



United Nations Mission In Sudan
UNMIS

SRSB Press Conference
Press Room
25 May 2005

Following is a near-verbatim transcript of today's press conference (12:30 pm) by Jan Pronk, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Sudan:

Spokesperson

Good afternoon all and welcome to this press briefing.

We have with us today SRSB Jan Pronk who is used to meeting with members of the press almost once a month. Today he briefs you on a number of issues especially the impending visit to Sudan of the Secretary-General.

In light of the short time available, this press briefing will run for only an hour and I kindly ask you to put that in mind.

Without much ado, I give the floor now to Mr. Jan Pronk.

Mr. Pronk.

SRSB: Thank you very much. I hope to be brief so that you can have ample time for questions. Moreover, I understand that what I am saying is not easy to be put in your newspapers because I made quite a lengthy statement last week, or two weeks ago, with regards to the position of NGOs. I was asking you to please give some attention in your newspapers to what I am saying about NGOs, you remember? I read all through the newspapers, I did not find any sentence. So I will be very brief.

We had a good meeting last week, a visit from Mr. Guehenno, the Undersecretary-General of United Nations, you remember?

He did visit Sudan in a framework of his position as the Undersecretary-General dealing with Peacekeeping Operations throughout the world - 18 countries. In the beginning he had very good meetings with Vice-president Taha and the President upon his way out. One of the issues which he discussed with the President, and I will come back to that separately, was the incident in Soba.

He has left. In the meantime we can look backward to a very good visit which helps us very much in the further development of the mission.

Secondly; I can inform you but you know that already that the Secretary-General of the United Nations is coming. He comes to Sudan about eleven months after his previous visit which took place around the first of July last year.

He is combining his visit to Sudan with a meeting in Addis which is taking place tomorrow. He will co-chair with president Konare the meeting of the donor countries which is meant to raise resources for the further deployment of the African Union in Darfur. You know that the African Union has decided to increase the level of its troops in Darfur from about 3,000 to about 7,000 this year. This requires many resources – logistical resources, financial resources – from many countries. They are coming to Addis and we hope that at the end of the day tomorrow, chaired by Koffi Annan and by president Konare, we will have enough resources committed to the African Union in order to make that further deployment indeed possible.

The fact that the Secretary-General is also coming to co-chair that meeting means that the United Nations shows the significance which it is attaching to that meeting. You know that it is the African Union which is in Darfur but with the United Nations as a catalyst, the United Nations as the organization inviting the African Union – Security Council always gets the reports – United Nations also as the facilitator of the whole operation, there is growing cooperation between the African Union and the United Nations. You may say as far as Darfur is concerned, regarding the strategy being followed, we have exactly of the same opinion.

The Secretary-General of the United Nations will travel on Friday morning from Addis to Khartoum for a visit of 3 days. Here, he will have of course internal meetings with the United Nations staff. We will brief him on the present situation. But for you it is more important that on Friday afternoon he will have a meeting with Vice-president Taha and also a meeting with Minister of Foreign Affairs Mustafa. I expect that there will be a possibility in particular when leaving the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for a brief stake out so that you can ask questions to the Secretary-General of the United Nations and to, I suppose, Minister Mustafa but that is of course up to him to decide.

On Saturday, the Secretary-General will fly to Nyala. In South Darfur he will visit the Kalma camp. He did not visit Kalma camp a year ago. For him it is a first visit and we hope to show to the Secretary-General that the situation in Kalma camp, the humanitarian situation in South Darfur is better than when he came here a year ago. It was difficult a year ago. Many people had been coming and the camps had not been organized yet very well and we did not have assistance and access to the IDPs was at a low level. Since then access is very good – anyway in the areas controlled by the government - humanitarian assistance has stepped up. Many people – Sudanese as well as international staff. Camps are being well-organized nowadays both by the Sudanese authorities and by camp managers based on NGOs. The situation has improved a lot, we hope to be able to show that to him. I think that is quite important because outside Sudan, not inside Sudan, there are still many stories that the situation is going from bad to worse in Darfur and the press outside the Sudan, not inside the Sudan, very often portrays that image which is not a correct image. You know better. The situation of course is far from ideal but there is improvement due to humanitarian assistance, due to political activities, due to cooperation with the government, due to some restraint which is being carried out by SLA and JEM – they give more

assistance. Our main problem at the moment is looting; our main problem is banditry but that is not the government, it is not the SLM, it is bandits. So we hope to be able to show that picture.

From Kalma, the Secretary-General is going to visit the African Union. Of course that is related to his visit in Addis, the African Union is present in Nyala. And the African Union will bring him to Labado which is a good example of a small city which has been demolished completely by the militia. He will see what had happened – still a lot can be seen over there. He also will see that the African Union is there; has come; is there, and by its presence, is creating confidence to people who fled away from Labado and are returning. He will be able to talk with returnees, to talk with the African Union. It is a good example of presence, leading to deterrence – no attacks anymore on Labado – leading to confidence-building among IDPs. It is a good project and we hope we will have many more of such examples of strong African Union presence, confidence-building, separation of the forces against each other and so on. The Secretary-General will also have the opportunity to meet the *Wali* and his colleagues in Nyala to get, of course, the proper view presented by the authorities of Sudan. He will not only listen to the agencies, not only to the refugees, not only to the African Union but also to the authorities which means it is a balanced overall picture which he will get in one day. We originally thought maybe it is possible to go to more than one place, also to North or West Darfur but it would take so much time flying which is taking away from time on the ground. Finally the decision was made that he will go only to one specific place. And last year he went to el-Fasher and to el-Geneina and now he goes to South Darfur which is balanced again.

On Sunday the Secretary-General will go to the south. It is a long flight. He will have to change flights in Juba. He will be greeted by the authorities in Juba – government authorities – but he is on his way to Rumbek. Because in Rumbek that is his intention to meet Dr. Garang. We keep our fingers crossed at the moment because of the weather which is difficult and we are not certain that we can land but that is the intention of the trip which is to meet Dr. Garang in his headquarters.

He will also have the opportunity to meet with the Constitution Review Commission in Rumbek. On the whole it is a short time on the ground, no more than three hours, and a long flight back.

When he is back in Khartoum he will meet President Bashir. President Bashir has asked the Secretary-General to be able to see him on his way out, not just welcoming on his way in (which is more of a courtesy issue) but now it is a political issue. At the end of his visit, on his way out, so that the Secretary-General can share with him his findings. We hope that it would be possible – we plan it - to have a brief press conference which only turns out to be possible at the end, of course after he has seen everything and not just in between. After he has also spoken with President Bashir. That will then take place at the airport because he has to leave earlier – I think by seven o'clock – you will get the proper information about the exact timing and the exact place from our office. I give you the rough picture at the moment – there are many details still to be settled. It will be a brief press conference. I intend to give the next press conference myself here after his visit. So if you are interested I could give it not on Wednesday but I could give it on Monday right after. So all questions which you were not able to ask the Secretary-General himself, you could ask me so that I

could elaborate a little bit more on his findings because I would have been in all the meetings of the Secretary-General with all the authorities. My plan is to do that on Monday – of course only if you are interested, otherwise we do it on Wednesday. It is up to you, I am available. It might be interesting.

Thirdly; of course it is important to say a word on what is keeping us at the moment quite busy in mind and heart in Soba. You have seen my statement which I did deliver last week. I didn't see it very often quoted in the press. Maybe I can read it again:

“Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General

Statement by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Sudan
on violence in Soba IDP area, South Khartoum

Khartoum, 18 May 2005: The Special Representative of the Secretary General in Sudan, Mr. Jan Pronk, is deeply concerned by reports of death in the Soba IDP area South of Khartoum today. Reports have indicated that several people, both civilian and police, have been killed in the incident. The loss of life is tragic and deplorable, and the Special Representative extends his deepest condolences to the families of the victims.

The Special Representative calls on the Government of Sudan and all concerned to exert maximum restraint in handling the situation and to prevent further escalation and loss of life. He reiterates the need for respect of the rights of IDPs, the protection of civilians and the need to handle the situation with restraint, respect for basic human rights and according to the law”.

It is important to recall that statement a couple of days later – it is now the 25th which is a week later. Since then, the situation has not improved. Far from it. And I can only reiterate what I said a week ago: It is very important that all sides – that means the authorities and also representatives of the people that are living there – show maximum restraint in handling the situation to prevent further escalation and loss of life.

Too many people have been killed on both sides. Civilians, we do not know exactly the number, I am reading different figures and I am not quoting because I get figures from the authorities and I get figures from the press and then get figures from eye-witnesses, from embassies ... I don't know. But I know: too many. And also too many policemen. There are not many people who dispute the number of policemen who have been killed which is around 14 and 15 which is a high number. And police is very often criticized in all countries. But police people always have been sent by others to do a job. Sometimes they do a job well; sometimes they do a job badly. I don't know how they did the job. I only know that police people have been sent, they are laborers who have been sent and when they lose their lives, that also has to be deplored. Also if there is a situation of panic, when shooting and counter-shooting starts and people take revenge, it is very important that on all sides restraint is being kept. And in carrying out a policy, I think it is necessary as I said in my statement last week, to take into account very strongly the rights, which means rights of IDPs – not everybody living there is IDP – the rights of IDPs are important and they have been laid down in international covenants for instance the Covenant of Economic, Social

and Cultural and Political Rights of the United Nations. When IDPs are being relocated with violence without a proper procedure, their rights are being violated. And that is, of course, also a violation of human rights which have been signed by governments including the GoS. At the same time, as I also said in my statement last week, everything has to be done according to the Law which is, of course, the Sudanese Law. National law has to be respected and if people do not agree with the law, they have to raise the issue according to the proper channels which are political channels, rather than not abiding by the laws. It is both ways: human rights of IDPs and national Law.

Then it is very important that there will be mechanisms for discussion of the future settlement issues. Khartoum is a big city. Khartoum has exactly the same problems as Nairobi, Addis, Lagos and Johannesburg. Many people are leading here a good life with many poor people around them in a city which is booming and wants to expand in order to create more wealth and to create more employment. And expansion very often goes to the detriment of where people live already. That has to be discussed. Proper planning is necessary. Good consultation between all parties concerned; the municipal authorities, the government, the representatives of the civilians who are living in a city including IDPs – even if people who are living in a city do not have a legal title to live somewhere, they have a moral title to live and to survive of course and not just to be seen as a toy. Everybody has to have the right in a proper procedure to participate in discussion on the future.

We hope we in the United Nations can help. I have asked the United Nations organization dealing with big city development issues, HABITAT, to come and to be kind of a lead agency in the discussions between the United Nations and the authorities. It is highly necessary like HABITAT is also doing in a number of other countries. We have raised the issue, as I did say, in the discussions with the President. I also had political discussions this week. We offer our support – human rights, planning and humanitarian assistance support. As you remember in the previous meeting I said that I took the initiative to bring together all the United Nations agencies asking them to go back to Khartoum – the UNICEF, WHO – to carry out activities and also NGOs to come back to Khartoum and also governments and embassies, countries, to spend resources because now there is a new situation, it is no longer just relief; it is part of the future of Khartoum in the new Sudan whereby you have new settlements and new location patterns all related to decisions of many people whether to stay or to return to the south of Sudan. It is a long term planning. In all aspects it is quite necessary. Sudanese planning, of course, Sudanese authorities, Sudanese people's representatives, we can help. And in the meantime we want to ask maximum restraint also in the follow-up of the incident which happened last week. Let this not be a political issue but a humanitarian and an economic issue – both a development issue and a humanitarian issue. Take time in order to solve the problem. We offer our assistance. We said that to the government; that is what I would like to say here today. I do not doubt that this also can be discussed in the next couple of days with the Secretary-General of the United Nations.

Thank you.

Spokesperson

Thank you Mr. Jan Pronk. If you have any questions, you are used to the way.

Q: Is it worrying for you that thousands of policemen and soldiers are surrounding and conducting house to house searches in Soba and that they will be going to other shanty towns and camps around Khartoum?

And could you say something about the harsh censorship of newspapers that is happening at the moment? The Khartoum Monitor was suspended for one day for trying to write an article about Soba Aradi.

SRSG: I do get information with a long time length. I know that there is police surrounding parts of the areas in that part of Sudan. I do not know exactly why. The restoration of law and order, of course, is necessary. Any police will have that task. I said please do not consider this a political issue but only a humanitarian and a development issue and that means that if the police carries out its task that means only law and order according to the law and with respect for human rights.

It is for the authorities in Khartoum to decide how many policemen are necessary. Please exercise restraint. Police has the right to arrest people if they have a good suspicion that people did indeed carry out activities which were not in accordance with the law. But then, of course it is very important that people who are being arrested are being treated on the basis of law and human rights considerations – due process. At this moment I do not have an indication that the government does not want to do so. But of course in my discussions with the government emphasizing also due process of law including human rights.

I know that authorities here also do exercise restraint. I am very pleased that for instance last week the military did exercise restraint which is in itself an important thing to be applauded. Things can go out of hand. That is very often the case in cities and this is a world city where you have a big group – in particular – if that big group of people is desperate. And many people in the outskirts of Khartoum are desperate, I know and as many people know. Many of us have forgotten that. And I said already in an earlier meeting that the international community can also be blamed for turning their back to the poor people in Khartoum all of a sudden altogether which is creating a situation of further despair because then people feel that they don't have support. Everybody has to be blamed. You can not just apportion blame to one party. Everybody has to be blamed including also the international community which has neglected this situation. A situation which always at a certain moment will lead to violence which is now the case. So we were too late.

Q: Your comments on the censorship ...

SRSG: I don't know about censorship. What I said in the beginning is that I have seen that you are self-censored. I asked you to put something on paper with regards to rape and the position of NGOs but nobody did so. Now if you have a situation of self-censorship – I hardly imagine that you didn't think it is not important enough – then why do you complain?

Q: The Khartoum Monitor was shut down for an entire day for trying to report about Soba Aradi.

SRSG: Yes, but I have seen many reports in many newspapers. Sometimes the authorities take temporary decisions and then change it later on. I get a lot of good information from the press.

I also did say to the authorities in my discussions with them that I get my information not only from our people who are sometimes on the ground (we have many staff members who are living in Soba and who could not leave the area for a day or so) so we get information by phone. But we get also a lot of information through the press and I am making photocopies of everything which you are writing which was quite useful so that the authorities also know that information is coming also from within Sudan. I am pleased that that is possible. I commend the press for putting things on paper. I commend also the NGOs of Sudanese character that they give information about what is happening – proper information, the right information, not political incitement but proper information is also very useful in order to get an effect on the table so that good policy decisions can be made. But within that process sometimes somebody takes a decision which later on is being corrected. Well that is part of the game.

Q: Do you believe that the authorities in Khartoum are carrying out forced relocation? Do you believe that people are being forced to be relocated around Khartoum?

SRSG: I don't know exactly what happened but I have seen in the last couple of months examples of forced relocation in, and I have said it in a press conference earlier in February, I saw elements of squatter settlements which were completely flattened down with bulldozers. I even saw a clinic which had been financed by the international community completely destroyed. That was unnecessary use of violence without any pre-warning. And on that basis I have also started discussions with authorities which has so far not led to an adequate result but the process of discussions has started. Now whether there was forced relocation, I do not know. I get different views and I need the facts.

I get many new stories saying that there were forced relocation. The authorities say, no, we didn't, we gave a pre-warning. The authorities say, we withdrew. I do not know exactly what happened. Maybe there was intended forced relocation and the decision was later withdrawn – it is possible. Maybe the decision to withdraw was not implemented – it is also possible. Sometimes situations get out of hand on the ground and not all the instructions are being implemented. I do not have facts and that is why I want to be extremely careful.

President Bashir has promised, in his meeting with Undersecretary-General Guehenno and me, an investigation. And I have asked him to make the investigation - of course it can not take place in a couple of days, you need a proper investigation - to make it public so that we can have discussions on the basis of such an investigation. And before the results of that investigation are clear, I do not want to pass a definitive judgment on what happened.

Q: You spoke out about El-Fateh a couple of months ago and I think you got assurances after that that there wouldn't be forced relocations. Do you mean the government is being disingenuous in what they told you?

SRSB: I am afraid that I can not say that I got a definitive answer that there would not be forced relocations. The authorities were very careful. The authorities did say: what you have seen was perhaps in your eyes forced relocation but not in our eye, so we disagree. That is what they said. And let us discuss the future policies; that is what we agreed and I made it very clear what is necessary and what should not be done but we have not finalized the discussions so there is no final commitment from the government in their discussions with us. And I very much deplore that we took quite some time – it was difficult to get together at different levels – that in that process this incident escalated.

So my answer to you is that the government did not violate a commitment which had been made to us. No, that commitment was not yet definitive.

Q: Finally; why is it so hard to get money for these communities around Khartoum? Why is it so hard to get in touch with agencies to get involved?

SRSB: It is a shame because there are many people here who are more poor than in Darfur. Many people here also are more poor than in the south.

I have seen situations whereby people, not a few of them but thousands, do not have a place to relieve themselves – very bad sanitation which leads to diseases. I have seen places where people were brought to and there was nothing – no leaves even. Leaves in order to build huts. No money, no financial resources by the government. I think the government should make available also financial resources as part of relocation assistance. If people leave somewhere, they do not have to riot always. Because the government has the right to decide about the spatial future of the city but then the government, that is my view, has the obligation also not to compensate the people but to give them at least the same living standards which they had. That is not happening and I consider that not good governance, if I could use other terminology. The government has resources for instance on the basis – that is part of the policy – of financial gains which the government would gain by giving a new allocation to the soil. So it shouldn't have been so difficult but is a matter of planning, and the international community has resources. And the resources of the international community have been withdrawn completely from Khartoum and only gone to other places where the press was – in Darfur and in the south. The press was no longer around Khartoum so the international community thought we go to the other places. So that was irresponsible – irresponsible from the government and irresponsible from the international community.

I give you an example: I had a meeting with the Archbishop Gabriel a couple of days ago. He said: I have schools there and I have about 40,000 children in schools and the donors think they can't finance my schools anymore because you can only finance schools until a certain moment. Each year less and less so I have no money. They told me to go to other sources and I have no other sources so in a year I have no money. That means that the children are on the street; no education; which means, of course, they become vagabonds. They have to find a living, they start throwing stones, or whatever. It is irresponsible from the international community and also the United Nations, by the way. I am not begging the money for myself. It is irresponsible from the international community to withdraw the money for the schools.

So I am telling the international community, please if you criticize the government of Khartoum and the government of Sudan, criticize yourselves first because you have added to that situation and you knew what might happen. It has happened in Dakar, it has happened in Bangkok throughout the last twenty years, and it was bound to happen in Khartoum.

Q: The main difference between the GoS and the United Nations in relation to the Soba incident is on the term “IDP”, it may seem. The GoS says the people in question are not IDPs and you now speak of IDPs. Have we entered a stage of a war of terminologies?

SMSG: I speak about IDPs but I know that in many areas in world cities people are living together. The IDPs from the south, there are many of them which is a normal terminology, the IDPs from Darfur, people from Khartoum or from another place, people with legal titles, people without legal titles and only moral titles – everybody is living with each other. I was there. I saw people who wanted to stay, I saw people who wanted to leave. I saw people from Nyala; I saw people from Abyei, from all over the country. That is a big city. Khartoum is part of the global community. It is part of globalization. Everybody is living together. But in Khartoum, more than in other countries, more than in other big cities, there are also many IDPs and that is a big problem.

Q: When will the Abuja talks resume?

The African Union delegation currently touring Darfur is facing problems with the rebel groups who refuse to cooperate. What is the United Nations position on this?

SMSG: At the moment there is a verification mission coming from the African Union sent by the African Union and by the chair of the N'Djamena-based ceasefire commission. A decision was made in N'Djamena in February to send a mission – they came late but anyway they are here now – to identify the locations of the parties. That is necessary for the continuation of the ceasefire; you have to know where the parties are. The government has said, ‘we are here, you can exactly tell we are here. We don’t go to other places and we keep ourselves to the procedures’. And the African Union has said, ‘yes, indeed, the government behaves. The military have made a promise and they have known where they are’.

SLM and JEM in general have said, ‘no, we don’t want it,’ which I understand. They are guerilla and it is very difficult to tell where you are. We have exactly the same problems in the north-south – so it is difficult. But we may be able to help you because you may be afraid that you may be attacked by air when you show where you are. And that important resolution of the Security Council, 1592, does say that the government is no longer entitled to bring in new troops, no hostile attacks, so you can’t attack. And we told SLM and JEM that they don’t have to be afraid anymore – no new attacks. Don’t be afraid for that so you can do it. Moreover, you have got what you wanted in terms of a political statement by the Security Council.

Now, finally, the verification committee has come and the government is completely open to them but SLM and JEM have said, ‘we don’t like it. We didn’t agree to the decision in the meeting in February and we still don’t agree’. So we are exerting

pressure on them to accept this, which is difficult at the moment. They still do not have their act together which is also related to the preparation of the Abuja talks.

My objective is (but I am not in charge, the African Union is in charge and I hope that tomorrow we can have some political talks as well) to have a re-start of the Abuja talks before, and you may say that is not very ambitious, the ninth of July, before the constitution of the new government. If that is the case, we can hand it before the 31st of December. You know that always has been my objective – a peace agreement before the 31st of December.

It is going to be difficult if there will not be a re-start of the negotiations before the 9th of July because I can see what is going to happen: you will have a newly-constituted government. They are going to talk and lay down their strategies for the future. There are many things on their table so they will take quite some time before they have a new definition of their mandate in those talks. By then it will be September, October. So, please June, before the 9th of July. The government has said it is willing – I still applaud the government for doing so.

It is also interesting that all the representatives of the movements also say, ‘we are willing to talk’, but as I said last time, they don’t translate that into action. We have our talks with individuals. They want now a kind of joint meeting amongst themselves to sort things out, possibly in Darfur this month or early next month. If that is possible, then they could have a good mandate. If not, I think the African Union should call for a meeting before the 9th of July, somewhere end June, because we can not wait too long. If there would not be any meeting in the half a year period after the signing of the other agreement then that is a waste of time. And the guerilla or the revolution movements, SLM and JEM, have had enough time to get their act together and to formulate a joint position which they can bring to the negotiations table. You can negotiate very toughly, nobody blames you, but I think you should start negotiating and I think we can blame the movements for not starting yet and for postponing it too long. That is not in the interest of the people in Darfur, it is not in the interest of the people whom they claim to represent.

Q: You talked previously of your intentions to tour a number of Arab states and coordinate with the Arab League. The Arab League is planning a tour to Darfur by a delegation led by her Secretary-General Amru Musa.

There are reports that the State of Kuwait intends to contribute 150 troops to join the United Nations peace support mission in Sudan. What comment do you have on this in light of the fact that it will be the first Gulf participation in a peacekeeping mission?

SRSG: I am waiting for the invitation of the Arab League because it is not my initiative; it is the initiative of the Arab League. They said, please join in our mission. They wanted to have the mission somewhere in May and I was told that they are now planning the mission somewhere in half-June. I don’t know. But anyway I am willing to participate in that mission. I think it is highly necessary. That is the answer to your first question.

The answer to your second question is that I said I have heard, indeed, but I did not get it in writing that Kuwait has also offered assistance. I have also discussed that with the government. It is a matter for New York to decide. Now we have 10,000 coming and the Security Council said 10,000 and not more. So the group is full. But if Kuwait does have good experience in peacekeeping in other parts of the world (I do not know, I am not an expert in that), then Kuwait could be considered as a potential Troop Contributing Country in the second round. I do not expect that all the countries which are now participating in the first round of 10,000 to stay for the whole period. It will be a rotation and then the offer by Kuwait certainly will be weighed and considered in New York. Thank you.

Shall we keep it like this? Nothing else, also not when I have left. This is the press conference and I am available, if you are interested, on Monday. I would like to know because I have to make my plans.

— *End* —