe you are prevented from that.” He didn’t know but he was disappointed that these issues, at least his view on the issue, were not reflected, as a matter of transparency, to the people – because (he is coming from this particular angle) the only ones talking about the issue of rape or commenting on it in the context of the large debate on credibility or non-credibility of the information provided by NGOs are the ones, unfortunately, only discrediting this information and discrediting the NGOs. So, for the purposes of just putting the other point of view to this point of view, he was kind of disappointed that these views that he expressed were not reflected.

Let me assure you, sir, that we value very much your cooperation with us and do value everything that you are doing. We do understand the sacrifices that sometimes you have to go through. The United Nations definitely as a whole, and definitely UNMIS, would not go out of its way to alienate the media because we do respect your mission, we do respect you and as I said we do value what you are doing.

And that was an opportunity for Mr. Pronk, if you allow me, just to engage into a debate with you and we will be having discussions with you in different forums to listen to your concerns, your expectations from us and to discuss with you ways to help us help you and the other way round too on how both of us can serve the purpose of an objective, unbiased, transparent information to the people of Sudan.

I’d like to conclude by reiterating on behalf of Mr. Pronk, that we do have the highest esteem to all the Sudanese media, radio, television, newspapers – English ones and Arabic ones, all of them – we do value them and do appreciate you addressing us this frankly on the matter and the forthcoming days we will be holding discussions with you. Mr. Pronk did not mean at all to launch an attack on the Sudanese media - on the contrary. Because he values your role, this is why he was kind of disappointed that some of you did not have the possibility to reflect on certain issues that are quite important. You know as we do that lack of information can have serious consequences because the public opinion can draw the wrong conclusions because the only ones commenting on certain topics are doing it in a certain way. So that was the whole context.

And later on get in touch with me, if you wish, and we will talk about this at more length.

Q: I am talking on the same point and would like to ask some questions for the UN. Mr. Pronk actually last week criticized the media for not reporting rape cases. But at one point has the United Nations tried to take some of the media organs to Darfur to try to cover this issue of rape because you can not cover a rape case when you are thousands of miles away and expect to print that in a newspaper. MSF is on the site and does have the right to give such information. But has the United Nations at one time tried to take the media to Darfur?

Spokesperson: Mr. Pronk did not say that you have to report on rape in abstract terms. The only thing that he said is the following and I am quoting: I have been making statements time and again on the issue of rape and the NGOs. Unfortunately the Sudanese media is not reflecting on this and is not reflecting the statements put out. This is what Mr. Pronk was saying.

Of course the United Nations cannot impose on anybody what you write about and what you don't write about. The only thing that he was trying to have your cooperation on is that if he makes statements he would rather see them fully reflected. Of course in your analysis you can say whatever you want – you can agree with him, disagree with him. That is your issue. Now you are absolutely right that for somebody to report on something they have to be on the spot. He said again on this topic that if you have any difficulties to reach these places we are willing as the United Nations to help you reach these places. We can provide with the transportation but, definitely, please do not understand it that we want you to write on certain topics. The only thing is that there are lots of things being written on the issue of rape and NGOs and so on and we do view these things published out as being biased to certain positions. Most of them are characterized by absolute denial that rape is taking place. Most of them are discrediting NGOs with no particular justification that one can take as a valid argument as to why these attacks in certain media are launched against NGOs.

The only thing that we are trying to achieve here with your cooperation is; do write whatever you want – it is your absolute right – but we are hoping that what we say on these issues is also reflected. And definitely we are not expecting you to go to Darfur and investigate rape. That is not the idea. What he said was: I see that some of you are not sure that rape is taking place and we are willing to help you go there and we are willing to assist you in terms of getting into contact with these people that we are talking about and then after talking with them, it is up to you to make up your mind but please don't deny it without at least talking to the people. This was his point. Not that you have to believe it systematically, not that you have to investigate it, not that you have to write on it no matter what – all his remarks have a certain context.

Q: The issue of rape, the issue of war crimes happening in Sudan are very contentious issues. If a Sudanese journalist reports on them and something happens to him then definitely the United Nations is going to keep quiet but if somebody from the *BBC* or *Reuters* reports then the United Nations is going to cry. These lines of demarcation that the United Nations has put up must stand by the Sudanese journalist should anything go wrong. This is the point I wanted to mention.

Spokesperson: Thank you very much. I think that it is a bit excessive when you say that the United Nations would not care if somebody reports on an issue and something happens to the person, because freedom of the press is one of the issues that is in the International Law as we know it and the United Nations is but the representative or the defender of International Law no matter what the topic is.

All of us, as you said, know the rules of the game we are playing – that is for sure. And as the colleague who spoke first put it, in your job there are lots of sacrifices to make particularly in certain contexts. Definitely the United Nations will not turn a blind eye just because the people who would be paying a price for communicating the information to the people are yourselves –. I think it is a bit excessive.

In any case, we are having talks with the Government of Sudan on lots of issues including information and all that. I do expect that this issue will be one of the topics to be discussed with the Government of Sudan and later on with the government of national unity. As also the colleague who spoke first referred to the CPA. Freedom of speech, freedom of the press is also in the Comprehensive Peace Agreement. We have the framework to work on this and even without the Comprehensive Peace Agreement there are provisions of the International

Law on anything that has to do with the freedom of press and we have already the legal basis as the United Nations to engage into talks on how to protect journalists and the freedom of speech for the journalist.

Q: The Chief Prosecutor of the ICC has announced it is starting the proceedings for trial. Have the investigation committees and the other relevant committees especially now that the government believes that the timing is inappropriate with the resumption of the Abuja talks on the horizon and that this may send wrong signals to the rebels in the Darfur region?

Spokesperson: I don't have much to say because UNMIS is not in any way involved in the issues related to the ICC and actually we have copies of the statement you are referring to both in English and in Arabic and in that statement you have the contact number of the spokesperson for the Chief Prosecutor of the ICC and I invite you to direct these questions to him.

Q: First of all we have read a lot about these complications with NGOs. Let me say one thing: what you say is not a Bible or the Qur'an that you have to believe it as they are. Personally we have been trying to verify these reports. I personally when I visited Darfur and tried to speak to these women, they refused and they put a protective shield of the chief who was the only one to talk on their behalf

The second time was when I went and tried to speak to the victims. Mr. Jan Pronk said, "Listen to the victims." No, we are not listening to the victims. We are listening to reports written by the MSF and other organizations. So we are not obliged to believe what somebody says unless we can verify this. This is a fundamental principle in journalism.

We are not obliged.

Spokesperson: I totally agree with you. Nobody is asking anybody to believe blindly anything that is coming out from NGOs or any other source. The only thing that we are trying to say here is that don't deny it until at least you have some arguments to discuss what is in the reports. The problem is that these NGOs have not been given a chance.

Personally, and yourself too I guess, we read lots of things in the media and they are just destroying every bit or piece of this report (MSF report) with no counter-argument. I am not a doctor, I don't have any reason or any background that would allow me to say: no that did not take place. How do we know it did not take place? And that is the point that we are trying to make. We are trying to tell those who write comments on these reports or these NGOs: don't just deny it without any solid argument. That is the only thing that we are trying to achieve. Definitely we are not telling you that anything that is coming from any NGO or even the United Nations should be taken for granted and you have to believe in blindly. Of course not. You still have your mind to make. You make it up yourself but, sir, you would agree with me also as a journalist or as somebody who makes researches or any field of this nature that before drawing conclusions you have to see all versions on the same issue. But what happened so far is that everybody jumped on the report of the MSF, destroying it and destroying by the same token the credibility of MSF and the credibility of NGOs at large with no valid, solid argument or reason or elements of proof. Just speculations. All of us know what MSF has been doing in Sudan for the people of Sudan, and also in other countries. If MSF is saying that 500 cases of rape happened, why should I say it did not happen if I don't have a solid proof it didn't? Many of you said that you did not have the chance to go to

Darfur to see by yourselves – okay it is a very valid argument – but why, coming from the same reason, would anybody be in the position to say no these cases did never take place? That is the only point that we are trying to make, sir.

And as for talking directly to the victims, we are, as I said, trying to assist journalists to go to these areas to talk to the people not only on the issue of rape, mind you, because that is not the only issue, there are so many issues. We keep telling you about Darfur and on many aspects of what is happening there: the conditions of life, the camps situation, the efforts of the humanitarian community, the progress achieved, the complaints of the IDPs either because they think that the assistance provided to them is not enough or not adequate or because of the security situation, all the information that we are providing you with. We would like for you to go by yourselves and listen to the people and see it all by yourself and then you can make up your mind whichever way you deem appropriate.

I am really sorry now that I am hearing these comments coming from you. I do believe that there is a serious misunderstanding that I hope we could address in a more adequate way in a setting that would allow us to exchange views and to have more time to listen to each other. But it is a misunderstanding. You still have your mind to make, you still are independent and you don't have to believe anybody just because they happen to be a representative of a certain party be it NGO or UN or otherwise. And that is what I have to say. But what we are trying to tell you is: okay, maybe you have your suspicions and so on but give it a chance and try to see if there is another point of view to the story. That is the only thing that we are trying to achieve here.

Q: But you already believed the MSF report. Did you verify it when you included it in your report to the Security Council?

Spokesperson: MSF is not apolitical NGO, it's a Doctors' NGO. We are talking about this report and I hope that everybody read it. First, it is not a political report and has never been a political report. The information and the data reflected on the report is only of a humanitarian nature. These are data collected by doctors who examined cases of women and they established that there was rape. I understand that the controversial part is not about the number and that the controversial part is about who is responsible for these rapes.

MSF did not vouch for the responsibility of any party. MSF just reflected on its report the testimonies of the IDPs – the ladies who were raped. These 500 women and girls said who raped them and gave a description of the rapists. MSF is not vouching for the veracity of these statements as they are because MSF is not an investigative party or authority that can vouch for the responsibility of whomever committed rapes. But the whole point of the report is that rape is taking place in a number that is quite worrisome and rape, I hope that all of us would agree on it, can be established medically, scientifically. And this is what we are vouching for as United Nations. Why would the United Nations doubt doctors whose job it is to establish if a woman has been raped or not? That is what we are backing.

For the rest, you know and we know that there was a Commission of Inquiry to establish or to start establishing the responsibility and who is responsible for what and that definitely is not the responsibility of the MSF or anybody else for that matter. What we are saying is: believe the victims or at least give them the benefit of doubt. Don't deny it systematically.

Q: Let us go down to another issue. About the peacekeeping forces, there are some reports that the contingent from Germany is having problems – they are not being granted visa and clearance. Is this correct or how are things going regarding these contingents?

Spokesperson: The deployment is ongoing in general terms steadily but a little bit slowly. Slowly due to a lots of considerations mainly because of the fact that we do not have in many of the areas where we are supposed to deploy particularly in the south, adequate infrastructure we will need to speed up deployment. Added to it the rainy season that has started. So far we have 474 military elements altogether in Sudan. Of course this number will be increasing as the days go past. Most of these are actually to prepare the ground for the deployment of a larger number of troops.

As for the Germans, yes I read the reports in the news but the issue of the visa and so on is primarily an issue to be discussed between the German Government and the GoS since it is a prerogative related to sovereignty of the country. Of course the United Nations, if need be, can mediate if there are difficulties and can facilitate the process but, above all, it is an issue that has to be resolved between the Government of Sudan and Governments concerned.

Q: Do you mean that these forces are coming under the umbrella of the United Nations or each country has to negotiate with the government on their troops?

Spokesperson: No, they are coming under the umbrella of the United Nations definitely. The Germans are supposed to be part of the Military Observers. However when it comes to visas it is still the sovereign right of any given country to proceed the way it deems appropriate in keeping with its own legislation. If the GoS thinks that they have a certain procedure to follow with any national of any country, it is still their sovereign right. The United Nations, again as I said, can facilitate processes and offer its mediation between the two parties but we can not impose on anybody anything – not under Chapter VI anyway.

Q: What about reports on starvation in the south?

Spokesperson: Actually I am trying to collect some information but unfortunately I couldn't because the WFP is undertaking lots of movements of personnel. However, yes, in general terms. I would not go into specifics but this issue of the threat of starvation is quite a worrisome one. I can assure you of one thing – all our humanitarian components are working to try to prevent this from happening. I know that in the south the WFP is trying its best to preposition food assistance in ahead of time so this situation will not occur. However, unfortunately I don't have details in terms of facts and figures but I will try to get in touch with my colleagues from the WFP and follow up on this.

Well if there are no more question then thank you very much for your attention and please do understand that we do value your presence very, very much and we do appreciate what you are doing.